

The Man Who Would Be Queen, by J. Michael Bailey, Ph.D.

A Review by A. Dean Byrd, Ph.D., MBA, MPH

*A new book has just been published, from the controversial researcher who said—
in the Archives of General Psychiatry—that
“homosexuality may represent a developmental error.”*

Psychologist and researcher Michael Bailey's *The Man Who Would Be Queen* has provoked significant controversy. It has been called “a scientific, yet superbly compassionate exposition.” A prominent endorser of the book, experimental psychologist Steven Pinker, has predicted that the book will upset the guardians of political correctness on both the left and the right. (It turns out that Pinker's prediction was only half correct—the attacks have come primarily from the left.)

Indeed, Bailey does make some very “politically incorrect” claims. The central—and most controversial—thesis of his book is the finding of a quality of femininity in gay males.

Yet “it is certainly an unfortunate state of affairs,” Bailey observes, “that gay men tend to be feminine, tend to be less attracted to femininity, but tend to be stuck with each other...The designer of the universe has a perverse sense of humor.”

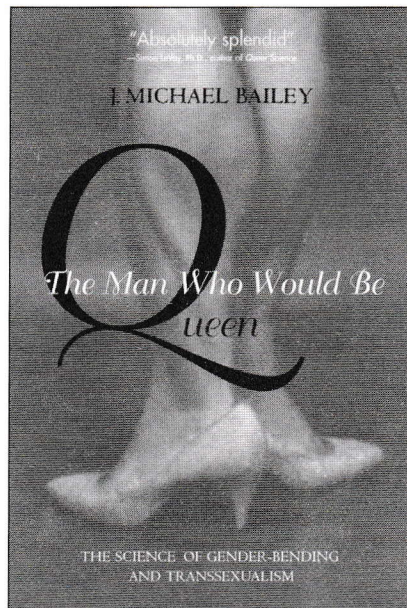
Gay men are known to highly value masculinity (p. 79) but the femininity that they themselves are “stuck with,” Bailey says, not only leaves a void of attractive potential partners, but also makes them susceptible to the many serious health problems associated with receptive anal sex (p. 82).

Thus, he notes, the feminine side of gay men makes them vulnerable to receptive anal sex, while the masculine strivings they feel as biological males make them naturally promiscuous, causing them to engage in risky behaviors.

Bailey also observes that homosexuality is inexplicable from an evolutionary perspective. Same-sex attraction is “evolutionarily maladaptive” (p. 116), and indeed, he notes, this “might be the most striking unresolved paradox of human evolution” (p. 115).

Personal Controversies

The book is controversial for other reasons. J. Michael Bailey has been accused of having sex with a research subject. His own sexuality has been questioned—he is a divorced father of two who frequents gay bars for the purpose, he says, of doing research. He has been accused of failing to obtain the informed consent of research subjects. Formal charges have been filed with Northwestern



University against him over this. Some media venues have labeled his book “junk science,” and others have attempted to label the book and Bailey's lectures as “hate crimes” against gays.

At least one prominent scientist, Dr. Ray Blanchard, a supporter of Bailey, has resigned from The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA) over the controversy.

Glowing Praise From Some Surprising Sources

Bailey has supporters such as Simon LeVay, who describe Bailey's book as “absolutely superb.” Dr. Anne Lawrence, sexual medicine and transgender medicine practitioner, notes, “This is a wonderful book on an important subject.”

The publicist for The National Academies (Advisors to the Nation on Science, Engineering and Medicine) is equally enthusiastic. He writes: “The conclusions to which Bailey came after years of psychological profiles, statistical studies, interviews, and comparisons of research with fellow scientists, may not always be politically correct, but they are scientifically accurate and groundbreaking. And with the publication of this book, the field of gender studies will never be the same.”

The editors at the Joseph Henry Press (an imprint of the National Academies) issued a statement in the midst of the furor, saying that the reviewers found the book “a well-crafted and responsible work on a difficult topic.”

Even the American Psychological Association appears to have provided an endorsement of the book, describing it as “the first scientifically grounded book about male femininities written for a general audience...Bailey sympathetically portrays these people's experiences and explores the roots of their development. Bailey's respect for the people he describes serves as a role model for others who still struggle to accept and appreciate homosexuality and transsexuality in society.” (APA Division 44, The Society for the Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues, Newsletter, Summer 2003.)

