Becoming Nicole

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AMY ELLIS NUTT

Nutt was born in Staten Island and grew up in Central New Jersey. She is the middle child of five children. She studied at Smith College, where she received a B.A. in English and Philosophy, before transferring to MIT, where she earned a Master of Science in Philosophy. She briefly worked as a philosophy professor at Tufts University the University of Massachusetts before switching to a career in journalism. She began as a fact-checker at *Sport Illustrated* before getting a Master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. She then wrote for the *Newark Star-Ledger*, where she was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in feature writing in 2009 for "The Accidental Artist," which eventually became her first book, *Shadows Bright as Glass*. In 2011, she won the Pulitzer Prize in feature writing for her series "The Wreck of the Lady Mary." She also taught journalism at Harvard and Princeton during this period. In 2014 she moved to Washington, D.C. to write for *The Washington Post* as a science writer, and in 2015 she published *Becoming Nicole*.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a part of the book, Nutt follows the evolution of transgender rights from the late 1990s (when Jonas and Nicole are born) through the present. Prior to the late 1990s, however, the rights and representation of transgender people was severely limited. Up until the 1950s there had been several examples of transgender people living as the gender with which they identified, such as New York City politician Murray Hall (1841-1901), California socialite Lucy Hicks Anderson (1886-1954), and American jazz musician Billy Tipton (1914-1989). These individuals largely kept their biological sex a secret until their deaths, even from close family members such as their children. It wasn't until the 1950s and 60s the first transgender organizations and publications began to crop up. The fields of law and medicine did not have favorable responses to the growing awareness of transgender people, as homosexuality was still illegal and frequently viewed as a psychological disorder. Through the 1970s and 80s, transgender people were frequently discriminated against—even by the gay and lesbian communities. In 1980, transgender people were officially classified by the American Psychiatric Association as having gender identity disorder. It was not until the late 1990s that transgender visibility in the LGBT community gained force and organizations grew that were devoted to adding gender identity to non-discrimination policies.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In the last decade, a host of fiction and nonfiction literature focusing on the experiences of transgender youth has gained traction. Some of the nonfiction works include *Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out*, which profiles six transgender teens; *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, which serves as a resource for transgender individuals to understand various medical and social topics affecting the transgender community; *I Promised Not to Tell: Raising a transgender child*, which is yet another resource for parents of transgender children and examines one transgender boy's life from birth to age 18. Another memoir includes *Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen*, which focuses on a trans girl named Jazz whom the Maines family looked to as a role model for Nicole. Fictional novels on the same topics include *If I Was Your Girl*; *Some Assembly Required: The Not-So-Secret Life of a Transgender Teen*; *The Art of Being Normal*; and *This Is How It Always Is*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family
- **When Written:** 2011-2015
- **Where Written:** New Jersey; Maine; Washington, D.C.
- **When Published:** October 20, 2015
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction; Memoir
- **Setting:** Orono, Maine; Portland, Maine
- **Climax:** Nicole undergoes her long-awaited sex reassignment surgery.
- **Antagonist:** Prejudice; Paul and Jacob Melanson
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Real-Life Superhero. In addition to her activism, Nicole Maines is an actress. One of her recent roles was as a transgender superhero on the show *Supergirl*.

A Well-Documented Life. In addition to *Becoming Nicole*, Nicole's experiences have been featured in two documentaries: *Not Your Skin* and *The Trans List*.

PLOT SUMMARY

Wyatt and Jonas Maines identical twin boys born on October 7, 1997 in upstate New York. Their biological mother is a

16-year-old girl named Sarah, who contacts her cousin Kelly and Kelly's husband Wayne, wondering if they're interested in privately adopting the twins. Having been married for five years but unable to conceive a child, Kelly and Wayne jump at the chance to adopt Wyatt and Jonas. Kelly had come from a less traditional family, having been raised by her biological mother's sister Donna. Wayne, by contrast, had grown up in upstate New York and is an "all-American boy." He looks forward to sharing the rites of passage of manhood as the adoptive father to his two sons.

Early on, Wyatt and Jonas show very different personalities. Wyatt loves Barbies, dresses, and playing the "girl" characters when they act out stories. Jonas loves *Power Rangers* and acting out the "boy" characters. Wyatt is also obsessed with **The Little Mermaid**. One day, when Wayne is fixing up the bathroom, Wyatt joins him with his toy hammer. Wayne revels in the rare father-son moment, but Wyatt then confesses, "Daddy, I hate my penis." Wayne comforts Wyatt but is stunned and upset by this statement. All he wants is for his son to have a normal childhood.

As Wyatt grows, he refuses to wear the masculine clothing Kelly buys for him, so Kelly starts to buy him more feminine clothes. She also does research on what Wyatt might be experiencing, leading her to think that Wyatt might be transgender. Wayne thinks that Kelly is being too indulgent with Wyatt but doesn't stop her from buying him girls' clothes and letting him grow out his hair. Wyatt becomes adamant that he is a girl.

Before Wyatt and Jonas start first grade, the family moves to Orono, Maine. At their housewarming party, Wyatt appears in a pink princess dress, and Wayne yells at him to put on something else. Kelly is frustrated at her husband's intolerance. Wyatt starts to become depressed and anxious, plucking out his eyebrows and having violent fantasies. Wyatt's friends at school accept his gender identity, but some older students start to bully and make fun of him. Kelly follows the news on transgender children and teenagers and is horrified at how much discrimination and violence they often face. She also watches a few profiles and interviews with transgender people on TV, including Jennifer Finney Boylan, a trans woman and a professor at Colby College, and Jazz Jennings, a transgender girl who is about Wyatt's age. They become role models for Wyatt, who starts to recognize that he is not alone.

Nutt takes a brief interlude to explain some of the biological factors of sexual anatomy and gender identity. The development of these two things are due to both genes and hormones, and the interplay between those two things. Her ultimate conclusion is that sex and gender are two separate processes that can have many variations. Neither sex nor gender is binary, and the two do not necessarily have to match. When doctors have tried to "correct" a child's ambiguous sexual anatomy with surgery, like in the cases of Cheryl Chase and David Reimer, at best they remove agency from the child in question and at worst they can be wrong about the child's gender and scar them for life.

Kelly also realizes that it is time to find someone to help Wyatt with his transition and seeks out pediatric endocrinologist Dr. Norman Spack. Spack helps the family understand the process of transitioning, which will involve taking puberty suppressants, then the female hormone estrogen, and then finally sex reassignment surgery at age 18. Wyatt is thrilled that he will be able to avoid puberty as a boy.

