

Introduction to the Panel:
**“The Bailey Brouhaha: Community Members Speak Out on Resisting Transphobia
and Sexism in Academia and Beyond”**
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**Presented at the 29th Annual National Women’s Studies Association
(NWSA) Conference**
Cincinnati, Ohio
June 21, 2008

Hello, and welcome to the panel “The Bailey Brouhaha: Community Members Speak Out on Resisting Transphobia and Sexism in Academia and Beyond.” My name is Joelle Ruby Ryan and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in American Culture Studies at Bowling Green State University. I am also the Session Organizer and the Moderator of today’s panel. Before I introduce the three insightful papers we are to hear this afternoon, I would like to proffer a brief history of the J. Michael Bailey controversy so that you have more context for the viewpoints to follow. In addition, we have prepared handouts which have links to relevant sources regarding this very complex affair.

J. Michael Bailey is a Psychology Professor at Northwestern University where he is best known for his work on the intersection between biology and sexual orientation. In 2003, he published the controversial book, *The Man Who Would Be Queen: The Science of Gender Bending and Transsexualism*. In addition to rehashing some of his work on gay men and sexual orientation, Bailey also covered the identities of male-to-female transsexual women. As news of the book reached the transgender community, more and more people became very upset by the claims made by Bailey in the book.

Although there is a long laundry list of complaints about the transphobia and sexism in Bailey’s book, chief among them are his insistence on theories introduced by Canadian sexologist Ray Blanchard. Blanchard has developed a paradigm of transsexual

taxonomy which asserts that male-to-female transsexuals can be divided into two discrete groupings: homosexual transsexuals and autogynephilics. Homosexual transsexuals are described as very feminine biological males who are attracted to masculine men. The rationale for their desire to transition is closely linked to their sexual desire for men. Autogynephilics are biological males who are sexually “turned on” by the idea of becoming a woman. They tend to transition later in life and are more often sexually attracted to women. This theory of etiology very much stresses sexual desire and sexual attraction. This ideology flies in the face of decades of research regarding gender identity and the lived experiences of transsexual and transgender women.

Transgender people feel a significant dysphoria that results from their internal gender identity not matching their physical, sexed embodiment. This sense of gender dysphoria is typically not linked to sexual orientation, sexual practice or sexual desire. The idea that transsexualism is linked to sexuality is foreign to the vast majority of transgender people, who struggle with the incredible stress engendered by having an identity which is incongruous with their assigned physical sex. Many find Bailey’s and Blanchard’s ideas, which are also echoed by transsexual physician Anne Lawrence, to be ludicrous, offensive and gravely insidious. In addition, these theories are out of step with the views and practices of the vast majority of helping professionals serving the trans community today. As many others have commented, these theories are reactionary and threaten to set back the clock on the pivotal progress that the trans community has achieved since the early 1990s.

In addition to tremendous ideological opposition to the book, there were serious ethics charges which have resulted from this case. Charges were filed against Bailey that

he did not correctly acquire permission to use human research subjects with the institution's human subject review board. In addition, one of Bailey's research subjects alleges that he had sexual relations with her, a charge that he has vigorously denied. The charges were reviewed by Northwestern but their findings were never made public. Curiously, Bailey stepped down as Chair of the Psychology Department around the same time. Initially, the book was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award but the nomination was quickly rescinded when trans community activists applied pressure to the organizers of the awards to pull the book from consideration.

The response to the Bailey publication is unprecedented in transgender history. In 1979, radical lesbian-feminist Janice Raymond, professor emerita of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, published a hateful screed called *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* in which she excoriated the lives of transsexual people. She saved particular venom for male-to-female transsexual lesbians, who she saw as an imminent threat to the feminist movement. Although there was undoubtedly anger and opposition to the book, 1979 was a very different time period for trans people than 2003. In the nearly 25 ensuing years, the transgender community has grown exponentially and become much more visible, involved in grassroots activism and lobbying and become more high profile in social, cultural and political affairs in their communities. In addition, the Internet explosion has enabled trans people to interact as never before in history. The political and social advances of the trans community, coupled with the communicative technologies enabled by the world wide web, combined to facilitate a tremendous political mobilization against these bizarre and harmful theories.