Bailey's attempts to respond to his critics seem to end with a sense of exasperation. He writes: “The controversy has

already consumed substantial time that I could be spending on new research, teaching, and administration, and I cannot afford more time to respond to each new charge made by Conway, Roughgarden, et al." As of January, 2004, there is little sign of the controversy abating.

The book is presented in three parts: The first one offers a case study of a boy with a Gender Identity Disorder (GID), which frames the book; the second part is devoted to gender-bending; and the third focuses on transgenderism, which has provoked the most controversy.

It Helps To Read The Book

I began, where most of the critics should have begun. I read the book. As a scientist, a contributor to the research in some of the same areas as Bailey, and as a clinician as well as clinical professor in a medical school, I found the book to be interesting—but probably not for some of the reasons the author intended, nor for the same reasons as the activists.

I found it interesting for some of the ideas Bailey presented, and for some reasons that I had not previously considered. For example, his reference to the femininity of gay men matches my clinical/research experience, but my sense is that many gay men experience a sense of diminished masculinity instead of femininity—which has implications for treatment of men with unwanted homosexuality as well as for the treatment of boys diagnosed with a Gender Identity Disorder (GID).

Some of Bailey's ideas do find strong support in the wider body of research; others do not. Unfortunately, Bailey does not separate the two. His philosophical position—that of an admitted essentialist—seems to undergird some of his science and does not reflect the current research literature. The adage, "To a hammer, everything looks like a nail," seems to apply to many of Bailey's conclusions.

Defining Essentialism

Essentialism is commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things—that is, in the "invariable and fixed properties" which define the "whatness" of a given entity. As applied to Bailey's perspective, it could be defined as the belief that sexuality and/or gender are determined by the basic features of an individual's biology or psychology. Essentialism defines groups of people by a small set of fixed properties, while ignoring the conditions under which such identities emerged—and in this process, it discounts any possibility of change or variation within the group.

Simon LeVay's position is thus an essentialist position; he claims that homosexuality is located in brain differences or genetic variations. ("I am homosexual because of my genes," or "I am homosexual because of my brain.")

Regarding the nature/nurture controversy with which Bailey is concerned, the evidence is in. The admissions by self-identified gay researchers themselves (LeVay and Hamer), in addition to the reviews by Friedman and Downey, as well as Byne and Parsons, concluded that homosexuality is not a purely biological phenomenon. All of these researchers arrive at the same conclusion: an interactionist model (not the "born that way" theory) reflects the current data to explain the development of homosexuality.

But the lack of biological evidence to support Bailey's essentialist theory of homosexuality was not cited. It should have been.

Danny Ryan is a young boy with all the signs and symptoms of GID. His case study introduces the reader of Bailey's book to the area of cross-gender behaviors — their origin, development and meaning.

The second part of the book focuses on gender identity and sexual preferences among male homosexuals.

The third part relates more directly to the book's title and focuses on Ray Blanchard's model of transsexuality, which is most recognized by its categories of autogynophilia and androphilia. Although Blanchard's theory evokes controversy as all good theories should, Blanchard is an excellent researcher with an impressive clinical and research *vita*e in the area of transsexuality.

It was quite surprising to discover in the book's epilogue that Bailey had actually never met Danny Ryan in a clinical setting (he saw him briefly at a graduation). Apparently, he relied on parental reporting. Yet Bailey makes sweeping statements such as, "I am fairly certain that Danny Ryan will become a man rather than changing into a woman. I am certain that his sexual desires will be for a man." Such research findings are based on retrospective studies, and such statements can not be reliably made from such data.

Though the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) notes that a high percentage—perhaps as much as 75%—of GID children go on to identify as bisexual or gay, a causative relationship cannot be offered. We have no way of knowing, for example, why the other 25% self-identified as heterosexual; nor do we know the number of matched comparisons of heterosexuals who were classified as GID children, but later managed to make the transition to heterosexuality. Bailey himself admits that he does not know how children develop their sexual feelings! (p. 34)

Although Bailey cites other research and researchers accurately, he provides no references. The reader is not provided with data from surveys or statistical information such as standard deviations. There are no references to

data or citing of either supportive or non-supportive research. (Though to Bailey's credit, he does list readings associated with chapter topics in the index section of the book).

Bailey's focus on femininity among pre-homosexual boys and homosexual men may offer a useful theory for understanding sexual deviance (in the statistical sense); but rather, he makes statements as if he were gambling in Las Vegas: "I would wager that among the many highly publicized cases of predatory men having sex with adolescent boys, a non-trivial percentage of boys were recognizably feminine." (p. 37).