At the same time, Wyatt starts fifth grade, which involves a few big changes: Wyatt changes his legal name to Nicole and starts using feminine pronouns, and Wayne publicly support's Nicole's transition for the first time. Additionally, in fifth grade, the bathrooms are single-sex. The officials at Asa C. Adams Elementary School agree that it would be more appropriate for Nicole to use the girls' restroom, which is where she feels more comfortable. This plan is thwarted, however, when Paul Melanson, the grandfather and guardian of another fifth grader named Jacob, hears that Nicole is using the bathroom. He does not believe that Nicole should be using the girls' bathroom and tells Jacob that if Nicole can use the girls' bathroom, so can he. Jacob starts to follow Nicole into the girls' bathroom and calls her a "faggot." Jacob is taken to the principal's office, but Nicole is also temporarily barred from using the girls' bathroom. When Kelly calls the school administrator, Kelly Clenchy, and demands that Jacob and Nicole be separated and that Nicole be able to use the bathroom again, the school refuses to take action.

Jacob continues to harass Nicole, but the school becomes more and more complacent, telling Nicole that she can only use the staff restroom, not the girls' bathroom. Additionally, various media outlets in Orono report on the incidents, and the Christian Civic League of Maine starts to publish editorials shaming the Maineses (though never by name) and arguing that the school should not allow Nicole to use the girls' restroom. The situation grows worse and worse, with more and more media attention. The school does little to punish Jacob for his continued stalking but has an adult follow Nicole everywhere she goes.

Nutt takes another interlude to provide scientific evidence for being transgender, showing that there are areas of the brain as well as specific hormone receptors that can cause those with male anatomy to have more "feminized" brains and be transgender. She also proves how identical twins, who share the same DNA, could have different gender identities because they each have a different amniotic sac and umbilical cord in the womb. This explains how Nicole and Jonas could be twins but have different gender identities.

Nicole's situation at school becomes so bad that Kelly, Jonas, and Nicole decide to move to Portland, Maine, while Wayne stays in Orono for work during the week and spends weekends

and holidays in Portland. They also decide to sue the school district for discrimination. At their new middle school, Jonas and Nicole are instructed to "go stealth" and remain quiet about Nicole's transgender identity, as the family fears a repeat of elementary school. This is frustrating for Nicole, who feels like she can't be open about who she is. Meanwhile, Nicole starts to take puberty suppressants and GLAD takes up the Maineses' lawsuit against the Orono School District.

Nicole and Jonas "go stealth" all through middle school, but at the end of eighth grade, the Maine legislature considers a bill that would allow business owners to decide who could use which restrooms. If a transgender person was denied access to the facility of their gender identity, they would not be able to claim discrimination. Wayne and Nicole both speak in front of the Maine Legislature and talk to their representatives, asking them not to pass the bill. Wayne speaks about his own experiences in learning about transgender issues, admitting his initial reluctance about Nicole being transgender, but revealing how proud he is of her persistence and her confidence in who she is. The bill is defeated.

When Nicole and Jonas begin high school at Waynflete, they decide that "going stealth" has been too painful, and so Nicole starts to come out to her new classmates. No one has an issue with this. The next year, proceedings begin for the Maineses' lawsuit. They lose their case in their district, but they win when the case goes to Maine's state supreme court. It is a major victory that has ramifications not only for the Orono school district, but for schools across Maine.

Nicole and Jonas graduate from high school, and both will attend the University of Maine in the fall. But there is one more hurdle for Nicole before she goes to college: having sex reassignment surgery. Nicole has made peace with her anatomy in many ways but knows that this is the final necessary step for her to feel like her body belongs to her. She is nervous, but her sex reassignment surgery goes successfully. She will take female hormones for the rest of her life, and will never be able to have children, but no one will be able to tell that she had ever had male anatomy.

Nutt writes in an epilogue informing the reader that transgender rights have evolved substantially since she started writing the book and continue to evolve. As of 2015, 18 states and 200 cities and counties bar discrimination on the basis of gender identity. Nutt concludes the book with an exchange between two third graders at Nicole's elementary school, after Nicole had moved and gone on to middle school. A boy and girl talk casually about what it means to be transgender, and when the boy brings up Nicole, the girl comments that she didn't know Nicole was transgender. The boy says, "Yeah, but it isn't a big deal, you know." The girl responds, "Oh, I know. It doesn't really matter. As long as she's happy."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nicole/Wyatt Maines – The protagonist of the book. Nicole is a transgender young woman who was born a biological male named Wyatt. As an infant, Wyatt is adopted by Kelly and Wayne Maines at birth, along with his identical twin brother Jonas. From an early age, Wyatt recognizes that despite his male anatomy, he strongly identifies as a girl. He prefers feminine activities and roles when he and Jonas act out stories, and favors dolls over action figures. Wyatt prefers wearing dresses rather than the flannels that Kelly buys for Wyatt and Jonas. Wyatt is also obsessed with **The Little Mermaid** from a young age. Over the course of Wyatt's childhood, despite not having the vocabulary to understand what he is going through, he has a very clear sense of himself and knows that he should not have to change herself to be accepted—rather, it is the people around her who have to adjust their ideas of who she is. Still, Wyatt faces a lot of challenges over her school years: his father struggles to accept his identity, he faces discrimination and bullying when she uses the girls' restroom in elementary school, and he feels anxious at the prospect of going through puberty as a boy. But Wyatt is gradually able to expresses his feminine identity more openly, taking on female pronouns and changing his name to Nicole. With the support of her family and the help of pediatric specialist Dr. Norman Spack, Nicole is able to take puberty blockers and eventually receive sex reassignment surgery, a transition from a male to a female that is deeply gratifying and affirming to the identity she has longed to express for so many years. Nicole also wins several legal victories in the state of Maine: she wins a case that forces her school (and others) to create a more inclusive bathroom policy, she helps defeat a bill that would allow businesses to choose the restrooms its patrons can use, and she and Wayne help to change the policy at the University of Maine so that sex reassignment surgery is covered by its insurance. In these victories, Nicole not only demonstrates courage, but also the power of someone being out and proud of their identity. Only by living this way is Nicole able to advocate for her rights and the rights of others.

