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THE STUDY OF THE UNFORESEEN ISSUES OF GENDER IDENTITY WITH REFERENCE TO JOHN COLAPINTO'S AS NATURE MADE HIM: THE BOY WHO WAS RAISED AS A GIRL

DEKSHA S

II.M. A. English Literature, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women

Gender is an essential characteristic to our identity as human beings. Though the world we live in may try to dim the lines of Gender Identity and confuse children and adults on the importance of their own biological gender, every individual must try to help the children to understand the importance of being male or female. Gender is not something that should be changed; it is something innate in one's self. John Colapinto, a Canadian award-winning journalist and novelist has always strived for justice and equality of sexes through his works. *As Nature made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl* is one such work of Colapinto which narrates the story of an anonymous baby boy who was turned into a girl by doctors at John Hopkins Hospital.

In 1967, after a twin baby boy suffered a botched circumcision, his family agreed to a radical treatment that would alter his gender. This case became the most famous in modern medicine and a total failure. *As Nature Made Him* tells the frightful story of David Reimer, who when finally informed of his medical history, made the decision to live as a male. It is an alarming tale of medical arrogance and the unexpected effects on Gender Identity. Thus Colapinto describes the unpleasant childhood therapy sessions given to Reimer, implying that the doctors have ignored or concealed the developing evidence that Reimer's reassignment to female gender was not going well as it went against nature. Some have also suggested that some of the allegations about the therapy sessions may have been the result of false memory syndrome and that the family was not honest with researchers.

However, Brenda who was later on known as David Reimer did not enjoy playing with stereotypically feminine toys or wearing feminine clothes. She sits with her legs apart as a boy would. The older she becomes, the more alone she feels, the more uncomfortable she is in her body. She becomes a social outcast: The girls does not want to play with her because she isn't girly enough. The boys does not want to play with her because she isn't a boy. Thus Colapinto's novel reveals the trauma of living life as the "wrong" gender. Colapinto first wrote about the boy and his family in a 1998 Rolling Stone Article, which won a National Magazine Award; he later expanded that account into this full-length book, *As Nature made Him: The Boy who was Raised as a Girl*.

The whole family suffers as Brenda struggles with her identity. Janet, Brenda's mother becomes clinically depressed and attempts suicide. Her father develops a drinking problem. Brian, the identical twin begins to act out, jealous of the extra attention Brenda receives. He too attempts suicide. Finally when Brenda is fourteen, her parents reveal the truth of her sex at birth and the accident she suffered as an infant. She immediately decides to live as a male again, taking the name David rather than her birth name. Later, David undergoes plastic surgery to have his penis reconstructed. At the time Colapinto wrote his book, David had grown up, married a woman, adopted her children and found a job at a slaughter house.

The case of David Reimer carries strong implications for intersex individuals. It has been a common practice to perform "corrective" surgery on infants and children with ambiguous genitalia so that they may live unambiguously as either a boy or a girl. The idea that it is possible to easily change and mold a child's gender

made this prospect seem a reasonable one, a path to a normal life. David Reimer's unhappy childhood and desire to re-transition, however, suggests that Gender Identity is shaped by more than environment. The social constructs around the traditional roles of men and women can put a strain on individuals not content in the role associated with sexual identity.

Confusion and ambiguity can be seen in the minds of people who do not accept the roles given to them by the society. But the difficulties faced by David Reimer was due to the experiment of the world's leading experts of Gender Identity who recommended a surgical sex change, from male to female. David Reimer was a victim of that ultimate experiment to prove that nurture, not nature determines Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation- an experiment all the more irresistible because David was an identical twin. What is more, Colapinto's book comes with a tragic post publication coda. In 2004, David Reimer committed suicide. Possible factors include his brother Brian's 2002 death from a drug overdose, trouble in his marriage and the lingering trauma of his painful childhood living as the wrong gender.

As Nature Made Him was a *New York Times* best-seller and received positive reviews. All the reviews reveal that a broader focus on issues of sexual identity would make the lives of people with Gender Identity problems better. It is often argued that gender characteristics are socially formulated and thus unrelated with biological sex. The more the people question or argue about one's abnormality, the more complicated the issue becomes. It is recommended that parents should closely observe the behaviour of their children so that they are better placed to detect the symptoms of the disorder early enough so as to take the necessary intervention measures, such as hormone therapy. This assists in minimizing the chances of developing psychosocial difficulties later in life.

The case of David Reimer came to International attention in 1997 when he told his story to Milton Diamond, an academic sexologist who persuaded Reimer to allow him to report the outcome in order to dissuade physicians from treating other infants similarly. Later on, Reimer went public with his story and as a result Colapinto published his alarming novel *As Nature Made Him*. In addition to his difficult lifelong relationship with his parents, Reimer had to deal with unemployment. In today's world, people with Gender Identity issues are experiencing some form of workplace discrimination and due to this, extreme levels of unemployment and poverty is being exposed and as a result, Sex Discrimination Laws were being accepted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 2012 and it has the potential to solve the issues related to work place discrimination.

In the concluding part of the novel, David says: "I've changed over, but mainly by name. The rest was all cosmetic. I just had repaired what was damaged"(61). But, in reality, the difficulties he faced due to unemployment and the death of his brother Brian from an overdose of antidepressants devastated him to a great extent. His wife Jane told him she wanted to separate and this added on to Reimer's burdens. As a consequence, Reimer drove to a grocery store's parking in his hometown of Winnipeg and took his own life by shooting himself in the head with a sawed-off shotgun and was buried in St Vital Cemetery in Winnipeg.

As Nature Made Him: The Boy Raised as a Girl also relates to the transgender unit, as well as the unexpected conflicts of Gender Identity. Reimer declares: "I was never happy as Brenda. Never. I'd slit my throat before I'd go back to that. I'd never go back to that. It didn't work because that's life, because you're human and you're not stupid and eventually you wind up being who you are"(43). David Reimer is just one of many stories about living as a transgender, and I believe it is the imperative of society to learn about these stories and become more educated about queer culture.

The time is up for all to be a part of making positive changes for an oppressed population in the world. Special consideration must be given to the particular needs and risks faced by individuals based on their sexual orientation and Gender Identity. Individuals with Gender Identity conflicts like David Reimer face acute violence and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and Gender Identity. Such individuals are found to be experiencing harassment in public accommodations, including bathrooms, restaurants and hotels. They try to attempt suicide at some point in their lives. Perhaps one day people with Gender Identity conflict will not be conflicted at all but simply be accepted for who they are despite the skin they are born with. But the darkest question in the novel *As Nature Made Him*, is unanswered and runs throughout the book like an

unidentified demon: Why did society deem a boy without a penis not a boy at all? The society cannot answer this question.

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