



## MONEY (1975)

**Aim:** To investigate the theory of gender neutrality

Dr John Money ran this experiment which he studied for a total of 9 years. It was a longitudinal study, therefore, and it was volunteer-sampled, because the participant('s parents) actually sought Money out, rather than Money finding them as participants.

They study was to look at the possibility of **gender neutrality**. This was a term which Money had coined, which outlined what he believed, this being that when a child is born, for the first two years they are "gender neutral" (i.e. have no fixed gender). This is because he believed biology does not determine the phenotype of a child, and that their gender at this young age is malleable and can be controlled by environmental factors – in other words, a baby born as a boy can be brought up as a girl, and will act and "be" a girl.

### GENERAL PROCEDURE

Overall, there were 45 cases studied, but one case study in particular is looked at here. Each case studied a genetic male reassigned and brought up as females: 43 had defective penises, the other 2 had **ablatio penis**

The case study studied in detail here is one of the ablatio penis cases. It studied one child who was brought up as a girl after gender reassignment as an infant. This was the perfect case study: the causes were natural, and the subject had an identical twin brother who provided a natural baseline measure

### **Ablatio penis** -

a penis which has been removed for some reason, a common cause (including that for the one in this case study) being due to a mishap in a circumcision on an infant

### CASE STUDY: BRUCE AND BRENDA

At seven months old, one of two identical twins suffered what was called a "surgical mishap" from a circumcision, which was done surgically using an electric current (this is quite a rare method not used very often), and the current was too strong, causing his penis to become ablated. His name was baby Bruce. Surgeons offered the solution: sexually reassign him to a female. Not sure what to do, his parents left it, until seeing Money on a TV programme, discussing what he considered to be the success of male-to-female transsexual operations. Bruce's parents went to Money and asked him to help them bring Bruce up as a girl successfully. At 17 months old, Bruce was gender-reassigned, and became Brenda.

Brenda was given this new name, as well as new hair, new toys, new clothing... whatever would help. Money assured the parents that (based on the success of adult operations) Brenda would become a girl and would conform to the gender she had been brought up as. Money instructed the parents what to tell friends and family, as well as the other twin brother, about the situation.

Money met with the twins regularly, most often Brenda, to assess how well the experiment was going and to make her feel more comfortable and to try and reassure her she was normal. At age 4, Brenda was said to be neater than the other brother, which Money considered a sign of potential future success, due to her feminine toys, hair, clothes and style of upbringing. The children began to copy the image of their same-sex parent, and Brenda wanted dolls to play with, whereas her brother wanted cars.

However, Brenda was tomboyish also, with abundant physical energy, stubbornness and being the dominant in an all-girl group. The mother tried her best to make Brenda become more lady-like. She was the more dominant sibling of the two twins.

Money decided at the end of the study, after 9 years, that the girl would one day have to be told the truth about her gender reassignment, for all of her family knew the truth that it would be hard to keep a permanent secret.

### CASE STUDY: DATA COLLECTION

There were several sources of data collection. Money himself met with the parents and the children, to inform the parents on how to deal with the study, and the children to assess the proceedings of the study and help move it along. But most of the findings were obtained from the mother, who made most of the observations at home and reported them back to Money.

Money's most basic early conclusion was that she was like any other normal little girl. Her mother reported Brenda had a liking for wearing dresses, playing with dolls, and would like to be a teacher or doctor when she grew up, rather than her brother's ideas of becoming a policeman or fireman (more masculine roles).

At the time of the study, Money's idea was widely accepted as a success. It had seemed that Brenda had successfully taken on the role of a female and was happy as a girl, and understood that is what she was. This had meant that the theory of gender neutrality was a strong possibility. Money's conclusion was: "with surgery and hormonal therapy it is possible to habilitate a baby with a grossly defective penis more effectively as a girl than as a boy". The study concluded it is possible to bring up a child avoiding ambiguity and uncertainty of gender.

### CASE STUDY: RE-ANALYSIS

Money provided the conclusion to the study, which essentially claimed it to be a success. However, the subjects of a study are able to voice their opinions and add to the conclusions and findings of a study. Since the "ending" of the study, events have taken place which allowed us to re-evaluate the case.

Bruce had become Brenda, but as an adult, Brenda later changed back to a male, becoming David Reimer. David told his story to the public, which gave a better insight into the parts of the study previously missed. The key feature here is that David Reimer explicitly made clear he was never happy as a girl, which is what Money had claimed was the complete opposite of. David said he hated wearing dresses and playing with dolls, etc.

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At the age of 14, Brenda was told the truth about her gender reassignment. She said that this made everything make sense, as she thought she was crazy as a girl. She underwent surgery becoming David. David's mother attempted to commit suicide; his father turned to alcohol; and his twin brother, called Brian, turned to crime, and became clinically depressed. David also was depressed and attempted suicide twice.

Eventually, David Reimer married and his wife was a huge help to him. She made David far more confident and he became a lot more stable. However, Brian later overdosed on some antidepressants, and David's marriage became troubled. After his wife left him, David, an angry and violent person, could not cope with no wife, no brother and no job, and so also committed suicide.

### ANALYSIS OF MONEY'S FINDINGS

This study by Money was extremely controversial for a number of reasons. It is suggested that he in fact knew Brenda was never happy as a girl, but lied for the purpose of his study. But as he only studied the case for nine years, it cannot be said for sure, as it's possible this was unclear at that age.

But also, both Brian and David later in life claimed Money was inappropriate in their meetings. On numerous occasions, Money had reportedly asked them both to remove their clothes and show him their genitalia, and he wanted to take photographs of them naked. All of their meetings were recorded, but four of those years have been made unavailable to anyone by Money, so this again is unclear.

When David Reimer was in his thirties, he met with a psychologist called Diamond. Diamond published a journal paper about Reimer, which said that all of Money's conclusions were wrong: Brenda was never happy as a girl, the case was therefore unsuccessful.

It was later accepted that gender neutrality was not true.

### EVALUATION

An interesting but controversial case study overall, it is unclear about the reliability of Money's methods, and his procedure was a little edgy in some areas. The story of David Reimer, and all of his family, is very sensitive, considering both the brothers committed suicide and his parents became depressed. Money's influence in this had to be taken into consideration

- ✓ There was a lot of detail taken about Brenda, such as her likes and dislikes, which could be related to the progress of the study – these were controlled carefully by Money
- ✓ These could be compared to her brother Brian, which provided qualitative data, which is much more valuable as it is more valid than quantitative
- ✓ More than one person contributed to the data – both Money and the parents observed the children
- ✗ The study was 9 years long and Money concluded it a success but it was later revealed by Reimer that he was never happy as a girl, which is shown by the fact he later changed back to a male, therefore there is no validity
- ✗ It is hard to generalise these findings as this is a very unique case study – the ablatio penis study is rare enough, but also having an identical twin brother as well as willing-to-be-studied parents

The study has a lot to say about the **nature-nurture debate**. Money's conclusions supported the idea of *nurture over nature*, stating that we are born gender neutral, and environment and upbringing decides on your phenotype. However, David Reimer himself helped to show these findings to be wrong, which were outlined in Diamond's paper published about Reimer. The study *actually* shows that it is *nature over nurture*, and that it is biological. This study was meant to show gender neutrality to exist, but actually it acts as support for the biological approach.