Kelly Maines – Nicole and Jonas's mother, and Wayne's wife. Kelly grows up in a somewhat unconventional family, as she is raised by the sister of her biological mother. She also finds herself unable to have children of her own, so she and Wayne adopt Nicole (then Wyatt) and Jonas from her 16-year-old cousin Sarah. Because of this, Kelly has fewer expectations of what a family should look like than her husband Wayne does. So, when Wyatt begins to express his female identity even before two years old, Kelly is more open to Wyatt's wishes—she buys him more feminine clothing, and dolls rather than action figures. Eventually recognizing that Wyatt's behavior isn't a phase, but not understanding exactly what is

going on in her son's mind, Kelly tries to learn as much as she can about the potential things that Wyatt might be experiencing. As she digs through information on homosexuality, transsexualism, and being transgender, she gaining knowledge makes her better equipped to help Wyatt. She starts to refer to Wyatt as her daughter, advocates for him to be on the girls' softball team, and finds a specialist who will allow Wyatt to continue his transition to Nicole. When Nicole faces discrimination at school and the school does nothing to improve the situation, Kelly decides that it would be better for the family to move rather than for her daughter to suffer. Thus, Kelly shows how families are defined by the love and support they have for one another, not by arbitrary social expectations.

Wayne Maines – Nicole and Jonas's father, and Kelly's husband. Unlike Kelly, Wayne has a very traditional upbringing in upstate New York. This is why, when Nicole (then Wyatt) starts to show a more feminine gender identity, Wayne is much more taken aback than Kelly is. Wayne's childhood centered around basketball, baseball, hunting, and a strong male bond with his own father and brother. When Wyatt rejects these activities, it feels to Wayne like a rejection of his own childhood, or as though he is being mocked. Thus, Wayne frequently gets angry at Wyatt or ignores his behavior. However, when Wayne's support as a father is tested, he shows his true priorities. Before the twins turn three, Wyatt confesses tearfully that he hates his penis. Wayne stifles his own emotional reaction in order to comfort his son. When a judge questions the Maineses' decision to change Wyatt's name to Nicole, Wayne stands up to make a statement in support of Wyatt's transition, even though he had been hesitant about it up to that point. Gradually, Wayne becomes a big advocate for transgender rights alongside Nicole and writes articles to help other fathers of transgender children understand what it means to be trans. Like Kelly, he discovers that the most important quality in a family is the support and love that they have for each other, not their conformity to a social norm.

Jonas Maines – Nicole's identical twin brother. In contrast to his parents Kelly and Wayne, Jonas recognizes early on that Nicole (then Wyatt) is a girl, not a boy. He admits that he sometimes feels that his life revolves around Nicole, such as when the family has to move away from Orono because of the discrimination that Nicole faces in school. But despite this, he is a constant source of support for her. Even though Nicole is the more aggressive twin, Jonas works hard to defend her from Jacob's abuse, even to the point where he gets into fights with him. Like Nicole, Jonas goes through his own period of anxiety and depression as he tries to understand his own identity. He is introspective and thoughtful, finding solace in music and theater, and plans to study theater and psychology in college. Nutt also makes it a point to illustrate how even though Jonas and Nicole are identical twins and share the same DNA, they don't necessarily have to have the same gender identity because they have separate amniotic sacs and therefore different environments in the womb, which could affect their intake of hormones and thus their gender identities. This is also why twins do not share the same fingerprints.

Brian/Bonnie/Cheryl Chase – An individual whom Nutt references as an example of an intersex person. At birth, doctors were unsure of the sex of this baby, but they counseled the parents to assign the infant a male identity. The parents complied and named the baby Brian. At 18 months old, however, doctors discovered that Brian had a uterus and ovotestes. They removed the baby's micropenis and suggested that the parents rename the child Bonnie and raise her as a girl. Bonnie underwent surgery to remove the testicular part of her gonads at eight years old under the false pretense that the procedure would help her stomachaches. When Bonnie was eventually told the truth, she was deeply disturbed by the doctor's decision. When she grew up, she took on the alias Cheryl Chase and formed the Intersex Society of North America, advocating that doctors not perform surgery on intersex babies but instead let children make a decision themselves when they reach an appropriate age.

Bruce/David Reimer – An individual whom Nutt references as an example of what can happen when a person is forced to embody a different gender identity than the one they feel is right for them. Bruce was a baby who had a cauterization as an infant to correct an obstruction, but his penis was accidentally burned off by this procedure. A psychologist, Dr. John Money, counseled his parents to simply raise Bruce as "Brenda" and give her female hormones. Despite her parent's efforts, Brenda became suicidal, never feeling nor acting female. When she was finally told the truth, she transitioned back to a male identity, took on the name David, and had multiple surgeries to remove breasts and rebuild a penis. David married and adopted children but was tortured by what happened to him and committed suicide in 2004 at age 38.

Jacob Melanson – A student in Nicole and Jonas's class at elementary school. Prompted by his grandfather Paul's disapproval of Nicole using the girls' bathroom at school, Jacob thinks it's wrong that Nicole (who he views as a boy) gets to use the girls' bathroom when he doesn't. Consequently, Jacob begins to stalk Nicole, follows her into the girls' bathroom when she uses it, and calls her a "faggot." While at first Jacob is disciplined by the school, gradually his behavior goes unpunished and the school focuses on policing Nicole instead.

Christine Daniels/Mike Penner – A trans woman who lived most of her life as a man by the name of Mike Penner. Penner was a veteran sports journalist at the *Los Angeles Times* when he announced that he was a transgender woman, rechristening himself as Christine Daniels. Unfortunately, Christine's transition was openly mocked by other journalists and she became extremely depressed, to the point where she reverted to her male identity and commited suicide.

Paul Melanson – The grandfather of Jacob, another student at Nicole and Jonas's elementary school. He is extremely prejudiced against gay and transgender people, and when he hears that Nicole is using the girls' bathroom, he tells his grandson that he should have that right, too. Prompted by his grandfather, Jacob starts to stalk Nicole and use the girls' bathroom whenever she uses it.

Bob Lucy – The principal of Orono Middle School and the acting principal of Asa C. Adams Elementary School when Jonas and Nicole are attending school there. It is partially Lucy's decision to not punish Jacob for his bullying; Lucy instead forces Nicole to use the staff restroom rather than the girls' bathroom at school.

