

SCANDAL OF THE BOY TURNED INTO A GIRL BY DOCTORS TO PROVE THE SEXES ARE NO DIFFERENT

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The human guinea pig in a bizarre Sixties social engineering experiment tells how his life has been wrecked by a Doctor's obsession.

As a teenager, Brenda Reimer felt hounded and such an outcast in the working class suburb where she grew up that she often contemplated suicide.

Partly it was her looks. Though the factory worker's daughter wore her glossy brown hair in a fashionable pageboy style and applied lashings of make-up, she had a wiry, almost masculine build and her voice was rapidly deepening into a rumbling baritone.

But more than that, it was her personality. When other pupils at her high school in Winnipeg, Canada, called her "Cavewoman", yelling crude comments about her boyish appearance, she would beat them up - just as if she were a boy.

Her secret fantasy was that she would grow up to be a mechanic. "Everyone is telling me I'm a girl even though I like to do boy stuff", she would reflect, "but I don't feel like a girl. So I must be an 'it', an alien."

Though Brenda didn't know it in those tortured days, her image of herself was eerily accurate. She actually was born a boy, one of twins, on August 22, 1965. But in one of the most macabre and ethically dubious medical experiments in history, an American psychologist, Dr John Money, persuaded the Reimers to allow him to try to turn the baby boy into a girl after the boy's penis was burned off during a botched circumcision.

Money later claimed the sex-change was a success and feminists flocked to back his theories that the gender gap was about culture, not biology.

However, at 14 Brenda discovered the truth, and after a series of operations, reverted to growing up a male adult, and living as a man, called David.

Now 34, he is revealing his story in a sensational new book. More than 125,000 copies of *As Nature Made Him* are destined for British and American shops. An interview with David is planned on the Oprah Winfrey show, and much is also being made of a campaign in the Seventies, which Money allegedly mounted, to try to prevent the BBC from discovering the truth about the bizarre scandal.

The reason for the enormous interest is that while David is relatively low on the social scale - now married, he supports his wife and three adopted children by labouring in a Winnipeg meat packing plant - Dr Money is regarded as one of the world's leading authorities on human sexuality.

And what makes him particularly well-known are the books, documentaries and scientific papers in which for years he has boasted that he changed an unnamed baby boy into a happy and well-adjusted girl through a 12 year programme consisting largely of social and mental conditioning.

His glowing accounts of the experiment convinced many of his fellow scientists that most of the psychological differences between men and women - the so-called gender gap - are a result of cultural indoctrination rather than biology.

David Reimer has decided to step forward and identify himself as Money's unwitting human guinea pig because he believes that his happiness was sacrificed for the sake of an experiment which, far from being a triumph, was little better than a callous hoax. It wreaked such havoc on his family that his mother tried to kill herself, and David himself made three subsequent suicide attempts.

"It was like brainwashing," he says of the visits which he was forced to make for years to Dr Money's Psychohormonal Research Unit at the respected Johns Hopkins University campus in Baltimore, Maryland, where, during one especially upsetting session, he attempted to escape by fleeing on to a rooftop.

"My parents didn't know they had options. The doctor told them, 'We can change him into a girl, and no one would ever know the difference.' But I felt like a trapped animal.... a freak.

"I was so very lonely. My only two friends in the whole world were my twin brother and my dog. I didn't fit in anywhere and it made me feel very bitter.

"From the time I was in kindergarten, I was ridiculed. As I walked by,

they'd start giggling, not one, but almost the whole class. It'd be like that every day. I was such a scared little rabbit. When I beat up the boys who teased me, it only made people think I was a bigger weirdo and ostracise me more.

"I was nine when I first had what I think was a nervous breakdown. I'd cry for nothing. I'd have the shakes and always be huddling in a corner. I was a miserable child and even now I don't know what to say about that doctor, other than the fact that one day he is going to meet his Maker and all those people whose lives he ruined are going to be judging him."

The conventional option when David's penis was destroyed would have been to wait until he was older and then attempt surgical reconstruction. But David's Parents, Janet and Ron, were a naive and barely-educated young couple, much in awe of what they believed were the wonders of the American medical profession.

They'd seen the charismatic Dr Money - who is nicknamed 'the agent provocateur of the sexual revolution' - on television, and were impressed by his claim that the anatomy with which a child is born can be over-ridden. When they wrote to him, seeking his advice, he invited them to Baltimore and announced that there really was a simple answer: "Bring the baby up as a girl," he said. "The child is young enough that she will never know that she was any different."

