

## Questioning Binaries: On Overlooking Culture and Postgenderism

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### Abstract

Humans have always constrained themselves by accidental binary gender assignments. The gender binary has become a part of human conditioning, causing one to see the world through basic binary categories from metaphysics to linguistics. This attitude has led to the marginalization of the LGBTI community as a whole. The concept of postgenderism is a radical movement that questions the very idea of gender roles in culture. However, most people belonging to the transgender community tries to fit in to the constrains of binary. This endeavor aims at examining the modus oprandi adopted by Amy Ellis Nutt in *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* to convey her ideas on the concept of gender and attempts to argue that in her effort to deconstruct gender polarity, she reinforces gender binaries which are rooted in the culture of every society. *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* traces the life of Wyatt who realizes that he is different from the rest and how he transforms the society in accepting the same.

**Keywords:** Post-genderism, marginalisation, LGBTI, gender polarity, gender roles.

In May 2011, Kathy Witterick published an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* stating that she and her husband have planned to raise their new baby gender-neutrally. This would mean keeping the baby's sex private from all but a select few and letting them vocalize their own gender identity once that identity took shape. The family received over a hundred interview requests and were the subject of global debate about raising a child without gender. Their plan was not to force the child to identify as non-binary but rather, by not imposing the gender binary, they could gift the child autonomy in defining its gender identity without the influence of social norms. After the publication of the article, The Wittericks faced oppositions from different parts of their community, primarily because they challenged the concept binary. Ostensibly, the worry was that the child may be subjected to bullying. In fact, the people who cried abuse embodied the fear of the non-binary: their concern was not for the child as an individual, but as a subject whose mere upbringing would challenge the notion of truth. The possibility that parents could give their children freedom from the regularly binary system proved that the binary is not inherent: stripped of its "natural" status, the binary loss its normative power. It, however, stresses that the concept of binary gender cannot be erased from the minds of people that easily.

The book *Being Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* too seems to reinforce the concept of the binary gender. Each character in the novel gives importance to this view and it becomes clear when Wyatt

finally changes his gender and become Nicole in order to fit into the society. Although she destabilizes the link between sex, gender, and sexual orientation, Nicole simply shift from one polarized gender to another, erasing the multiplicity of genders and exchange one stereotype over the other.

*Being Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* portrays an essentialist view of gender. It sees gender as a basic and universal category of experience: man and woman, as categories of personhood, and are trans-historical, eternal, immutable essences such that an individual can be only one gender, never the other or both. There is a tendency to look through and see either a male or a female. This is contrary to the postmodern view of gender.

On observing the narrative style of the work it becomes clear that it is quite traditional and unlike postmodern narratives it reinforces the old binary models of gender identity as it documents transition from male- to-female with no grounds in between. The postmodern theorists hold the view that, as a result of the plurality of selves and unproductive communication, the truth of reality and its stability are uncertain. The gender system of Western world gets its meaning from a hetero-normative binary. Based on the biologically sexed body, this binary recognizes two legitimate gender identities: female and male. Because the stability of the Western reality depends on the gender binary, society enforces adherence to norms – those phenomena that "represent the average or ideal

towards which all other phenomena move" (Butler 50). The imposition of normative behavior creates a structure in which delinquent gender identities and performances are extremely apparent. Gender transitivity can emerge as the crossing or blending of gender categories, physical gender movement through surgery, or the movement away from binary boundaries.

In contrast to postmodern narratives, which are constantly under revision and account for a provisional identity open to change, *Becoming Nicole* is a relatively closed narrative. Amy Ellis Nutt forecloses alternative interpretations of experiences and offers only one clear and unambiguous interpretation for events of Nicole's life. Nicole reports that her narrative is no different from other women because she has always been a woman.

Nicole conforms to role expectations. Role-following maintains traditions and upholds order. She tries to derive strength from the existing social order. Since she conforms to prevailing social norms, she adopts and assimilates into existing power structure. Thus, she tries to attain the social power and position of women. Indeed, role-following in one way or the other prevents marginalization. Moreover, by fitting in as one or the other gender, she confirms with the norms of the society and rejects her position as a transgender.

The conspicuous presence of a wealth of historical and anthropological examples gender roles may stand as an impediment to a gender free society. However, there are contemporary efforts in scientific field to create gender-neutral societies. Moreover, biotechnologies,

neurotechnologies and information technologies make it possible to complete the project of freeing oneself from constraints of binary gender. Hopefully, post-gender technologies may put an end to static biological and sexual self-identification. Thus, it will provide ample space for individuals to choose the biological and psychological gender traits according to their convenience.

The biological base of the gender cognition, gender identity and sexual preference impose limits on one's capacity for communication and inter-subjective understanding and empathy. Postgenderism may be regarded as an extreme form of the feminist critique, especially in relation to gender and the genderqueer. It also analyses how the binary gender obliges an individual to communicate with and understand other people. Postgenderism seek to transcend essentialism and social constructionism by asserting that freedom from gender. will require both social reform and biotechnology. However, biographical novels like *Becoming Nicole*, stresses on the fact that the society has to travel a long way to imbibe post-genderism into its culture.

#### Work Cited

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