Dr. John Money – A doctor who believed that gender was a social construct, and that parents could simply choose the sex for their baby. He touted the case of David Reimer as an example of this strategy's success, but given Money's disturbing clinical practices and David's psychological torment throughout his life and eventual suicide as an adult, the ethics and legitimacy of Money's work have been heavily criticized.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jennifer Finney Boylan – A transgender woman and a professor at Colby College who gives an interview on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* about being transgender. Kelly watches the special and sees Jennifer as a "pretty and normal-seeming woman," and thinks that she could be a good role model for Wyatt.

Michael Heath – The executive director of the Christian Civic League of Maine, who supports Paul and Jacob Melanson's actions. He writes several editorials against the Maines family, calling advocates of LGBT rights "children of the devil."

Jazz Jennings – A transgender girl featured on a *20/20* special who is about the same age as Wyatt when he watches the special with Kelly and Wayne at 10 years old. Seeing Jazz tell her story, Wyatt is relieved to find another child who shares his experience.

Lisa Erhardt – The school counselor at Asa C. Adams Elementary School. Erhardt helps Kelly understand more about Wyatt's identity and tries to help create policies that will allow Wyatt to use the girls' facilities in the school.

Eric Buffong – A transgender man who was fired from his job as a cook when his gender identity was discovered in 2006. He won a $3 million suit against the restaurant for discrimination based on his gender identity.

Dr. Norman Spack – A pediatric endocrinologist who specializes in transgender children, and who helps Nicole transition.

Gwen Araujo – A transgender teenager who was tortured and beaten to death by a group of men in 2002 because of her gender identity.

Virginia Holmes – Wyatt's first therapist, who helps him understand his transgender identity.

Dr. Kathy Rumer – The specialist who performs Nicole's sex reassignment surgery.

Kelly Clenchy – The school administrator at Asa C. Adams Elementary School.

Roxanne – Kelly's biological mother, who gives her to her sister Donna to raise.

Donna – Roxanne's sister, who raises Kelly.

Sarah – Kelly's 16-year-old cousin and Nicole and Jonas's biological mother.

Leah – Wyatt's best friend growing up.

Bill Maines – Wayne's father.

Betty Maines – Wayne's mother.

Janis – Sarah's mother.

TERMS

DSM – The acronym for the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. It often is followed by a roman numeral (i.e., DSM-V) to indicate the version to which one is referring. The manual offers a common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders for psychologists and psychiatrists. **Kelly** and **Lisa Erhardt** both reference the DSM in order to better understand **Wyatt**'s transgender identity. Using the DSM, Wyatt is diagnosed with gender identity disorder (which has since been updated to gender dysphoria).

GLAD – The Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders organization. This organization is a non-profit legal rights organization dedicated to ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. GLAD helps the Maineses in their lawsuit against the Orono School District. GLAD is not to be confused with GLAAD.

GLAAD – Formerly known as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, GLAAD is an organization that aims to promote representation and acceptance of the LGBTQ community in media. GLAAD contacts Nicole to see if she is interested in auditioning for the role of a transgender teen on *Royal Pains*. GLAAD is not to be confused with GLAD.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

GENDER IDENTITY, EXPRESSION, AND TRANSFORMATION

Becoming Nicole follows the childhood of a transgender girl named Nicole Maines (who is born with biologically male anatomy, as Wyatt Maines) and her journey to understand herself and fight discrimination. As Wyatt grows up, he innately understands that his gender identity does not match his outward appearance, nor does it seem to match how people treat or think of him. As Nutt tracks Wyatt's transformation to Nicole and the change in Nicole's family and her community's view of who she is, Nutt demonstrates that it is not transgender people's understanding of *themselves* that changes when they transition—rather, it is the perceptions and attitudes of those around them that must change.

Wyatt and his twin brother Jonas are born as identical twins, adopted by Kelly and Wayne Maines. Despite their deep connection and outward similarities, Wyatt immediately expresses himself differently from Jonas. His gender identity is immediately clear, and he understands himself to be a girl. Wyatt prefers Barbies as a kid and takes on the female characters in their games, like Cinderella, Dorothy, and particularly **The Little Mermaid**. He begins to express that he really feels a girl, telling Wayne shortly before he turns three that he hates his penis. Wyatt instinctively understands that he is "a boy who wants to be a girl" or "a girl in a boy's body." Nutt illuminates for readers how Wyatt's gender identity is both central to his identity as a whole, and how he is very firm in his belief in that identity. What he doesn't understand, instead, is why he is expected to be anything other than who he believes himself to be. Wyatt grows anxious and even depressed, but not because he is confused about his identity. Nutt writes, "These new stresses seemed to be more about how others saw Wyatt, and him wanting to fit in with the girls." Nutt again highlights the idea that Wyatt has no doubts about his identity as a girl—it is others who have to accept him and change their thinking about him.

Even at a young age, Wyatt's ideas of himself are so strong that Kelly and Wayne understand they need to transform their own attitudes toward their son's gender expression. Wyatt refuses to wear the red flannel shirts that Kelly buys him, preferring to go bare-chested. Rather than torture her son, Kelly allows him to wear more traditionally feminine clothing and grow out his hair, even if it leads to awkward comments or questions. She decides that it is other people's problem if there is an issue with what he wears. In elementary school, Kelly fights for Wyatt's right to play on the girls' softball team rather than the boys' baseball team. In an email advocating for Wyatt, she refers to Wyatt as her daughter and uses female pronouns. This shift in language is not a small one; it indicates a shift in how Kelly thinks of Wyatt and how she expects others to think of Wyatt as well. This is only further reinforced when she helps guide Wyatt through his name change to Nicole. Unlike Kelly, Wayne at first views Wyatt as a source of shame. When they move to Maine, Wayne yells at Wyatt for wearing a pink princess dress during a housewarming party they are holding. He sees Wyatt as deliberately rebelling and continues to insist that he is not transgender—perhaps out of a lack of understanding about what being trans means, or because he views Wyatt's actions as a comment on his own masculinity or his ability to be a father. Gradually, Wayne comes to understand that Nicole's gender expression is not a phase. He starts to accept her, even taking her to a father-daughter dance, to her delight. He eventually recognizes that he'd "spent too much time dwelling on the loss of a son and had never really considered the special rewards of a daughter." In this way, Nutt examines how it is actually Wayne's transformation that allows Nicole to feel like herself. His acceptance of her identity makes her feel more comfortable in her own skin.

