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**Nature vs. Nurture - The Case of David Reimer**


[John William Money](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/transcripts/2813gender.html) was a psychologist and a sexologist well known for the sex reassignment of David Reimer. When David Reimer’s (then named Bruce) penis was destroyed by accident during his circumcision in 1966 , his parents brought him to John Money. They saw him in an interview and contacted him for help regarding the problem of their son.

He advised the parents to change the sex of their child since penis reconstruction wasn’t a viable option back then. He was a supporter of the idea that gender was not necessarily predetermined in the womb but an influence of the environment and conditions experienced by the child. He thought that a baby’s gender is neutral in the first 2 years of life. So, at the age of 22 months Bruce Reimer suffered a surgery called [orchidectomy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orchidectomy)  which would remove his testicles and the spermatic cord. He also started a hormone treatment and became Money’s guinea pig named Brenda. He comforted the parents telling them that this type of surgery was very common and was successful in the past. What Brenda’s parents didn’t know was the fact that this type of surgery was performed on intersex infants but never on normal infants.

Brenda’s childhood wasn’t great; whenever her mother tried to dress her with a dress she would tore it off. She also liked playing with her brother’s toys and was often bullied by her classmates in school. Despite these, Money made his case public and wrote: "The child's behavior is so clearly that of an active little girl and so different from the boyish ways of her twin brother”.

Brenda suffered terribly, no hormones were able to make her feel like a girl, for some time she urinated through a hole surgeons had placed in the abdomen. It was clear that she identified herself as male as she declared that when she grew up she would marry a woman, not a man. Besides a traumatizing childhood, her visits to Dr. Money were also highly traumatizing and tiring because she was supposed to visit him regularly. He would often show her and her brother pictures of people having sex and also forced them to take off their clothes and [examine each other’s genitals](http://reason.com/archives/2004/05/24/the-death-of-david-reimer) (however these claims might not be true).

Brenda soon developed psychological problems. She had a nervous breakdown when she was only a small child and by the time she reached adolescence she already had suicidal depression. When told that she was in fact born a man, she took the name David and decided to become a male again. She undergone surgery to remove her breasts and also had penis reconstruction. [David married in 1990](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Reimer) and became a defender of sexual liberation.

In 2004, David committed suicide; the events that lead to his suicide were harsh: his brother died by taking an overdose of antidepressants (he suffered from schizophrenia), he and his wife separated, and he had financial difficulties.