

Horizon: "The Boy Who Was Turned into a Girl"

UK TV documentary : 2000 : dir. : BBC : 50 min
prod: Andrew Cohen : scr: : dir.ph.:
series editor: Bettina Lemer : broadcast: December 7th 2000

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Radio Times programme notes:

"In 1965 a Canadian woman gave birth to twins, one of whom would become a scientific *cause célèbre*. After Bruce Reimer underwent a bungled circumcision operation at six months, he was surgically transformed into a girl, Brenda, under the guidance of controversial psychologist Dr John Money."

"The science documentary series investigates one of the human faces of the nature-versus-nurture debate in this poignant case history. In 1965 twin boys Bruce and Brian were born, but Bruce, at the age of six months, was left without a penis after a bungled circumcision. Prevalent at the time was the theory of Dr John Money who believed that babies were neutral at birth and that nurture could determine their gender. He recommended that people born with ambiguous genitals – intersexuals – should be assigned a gender. In Bruce's case that gender should be female. Bruce became Brenda both surgically and socially and 35 years on, this ultimate test of the nature-versus-nurture issue is reviewed. Tapes were not available for preview¹, but the story of Bruce/Brenda is bound to stir both controversy and compassion."

Still Caption:

"Boys will be boys? Tonight in "**Horizon**" Dr Milton Diamond argues that the gender of "intersex" children is determined by biology and not nurture."

Metro programme note:

"The extraordinary story of how a boy born in Canada in 1965 was brought up a girl. An accident during his circumcision left six-month old Bruce Reimer without a penis. His parents turned to controversial psychologist Dr John Money for help. He said the gender of a child wasn't formed until later in life and that Bruce would grow into an ordinary girl if he was raised as one. So baby Bruce had his name changed to Brenda and was raised as the family' daughter."

¹ Tapes of a BBC programme were "not available" to the BBC's own listings magazine?

Let me get this straight. Because of criminal negligence during a circumcision operation (90% of which are performed without any medical necessity) the child's penis was so irreparably damaged that it had to be replaced with an artificial vagina? Yes? And according to some sixties quack, babies born with unequivocal genitalia are nevertheless sexually "neuter"? Yes? And that a spot of surgical damage limitation between the legs can convert a baby which developed from a male foetus into a fully-functional menstruating female adult? Yes?

A *Ripley's Believe It or Not* tale of modern witch-doctory, then, and a fairly baroque example of authentic "child abuse" perpetrated on a boy with the full blessing of the authorities. Now that so-called "gender reassignment" techniques have become far more sophisticated than they were back in the sixties, unwanted male infants can simply be converted into pseudo-females by dint of a dodgy circumcision, can't they?

A male cousin of mine was born with "indeterminate" external genitalia in the sixties. Luckily for him he was not born in the USA, or he would not be married now with a natural daughter of his own. The plain truth of the matter, all quackery aside, is that science is incapable of reassigning gender in the only sense that finally matters. Artificially constructed "females" do not ovulate. Artificially constructed "males" cannot ejaculate sperm. The rest is essentially window-dressing, and if any surgery is required, it is on our culture and its morbid obsession with gender. Women are every bit as much to blame for this as men, placing such strenuous emphasis as they do on the qualities they presume to be special to "womanhood". The first question that should be asked of any newborn baby is not "which is it?" but "how is it?". And parents should not put their daughters so blithely into trousers if they would not as readily put their sons into frocks.

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