Nicole does certainly undergo her own transformation alongside her parents, as she socially and biologically transitions to female over the course of her teenage years. She gains a new name, undergoes hormone treatments, and has sex reassignment surgery. All of this does nothing to transform who Nicole feels herself to be, however; it instead transforms her outward appearance to match her inner sense of self, so that others treat her the same way. The Maines family aren't the only ones who adjust how they think about transgender individuals—society as a whole also transforms in big and small ways. Nutt cites how, in the four years it takes to write her book (from 2011-2015), the rights of transgender people have completely evolved. As of 2019, 18 states and the District of Columbia bar discrimination of transgender people. Seven countries legally recognize more than two genders. In July 2015, the Obama administration moved to lift the ban on transgender people in the military. This is a testament to the transformation of the public in recognizing that transgender people deserve the same rights as every other person.

Nutt concludes her book with an exchange between two boys and a girl in a third-grade classroom. The exchange takes place in the elementary school that Nicole had attended, after Nicole has left the school. One boy is coloring his giraffe in pink and teal, the colors of the transgender flag. He and another girl start to discuss Nicole, and one girl says, "Oh, I know Nicole. She's cool. I didn't know she's transgender." The boy responds, "Yeah, but it isn't a big deal." The girl affirms, "Oh, I know. It doesn't really matter. As long as she's happy." This exchange, like the whole of Nutt's book, illuminates a fundamental truth: although there is still a long way to go to combat stereotypes, curtail violence against transgender people, and achieve full equality, subsequent generations are increasingly understanding and accepting of transgender people.

KNOWLEDGE VS. IGNORANCE

As Wyatt is growing up, there is a fundamental lack of understanding about what it means to be transgender. The topic is generally taboo to speak about, and therefore there isn't much information on transgender people—either anecdotally or scientifically. As Nutt recounts Kelly's trials in attempting to find out more about what her son is experiencing, she proves that a lack of knowledge has led to ignorance, discrimination, and even dire consequences for transgender people, whereas gaining information allows for understanding and the ability to help.

Although Kelly doesn't initially have the vocabulary to understand that Wyatt is transgender, she recognizes his distress when he is forced to wear masculine clothing and expresses resentment toward his male anatomy. Kelly immediately takes it upon herself to figure out more about what Wyatt is experiencing in order to understand—and to help *him* understand—who he is as a person. Kelly googles "boys who like girls' toys," reading about homosexuality, transsexualism, and being transgender. She reads for hours, trying to understand the difference between the terms. She learns that gender is innate—typically not something that a person has to think about, unless other people treat a person like one gender when they, in fact, feel like the other. With this information, Kelly begins to understand Wyatt's unease. She allows him, more and more, to wear feminine clothing, knowing that he has a very secure sense of who he is. The more information she has, the more comfortable she is able to make Wyatt, knowing what he really wants.

Others express discomfort in not understanding Wyatt. The counselor at Asa Adams Elementary School, Lisa Erhardt, has an initial conversation with Kelly about Wyatt. She immediately pulls out the DSM, knowing that she doesn't have the vocabulary to help Wyatt with what's ailing him. She then contacts the LGBT center at the University of Maine, who astound her with their generosity in fielding her questions and providing her with information. The more information Erhardt gains, the more she is able to help others understand as well. When Nicole begins to use the girls' bathroom in the fifth grade, a mother of another fifth-grade girl calls the school, admitting that she hadn't been uncomfortable with Nicole using the bathroom until she remembered that Nicole was anatomically a boy and that her own daughter was on the verge of puberty. Erhardt assures the woman that for a transgender child like Nicole, "the last thing she wanted was anyone to see her 'birth genitals.'" Reassurance and understanding like this demonstrate how knowledge allows for a greater ease in Nicole's life and the lives of those around her.

Nutt also provides several examples of how a lack of scientific understanding about gender identity, being transgender, or being born with ambiguous anatomy led to deeply disturbing consequences. In one case Nutt cites, a boy named Bruce (born 1965) accidentally had his penis burned off during an operation at eight months old. A doctor named Dr. John Money convinced the parents to raise him as Brenda, remove his testicles, dress and treat him like a girl, and administer hormones to him during puberty. Money believed that gender was a social construct, and parents could choose a gender in which to raise their child (i.e., that gender is based completely on "nurture"). Brenda became depressed and suicidal as a teenager and is bullied. When she was told the truth about her gender at 14, Brenda renamed herself David Reimer and went through a mastectomy, testosterone injections, and two phalloplasty surgeries to rebuild a penis. But David was tortured by what happened and tragically committed suicide at age 38. This lack of understanding, or even willful ignorance, of the scientific basis of gender identity cost this man his life.

In several cases, ambiguous anatomy led to doctors performing surgery on children to enhance their likeness to a given sex without knowing what sex they actually were, sometimes with disastrous results. One infant (born in August 1956) had a sexual anatomy that was difficult to determine: doctors did not know whether the infant had a very enlarged clitoris or a very small penis. They suggested assigning the baby a male identity, and so he was brought home as Brian. But 18 months later, doctors found that Brian had a uterus and gonads containing both ovarian and testicular tissue. They renamed the baby Bonnie and had her microphallus removed. At eight years old, she (unbeknownst to her) had surgery to remove the testicular part of her gonads. Learning of this years later, Bonnie was horrified at the lack of agency she had in making very serious decisions about her own body. She took on the alias Cheryl Chase and advocated that for intersex babies (who have both male and female anatomies), doctors should not perform surgery until they reach an appropriate age to make a decision themselves. Particularly at that time, with so little understood about the complex relationship between one's gender identity and one's sexual anatomy, Chase believed that if doctors acknowledged their lack of understanding, individuals would be better off than if doctors simply "corrected" what they viewed as wrong.

In all of these cases, a lack of knowledge led to at best discomfort, and at worse deep depression and suicide on the part of the people who are directly impacted by others' misunderstanding. Through both Nicole's struggles with acceptance and the anecdotal and scientific examples provided alongside Nicole's story, Nutt shows that the more people understand about transgender and intersex children, the better off these children and their loved ones will be as they grow up.

GENDER, SEX, AND THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Nutt, who has a background as a science writer, makes it a project of her book to remedy the

potential ignorance surrounding transgender people among her readers, as there is still little scientific data or common knowledge about being transgender. She shows how complicated both gender and sex can be, and how frequently they can fall outside the binary categories of man and woman. Nutt brings in scientific data to help people understand that gender identity runs along a wide spectrum, is innate, is not always determined by sex. With this context in mind, the book ultimately argues that being transgender should be treated as a physical medical condition rather than a psychiatric one.