The doctor was delighted to take on the case, according to the new book, because it offered him the opportunity to test his theories about gender on a human being. The baby's identical twin, Brian, made it better.

Brian would be brought up normally as a boy and serve as a built-in 'control' to monitor the progress of Brenda, as his twin now would be known. Most of the treatment would consist of psychological conditioning, but in order for Brenda to grow up believing she was born a woman, the doctor urged that the baby's testicles should be removed as soon as possible. The infant was 22 months old when he was surgically castrated. The surgeon used a flap of skin to create a rudimentary opening which Money said would have the appearance of a vagina.

Money unveiled the initial results of what he labelled the 'twins case' in a 1972 book, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl*. It drew contrasts between the behaviour of Brenda and her brother which Money claimed were compelling evidence that little boys and girls are made, not born.

Following her mother's example of womanhood, he wrote, Brenda loved to wear

'feminine clothing', enjoyed doing housework, and played with dolls. Brian, on the other hand, patterned his behaviour on his father's expectations and like to play with cars and tools.

The implication was that, if Brian had been put in a dress, he'd have been the twin who liked scrubbing floors and dressing Barbie.

Feminists rushed to write their own books about the case which, as Time Magazine reported, 'provides strong support for a major contention of women's liberationists; that conventional patterns of masculine and feminine behaviour can be altered'.

Last week, David's mother angrily joined her son in denouncing the doctor. Janet Reimer, a waitress at the local diner when she had the twins, says Money's rosy descriptions bear no resemblance to the real scene at the family's Spartan flat.

She recalled the first time that she followed the doctor's instructions to put Brenda in a dress. "She was ripping at it, trying to tear it off. I remember thinking, 'Oh, my God, she knows she's a boy.'"

A tomboy with perpetually grubby fingernails, Brenda's favourite toys were similar to her twin brother's - trucks and guns. When her parents gave her a sewing machine, she dismantled it with a screwdriver.

Dr Money's foremost rival in gender identity research, Dr Milton Diamond of the University of Hawaii medical school, says that it came as no surprise to him when he learned the horrifying truth about the experiment. "It is nature rather than nurture that largely determines gender identity" Dr Diamond told the Mail on Sunday.

Another expert, Dr William Reiner, added: "Despite everyone telling this child he was a girl, his brain knew he was male. The most important sex organ is not the genitals, it's the brain."

Far from being deterred by the dismal look in Brenda's eyes, Money, however, intensified the indoctrination. During visits to the clinic, the child and her brother were ordered to engage in sexual role-play, including a game which mimicked intercourse, and were also shown pornographic pictures, which the doctor said would reinforce their respective 'masculine' and 'feminine' natures.

In 1979 a BBC documentary producer started to investigate rumours that the doctor might be exaggerating the success of his experiment. The producer

discovered the Reimers' identity and during a visit to Winnipeg noted that Brenda looked surly and sexually ambiguous. But Money, it is believed, warned the then BBC Director General, Sir Charles Curran, that the family might sue if they were named.

A programme which raised questions about the experiment was finally aired in March 1980. But shorn of any information about the family's real identity there were no leads for other reporters to pursue.

Curiously, despite his insistence that gender is largely a psychological choice, Money now had decreed that the rebellious Brenda take female hormones. Presumably, his hope was that biology might succeed where the mental conditioning had failed so spectacularly.

Instead, his young subject's life was thrown into the worst confusion yet. Her adrenal system was still producing male hormones and as her body sprouted breasts, her voice broke.

Finally, at 14, her disillusioned parents told her the truth. "I was crying my eyes out," David recalls. "I felt robbed and cheated." He doused his wardrobe and set fire to it.

One month before his 16th birthday, he began an attempt to rebuild his life, undergoing the first of a series of operations to remove his breasts and create a penis.

Eventually he would meet the woman he was to marry, Jane. She had three children from previous relationships, and he revelled in the prospect of adopting a family which he could never naturally father.

Nothing will totally obliterate the past, of course. The memories are there every time that David looks in the mirror in his tiny bungalow. His beard consists of a few wisps and the female hormones have given an enduringly delicate cast to his cheeks.

Still, David says, he has no doubts about his gender. His masculine genes, as the experiment gruelingly proved, are something which no doctor can ever take away from him. "I enjoy what being a man entails. You treat your wife well. You're a good father." he says. "I guess John Money might not agree, but to me, that is being a man. I didn't have any kind of childhood but I live through my son.

"When he achieves something it's like I'm there. He does the things that I never had the chance to do."