Could Early Same-Sex Molestation Lead to Homosexuality in Adulthood?

Had Bailey reviewed the research of Johnson and Shrier, he may have discovered that boys who were sexually abused were, in fact, seven times more likely to label themselves bisexual or homosexual. What might this suggest about a pathway that could lead to adult homosexuality? Bailey does not speculate. He does note that "Gay men are more likely than straight men to have had homosexual experiences in childhood and early adolescence" (p. 112), but surprisingly, he does not suggest that such experiences might influence sexual identity development. And he ignores the research of Daryl Bem, whose EBE ("erotic becomes exotic") theory offers a significant contribution to this area. (Bem theorizes that what we find "exotic" or different from us in our childhood is what we will later eroticize in adulthood.)

Sound bites are peppered throughout Bailey's text: "I'm betting on biology" (p. 172) and "This smells genetic to me." (p.170) Such statements are hardly scientific conclusions based on research. Bailey would be hard-pressed to incorporate such data into his essentialist theory.

Homosexuals Are At Risk For Mental Illnesses— Even In Gay Affirming Cultures

Recent research published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* reported that people engaging in homosexual behaviors were at greater risk for certain forms of mental illness. And Bailey correctly noted that this was not likely due to society's treatment of homosexuals (so-called "homophobia") because a similar, more robust study was conducted in The Netherlands — probably the most gay-affirming country in the world—yet it had similar results.

In fact, in this same issue of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, Bailey authored a commentary which included the following hypothesis: "...homosexuality represents a deviation from normal development and is associated with other such deviations that may lead to mental illness...homosexuality may represent a developmental error."

Bailey offers little supportive evidence for his theory, either in terms of research or an elaboration of his earlier theory. Yet, other researchers have provided extensive documentation. *The Puzzle: Exploring The Evolutionary Puzzle Of Male Homosexuality* by Louis Berman, offers an excellent treatise on male homosexuality and evolutionary theory, but it was not cited. It should have been.

Bailey Expresses Disdain For His Critics

Bailey treats those who disagree with his views with a certain disdain. Of Dr. George Rekers, who works with gender-disturbed boys, Bailey says there are "disturbing aspects of Rekers' work that are peculiarly unscientific, such as his writings invoking religious arguments for the superiority of heterosexuality" (p. 24). Bailey believes that Dean Hamer's work searching for a gay gene remains "intriguing but doubtful." He also compares Byne's skepticism about LeVay's work to paranoia (p.121). (Ironically, similar statements are currently being made about Bailey's work.)

Bailey has particular disdain for the social-constructionist understanding of sexuality. He indicates that "they aren't very clear, and to the extent they are clear, they are incorrect" (p. 124). Bailey has even more disdain for social conservatives, and for religious conservatives in particular.

Promiscuity

Bailey accurately quotes the CDC statistics of 1981: "AIDS patients with an average age of 35 years reported an average of 60 sex partners per year, or approximately 1000 lifetime partners" and he notes the gasps from his students at Northwestern University when gay panelists confess that they have had hundreds of sexual partners (p. 86).

By heterosexual standards, Bailey notes, gay men are promiscuous. Then as if to excuse the promiscuity, he uses a Clintonian defense, suggesting that it depends on what you actually mean by having sex. "Gay men," he notes "don't have vaginal sex much!"

"Social conservatives have taken the facts like these as evidence for the decadent and perverse nature of gay men," he says. "I think they're wrong. Gay men who are promiscuous are expressing an essentially masculine trait. They are doing what most heterosexual men would do if they could. They are in this way just like heterosexual men, except that they don't have women to constrain them" (p.87).

Longterm Relationships Are Non-Monogamous

Thus Bailey is not surprised by the research from McWhirter and Mattison, which concluded the following about homosexual men: "Most [couples] became non-exclusive within a year, and all were non-monogamous with-

in five years. This pattern occurs even as partners become increasingly committed to each other in other ways—emotionally and financially, for example” (p. 90).

He makes the following very “un-PC” statement:

“Regardless of marital laws and policies, there will always be fewer gay men who are romantically attached. Gay men will always have many more sex partners than straight people do. Those who are attached will be less sexually monogamous. And although some gay male relationships will be for life, these will be fewer than among heterosexual couples. The relative short duration, the sexual infidelity—are indeed destructive in a heterosexual context, but they are much less so among gay men.