Nutt includes hard scientific facts about gender identity to show how many factors contribute to what constitutes gender. Genetically, chromosomes make a person male (XY) or female (XX), but there are 50 genes that play a part in sexual identity. Sexual anatomy, on the other hand, is determined by hormones. Testosterone fuels the development of male genitalia, while the absence of testosterone prompts an embryo to develop female genitalia. Nutt describes several variations: some individuals have the chromosomes of one gender but the sex organs of the opposite gender. Others have male genitals and testes, but internally have a womb and fallopian tubes. Others have atypical chromosomal configurations. Thus, even on the chromosomal level, sex and gender can vary greatly. In addition, different balances of hormones can also create differences in sexual development independently of chromosomes. "No one thing determines sex [...] small changes or interruptions can lead to nonbinary results, neither wholly male nor wholly female." She writes that according to Brown University gender researcher Anne Fausto-Sterling, as many as one in 100 infants are born with sexual anatomy that differs from standard male and female anatomy. Nutt therefore challenges the idea that sex is binary, contrary to what many people understand.

In addition to the variations that can arise in sex and anatomy, Nutt also relates that the development of this anatomy and the development of sexual identity, however, are distinct processes. Thus, Nutt shows how one's genitals and gender identity do not always match up, which provides a scientific explanation of how someone can come to be transgender. Studies have shown that there are differences between men and women in an area of the brain called the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis (BNST) which is responsible for sex and anxiety responses. It is twice the size in males as in females. The BNST in the brains of transgender females look exactly like the BNST in the brains of cisgender females. This area is not affected by hormonal treatments or sex reassignment surgeries. Thus, this study provides neurological evidence of how people's brains can biologically resemble a different gender, regardless of their hormonal makeup or anatomy, which gives scientific validity to people's claims of feeling like they are a different gender. In 2008, Australian researches discovered a genetic variation in transgender women: the receptor gene for testosterone was less efficient than in gender-conforming males, resulting in a more "feminized" brain. Again, Nutt emphasizes that gender identity has a biological basis outside of a person's sexual anatomy. The relatively new scientific field of epigenetics looks at environmental influences on a person's genetic makeup as they are developing in the womb. Drawing on epigenetic studies, Nutt addresses how identical twins could share the same DNA but be so different. Each fetus has its own amniotic sac and umbilical cord, resulting in differing amounts of hormones to reach each embryo. This also explains why twins have unique fingerprints. Nutt includes this to counteract confusion about Jonas and Nicole's specific situation, to show how even though Nicole and Jonas share the same DNA as identical twins, there can still be biological reasons that Nicole is transgender while Jonas is not.

All of Nutt's scientific evidence argues that gender identity is just as innate as sex. Thus, she argues, being transgender should not be treated like a psychiatric illness, but instead as a physical medical condition. In a 1966 survey of medical and psychiatric professionals in the United States, an overwhelming majority believed "transsexuals" were "severely neurotic." But, faced with new evidence, this thinking has evolved to understand that transgender's people's unease stems from their assigned anatomy and how other people treat them—not an insecurity in their identities. In 2015, Boston University School of Medicine released the results of the first "comprehensive review of the scientific evidence regarding gender identity as a biological phenomenon." It found that for treatment, "the best outcomes for these individuals are achieved with their requested hormone therapy and surgical sexual transition as opposed to psychiatric intervention alone." In other words, the best treatment is not found in therapy, but instead in medical care and surgery. By coupling Nicole's heartfelt story about transitioning with Nutt's logical arguments and scientific explanations, *Becoming Nicole* enables readers to have a more informed and nuanced consideration of transgender individuals on the whole.

DISCRIMINATION, ADVOCACY, AND PRIDE

Nicole and other transgender people face an immense amount of discrimination, to the point that Nicole and her family decide that it is better to "go stealth" and not reveal her gender identity to her peers when she moves to a new middle school. But not only does this hurt her ability to be fully open with her new friends, it also prevents her from being her own advocate and working to gain the rights she deserves. It is only by being out and proud as a transgender girl that Nicole is able to campaign for herself and others, suggesting that openness and advocacy for transgender people is crucial to help others feel more familiar and more comfortable with what it means to be transgender.

As Wyatt is growing up, a significant portion of the news and

information surrounding transgender people is very negative. This allows readers to understand why Kelly does not want Wyatt to be fully "out" in school. When Wyatt is still very young, Kelly hears about a news story in which a couple in New York City allowed their young son to go to school dressed as a girl. The parents were reported to the police and arrested, and the child was temporarily taken away from them. This incident makes Kelly understandably anxious, as the discrimination against transgender children is so bad that Wyatt could possibly be taken from her, and thus him being out as trans would be more worrying than not. When Wyatt and Jonas are five, Kelly hears another story: that of a 17-year-old transgender woman named Gwen Araujo, who was strangled and beaten to death for being transgender. Having pride and engaging in advocacy around one's identity, Nutt shows, are difficult when the prevailing prejudices can lead to so much danger.

Nicole faces her own experiences with discrimination, which ultimately force her to conceal her transgender identity. When the school and Kelly decide that Nicole should use the girls' bathroom in fifth grade, another fifth-grade boy, Jacob, starts to follow Nicole into the bathroom, saying that if she can use it, he can too. Jacob calls Nicole a "faggot," and for the first time, Nicole feels ashamed of who she is, sobbing when she tells Kelly later. The school makes little effort to punish Jacob, focusing more on Nicole's behavior and what she is allowed to do, demonstrating their own complicity in this discrimination. The situation at school becomes so toxic (particularly when the Christian Civic League gets involved and criticizes the Maineses) that Kelly, Jonas, and Nicole move out of Orono, Maine, and Wayne is forced to commute 140 miles between Portland and Orono. Nicole then hides her transgender identity from her new classmates, knowing that coming out as transgender to her peers could potentially repeat this crisis. But not being able to fully share her identity with others proves to be torturous and upsetting to her as well.