Due to pioneering work by many people in the trans community, including academics such as Lynn Conway and Deirdre McCloskey and consumer activists such as Andrea James and others, the Bailey affair was in many ways an open-and-shut case until the appearance of a pre-print in 2007 entitled “The Controversy Surrounding the Man Who Would be Queen: A Case History of the Politics of Science, Identity and Sex in the Internet Age.” Penned by Bailey colleague and intersex researcher Alice Dreger, this lengthy apologia for Bailey was published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* in June, 2008. Although touted as an objective “scholarly history” of the Bailey controversy, Dreger castigated transwomen activists for their attempts at “ruining” Bailey. She essentially “exonerated” Bailey of all wrong-doing and demonized transwomen activists for daring to criticize Bailey's controversial and bizarre views. Her “investigation” was seen by most in the trans community as nothing but a one-sided hatchet job intended to glorify Dr. Bailey and impugn the hard work of trans activists to expose specious science and transphobic and sexist views. In fact, in that very edition of the *ASB*, there are as many as 14 peer commentaries which severely critique Dreger’s work and expose her bias.

For many years, the transsexual community was a colonized community. We were colonized by psychiatrists, psychologists, endocrinologists, social workers, academics, surgeons, lawyers and others in positions of power. Our own voices were rarely heard. Others deigned to speak for us and, often with good intentions, defamed, denigrated and distorted our lives. The emergence of a transgender liberation movement in the 1990s quickly worked to overturn this severe colonization. This was done in multiple ways. Trans people demanded that they were perfectly able to speak for

themselves. They challenged the Standards of Care and the gate-keeping of old-guard psychologists who stood in the way of their urgent health care needs. The vast majority of the community opposes the continued pathologization of trans people in the DSM under the diagnosis of so-called “gender identity disorder” and are actively lobbying to make sure that it is taken out of the next edition and that people like Kenneth Zucker are called on their transphobic clinical practices. In addition, the community has done pioneering work to advocate on behalf of transgender youth and have opposed trans-reparatists like Zucker and others who attempt to “cure” gender-variant youth, and have demanded that all people, regardless of age, have the right to freedom of gender expression. More and more trans people have bypassed the overly stringent standards of care by doing things like ordering their hormones on the Internet or traveling to the more permissive Thailand to get their surgery. Writings, websites, and media productions have poured forth from the trans community which challenge old-school ideas about our lives, identities and complex realities.

One could assert that the trans community is currently living in a post-colonial era. We have done a tremendous amount of work to liberate ourselves, our lives and our bodies from the hands of overly bureaucratic imperialists who wrap themselves in academic credentials and “science” to legitimize their own oppressive missions. However, as is the case in any post-colonial state, the remnants of colonization still remain. And the old guard, though largely removed through militant and persistent transgender activism, still “white-knuckle” it to hold on to their thrones and recapture their power.

I believe that this panel is so immensely important because it represents a formerly colonized people speaking truth to power. As an African proverb succinctly states, until the lions come to power, the hunters write the history. Through using our own agency and demanding on the validity of our own lived experiences, we, the lions, are charting our own experiences, decolonizing our own minds, and usurping the power that is rightly our own. The papers that follow are so important because they contribute to the process of decolonization and fight back against the old-guard backlash that is so detrimental and insidious to our very lives.

The first paper is written by Élise Hendrick, independent scholar from Cincinnati, and is entitled “The Falling Hegemon: J. Michael Bailey’s Responses to Trans Criticism as a Defense of Power.” In it, Hendrick stakes the claim that challenges to elite monopolies on the power to define the framework of discourse have never been well received. This paper examines Bailey’s responses to the (largely trans) criticism of *The Man Who Would Be Queen*, and posits explanations for certain choices he has made in these responses. In examining Bailey’s reaction to criticism, the focus is on Bailey’s conduct as an attempt to reassert power. The second paper is entitled “Go Ask Alice – But Not About Transsexuals’ Lives and History: A Defense of the Right of Members of an Oppressed Class to Speak for Themselves” by Katrina C. Rose from the University of Iowa. In this essay, Rose demonstrates the de facto posture of J. Michael Bailey and his defenders. Pro-trans challenges to the conventional historical narrative were met with a robotic unwillingness by the practitioner-beneficiaries of that dominant narrative to re-examine its factual underpinnings. Ultimately, the presentation encourages all scholars to not let themselves be bullied by those in dominant positions. The final paper is entitled

“Fair Comment, Foul Play: Populist Responses to J. Michael Bailey’s Exploitative ‘Controversies’” and is written by Andrea Jean James of the GenderMedia Foundation. In this paper, James show that *The Man Who Would Be Queen* derives from the careerist strategy of academic trolling marketed as “science.” The paper examines strategies for bringing consequence to academic irresponsibility, the culture clash between online and academic trolling, and the use of offspring as unassailable evidence. The final section examines the eugenic underpinnings and long-term implications of work by J. Michael Bailey and his colleagues. Please join me in giving thanks to all our panelists for being here and sharing their cutting-edge scholarship with us.