“There are two main reasons for this difference. First, gay couples do not often have children, but heterosexual couples usually do. The main reason we strive for commitment in our sexual relationships is because we want to keep families with children from breaking up. This function is irrelevant to most gay men. It is relevant to those few who raise children, but they are unlikely to ever comprise a substantial proportion of gay men” (p. 100).

The Bias that Pervades Research With the Gay Community

In his discussion of gay researchers and research, Bailey notes that the study subjects have an expectation that such efforts will advance the gay agenda. Researchers who are gay themselves, of course, vehemently deny that they are attempting to advance any sexual agenda. But Bailey notes that there is a higher-than-average number of self-identified gay people working as researchers on homosexuality and concludes, “Perhaps half of us are gay, a much higher percentage than would be expected” (p. 106).

Citing the significant differences between homosexual and heterosexuals, Bailey offers a critique of one of the cornerstones of the gay-activist movement when he discredits one of its heroines — Evelyn Hooker. Of her supposedly landmark study, which was viewed as the first study to promote gay rights (Hooker concluded that gay men could not be distinguished from heterosexual men on the Rorschach test), Bailey concludes: “In recent times, the Rorschach has fallen into increasing disfavor, and some of us think it is little better than reading tea leaves. So, the fact that psychologists couldn’t tell gay men from straight men based on their Rorschach scores is not very meaningful” (p. 81).

Bailey’s Work Is More Science Fiction Than Fact

Bailey makes a good case for studying homosexuality, dismissing the leftist argument that such research will cause harm to gay people. To the contrary, he reasons

that the more that is known about homosexuality, the better the attitudes toward gay people will become (p. 115).

Here again, he seems to be banking on the truth of essentialism. I agree with Bailey on the legitimacy of conducting research on homosexuality—for the sake of science, truth and humanity—but not because I expect that essentialism will prevail!

To the leftist argument that homosexuality has always been with us and was accepted by the ancient Greeks, Bailey notes that the “Greeks were intolerant of receptive anal intercourse, which they viewed as an abomination against nature” (p. 128).

He continues, “Pederastic relationships between men and adolescents were viewed as a decadent practice of the aristocracy. Parents often tried to prevent their sons from entering these relationships (as the younger member). If money exchanged hands, the younger member could lose citizenship” (p. 128).

Bailey then offers some interesting historical and current comparisons. He mentions the Apostle Paul’s characterization of homosexual men in Rome as Paul’s chief example of the capital’s decadence. Bailey makes an interesting present-day comparison: “They appear to have shared a flamboyant style of distinctive dress, hairstyles, and mannerism, as well as regular cruising grounds and typical occupations. To me, they sound a lot like the guys on Halsted Street (Chicago’s gay district).”

In a similar fashion, Bailey compares 15th century Florence, Italy, with its bastion of “sodomites” to the present day Renaissance-era San Francisco.

The Man Who Would Be Queen poses significant problems because Bailey mixes good science with bad science, good theories with values-laden opinions, and even sometimes offers gut-level responses. And he does not distinguish among them. If Bailey is suffering under the delusion that his status as a scientist will gain him deference for making reckless statements in the guise of science, he now has evidence to the contrary.

The evidence for a biological theory of homosexuality has been essentially discarded and discredited. The research attempts by the gay activist researchers to show that homosexuality is biologically determined have failed. What is clear is that a bio-psychosocial model best fits the data for non-heterosexual attractions and behavior.

All behavior, of course, ultimately has a biological substrate. The best theories and research available indicate that homosexuality, transgenderism, and all of its variants are likely polygenic and multifactorial in origin. Moreover, what is even clearer is that sexual attractions are fluid; and

though individuals do not consciously choose their attractions, how they respond to those attractions does involve a choice. It's called "patient self-determination," and it is the cornerstone of the helping professions.

Would I recommend *The Man Who Would Be Queen*? Absolutely. It makes for interesting reading, and it's hypothesis-generating. Unfortunately, it is as much science fiction as it is science. There are significant research studies omitted, and misrepresentations of science. But

there is also some good science to be found in the book.

Activism, it is hoped, will not silence Bailey. When it does, politics replaces science, and no one wins.. As Bailey himself noted in his *Archives of General Psychiatry* Commentary, "...it would be a shame if sociopolitical concerns prevented researchers from conscientious consideration of any reasonable hypothesis."

With that, I agree. ■