Despite the dangers of being out, Wyatt and Kelly also see instances in which role models and advocates for transgender people can make a large impact. Again, when Wyatt is young, Kelly sees an interview on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* with Jennifer Finney Boylan, who is "a pretty, very normal-seeming woman, who just happened to have once been a man." She talks about her own experiences as a transgender woman and how she no longer wanted to live in "silence and shame." This gives Kelly the kind of affirmation she needs to allow Wyatt to do what makes him most comfortable. Having transgender visibility and representation gives Kelly and Wyatt confidence in knowing that he, too, could have the same success. When Wyatt is 10, he, Kelly, and Wayne sit down to watch a *20/20* special that focuses on a transgender girl named Jazz, who is about the same age as Wyatt and Jonas. Wyatt is relieved to know that there is someone like him, and Wayne is shocked to see Jazz's parents speaking openly about their anxieties on national TV. The story allows not only Wyatt to feel more comfortable and prouder of his identity, but also for Kelly and Wayne to see that they can be more open about Wyatt as well.

Ultimately, Nicole and the rest of her family recognize the value of being proud of her identity and their subsequent ability to advocate for Nicole and other transgender people. The Maines family decides to sue the school for its discrimination against Nicole in terms of which bathroom she would be allowed to use. They recognize the importance of their position and the fact that it "had meaning and significance for many others." They win the case in the state supreme court, setting a precedent not only in Maine, but also throughout the country. The victory illustrates how her fight is important not only to her own rights, but to the rights of others. The Maineses also speak out against a law that, if passed, would allow the owners of any business to decide who could use their restrooms and prevent transgender people from claiming discrimination under Maine's Human Rights Act if forced to use a bathroom that did not match their gender identity. Wayne gives an impassioned speech imploring the Maine legislature not to pass the bill, and Nicole stops representatives in the hallway, asking for their support to defeat the bill. The bill is defeated, which is a significant victory for Maine and the Maines family. Nicole's openness about her identity in these situations allows her to change the minds of other people—and in turn, support the rights of all transgender people.

Nutt recognizes that being out is not always possible or safe for transgender people. But she also highlights the power of a person being out and proud of their identity. By embracing this courageous sense of pride, they can subsequently affect the next generation in terms of being positive representation, as well as helping to change minds and discriminatory laws.

FAMILY, LOVE, AND SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

At the heart of Nicole Maines's story is the Maines family. Part of the difficulties the family finds with Nicole growing up transgender is the fact that this disrupts her father Wayne's idea of what a "normal" family looks like. But what her mother Kelly understands innately, and what Wayne eventually comes to realize, is that family is less about living up to social norms and more about unconditional love, support, and even sacrifice.

Wayne's traditional upbringing, and the relationship that he has had with his own family and his father, make it difficult for him to reconcile Wyatt's transition, which he views as the loss of a son. However, when he realizes that the wellbeing of his child is at risk, he puts his love for his son over any desire to be a "normal" family. Wayne grows up with "small-town values, especially devotion to family and respect for country." He grew

up hunting with his brother and father. When Wayne learns that they are having two baby boys, he thinks about the joys of "two baseball gloves, two basketballs, two rifles for his two baby boys!" What Wayne views initially as "normal" to him means fitting into his stereotypical mold of what it means be a man. Not having a typical son is distressing, because it means that he won't then have a typical family. Part of Wayne's distress at Wyatt comes from an idea he expresses early on: "Wayne was afraid he wouldn't know how to be the kind of father Wyatt would want—or need." In this, Wayne reveals a secondary worry: that he won't be able to be a supportive father. This secondary fear of Wayne's proves to be unfounded. When Wyatt starts to express dissatisfaction with his sexual identity—particularly during an incident in which he tells Wayne that he hates his penis—Wayne's reflex is still to comfort his child, even though Wayne is upset at what is happening, too. His instinct to love his child overcomes his uncertainty about Wyatt's identity. When a judge questions the family's decision to change Wyatt's name, however, Wayne's fatherly instincts kick in. Nutt writes, "For Wayne, this was the first time he'd shown any kind of public support for Wyatt being transgender. His instincts as a father had been tested without his even realizing it, and he'd responded to the challenge." His love for his child is what makes his family strong, not a stereotypical idea of what constitutes a "normal" family.

Unlike Wayne, Kelly never had a "typical" family growing up, and thus she understands that family bonds are more about love and support than seeming "normal." She, too, prioritizes supporting her child, even if it means that to others, Wyatt's behavior is strange. Kelly's biological mother, Roxanne, became pregnant with Kelly following a one-night stand, and asked her sister Donna to adopt Kelly two days after she was born. Donna divorced Kelly's adoptive father when Kelly was 11 and raised her alone. Thus, Kelly knows from her own childhood that families are formed by bonds of love and care, not necessarily by biology. Kelly went on to have trouble conceiving a child in adulthood, and so when her 16-year-old cousin, Sara, tells her she is pregnant and doesn't want to have an abortion, Kelly is thrilled to be able to adopt Sara's twin baby boys. This affirms again that families are built on love and support, and don't have to fit a typical mold of two biological parents and children that fit into rigid gender expectations. Kelly, too, tries to proceed with Wyatt cautiously, encouraging him to wear gender-neutral instead of feminine clothing. But when she realizes by the time Wyatt is seven that he isn't outgrowing his rejection of masculine clothes, she changes her outlook. She knows he is different, but that doesn't mean he's strange. Kelly allows Wyatt to be as feminine as he wants, permitting him to wear dresses and paint his nails, and buys him all the dolls he wants. "In truth, she didn't care if he outgrew it," Nutt writes, "All she wanted was to do right by her son." Kelly simply wants to support Wyatt in whatever way she can, unconcerned about the judgments that others might have of her family.

Jonas, too, struggles with how to fit into his family in a normal way; he is sometimes insecure about Nicole's difference and being known as the "twin brother of a transgender sister." He feels as though his life revolves around Nicole. But this fear is overpowered by his supportive instinct, knowing the struggles Nicole has to face. He takes on the role of a protector at school, taking it perhaps too far when he gets in a fight with Jacob, who has been stalking her into the bathroom. Jonas stays with Nicole through her sex reassignment surgery, posting updates for their friends to know how she is doing. Through all this, Wayne and Kelly see how the twins' bond is the true heart of their family. When they are invited to the White House in 2012 by President Obama to celebrate LGBT Pride Month, Wayne sees how much Jonas is helping to shepherd his sister. Wayne hugs Jonas and admits "how proud he [is] of him for looking out for Nicole all these years, for worrying about her, and for stepping up whenever and wherever he was needed." Jonas makes his own sacrifices for their family, knowing that their love and support of each other is more important than anything else.

Becoming Nicole is subtitled "The Transformation of an American Family," and it is an apt description of the Maineses' journey. While at first, perhaps, Kelly and Wayne wanted to seem "normal" or have a more typical family, gradually they undergo a change. They recognize that the love their family has for one other, and their instincts to care for one other, are more important than any outward social pressure. These bonds are truly what constitute a family—not the belief of what a "normal" family should look like.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE LITTLE MERMAID

Ariel's story in Disney's movie *The Little Mermaid* symbolizes Wyatt's own struggle with his gender identity. When Wyatt is young, he becomes obsessed with watching *The Little Mermaid*, and Nutt makes the parallels between the character and Wyatt himself. Like Wyatt, Ariel "lives in one world but yearns to be in another." She has the top half of a human female, but the bottom half doesn't make sense to her. Wyatt, too, feels like a female and outwardly presents as such throughout most of his life, so his biologically male anatomy is confusing to him even from an early age. He understands himself as a girl, but the rest of the world doesn't see him that way.

The parallel between Wyatt (who eventually takes on the name Nicole) and Ariel only grows stronger by the end of the book. When Nicole is finally able to have her sex reassignment

surgery, a friend of hers texts her that she's "like Ariel." Like Ariel, who finishes her story where she belongs—with human legs and joining her prince on land—so, too, does Nicole transform herself and have a sense of true belonging inside her body.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *Becoming Nicole* published in 2015.

Chapter 1 Quotes

By the time Wayne reached home and embraced Kelly, he was smiling, thinking not about the added expenses but about the double joy: two baseball gloves, two basketballs, two rifles for his two baby boys!

Related Characters: Sarah, Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines, Kelly Maines, Wayne Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Wayne and Kelly agree to adopt the baby of Kelly's young cousin, Sarah, they learn that Sarah is actually having twin boys. Wayne is overjoyed and thinks to himself about the things he will be able to do with his two sons, like playing baseball, basketball, and hunting. Wayne's thoughts reveal how he has a stereotypical idea of what masculinity and father-son relationships look like. He thinks of very stereotypical male activities to do with his sons because he himself had a very traditional upbringing. This leads to his eventual disappointment with Wyatt, who has no interest in taking part in these activities. Much of Wayne's struggle with Wyatt stems from this conflict: believing that Wyatt is rejecting all of the masculine things that Wayne values. Wayne's desire to have a family that conforms to social norms persists through most of the book, but eventually his love for Wyatt proves stronger than his aversion to Wyatt's gender identity and what people will think of him.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Part human, part fish, Ariel, with her shiny green scales, is decidedly a mermaid below the waist. But above it, with her long hair and luscious red lips, she is all girl.

Ariel's problem, however, is that she lives in one world, under the sea, even as she yearns to be in another, on land. As she gazes at her image in a mirror beneath the waves, she feels comforted by the top half of her reflection. It's the bottom that doesn't make sense.

Related Characters: Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Even from the age of two years old, Wyatt starts to express himself very differently from his twin brother, Jonas. He prefers to take on the female characters when they act out stories, and he becomes obsessed with The Little Mermaid. Nutt offers a description of The Little Mermaid that makes it clear how the movie's title character, Ariel, represents Wyatt's own struggle with his gender identity. Like Ariel, Wyatt sees himself as a girl and wants to be just that. When he looks in the mirror, he even sees a girl, particularly when he grows out his hair and wears feminine clothing. But, as Nutt describes, it's "the bottom that doesn't make sense." Much like Ariel feels dissatisfied and alienated from the human world by her fishlike bottom half, Wyatt feel that his male anatomy causes him to live in one world but belong in another. Nutt's comparison, then, along Wyatt's own obsession with The Little Mermaid, highlights not only his gender identity but also foreshadows the only resolution to his problem: he must transform—or transition—to the body that will reflect what he feels on the inside.

"Daddy, I hate my penis."

Jolted out of his reverie, Wayne tried to take in the words his precious son had just uttered. Then he reached down, scooped up the young boy, and hugged him fiercely. He kissed away the tears in Wyatt's eyes. He kissed the tip of his nose, his cheeks, his lips, all the while fighting back his own tears.

Related Characters: Nicole/Wyatt Maines (speaker), Jonas Maines, Wayne Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23-24

Explanation and Analysis

Just before Wyatt and Jonas turn three, Wayne is renovating the bathroom when Wyatt joins him with his own toy hammer. Wayne is happy to have this rare father-son moment with Wyatt, but this quickly ends when Wyatt reveals that he hates his penis. This moment illustrates two ideas: first, Wyatt's gender identity as a girl is clear from a very young age, even in spite of the fact that his father had been constantly promoting masculine activities for his sons. It illustrates the idea for which Nutt provides scientific evidence later in the book, that gender identity is as innate as sexual anatomy.

Additionally, even though Wayne is dealing with his own emotional reaction, and even though he struggles for a long time with Wyatt's identity, his instinct is to comfort his son and ease his distress. This foreshadows the scenes and which in which people threaten Wyatt's rights. When realizing that Wyatt's rights are in danger, Wayne only finds love and support for his son. He understands that protecting Wyatt and ensuring his happiness are more important than having a "typical" family.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Kelly was learning to do things pretty much on her own for both boys, but especially Wyatt. He clamored to wear the same colorful clothes as Leah, and rather than wear the flannel shirt his mother bought him to match Jonas's, he would go bare chested. Kelly felt it was cruel to keep dressing Wyatt in clothes he hated, so she made the decision, without Wayne's input, to shop every now and then for something less masculine for Wyatt to wear.

Related Characters: Wayne Maines, Leah, Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines, Kelly Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

As Wyatt continues to grow, he becomes more and more uncomfortable with his masculine identity, pulling away from Jonas and relating more to his female best friend, Leah. Kelly acknowledges Wyatt's discomfort and tries to remedy the situation. Although it is clear that Wayne doesn't approve, and though Kelly has her own hesitations with Wyatt's decisions, she seems to recognize that the most important thing is not other people's perceptions of Wyatt. In fact, in the next scene as she shops for him in the girls' section of a department store, she decides that other people's opinions are not her problem. Instead, Kelly recognizes her child's genuine understanding of his own identity and knows that she has to love and support him in whatever way she can, rather than torture him by forcing to be someone he's not. It is these bonds of love, not any societal pressure of what "normal" should look like, that truly constitute a family.

❝ One evening, when the twins were about three years old and had been tucked in for the night, Kelly sat down at the computer in the living room and typed five words into the search engine:

"Boys who like girls' toys."

It was both a question and a statement of fact. For Kelly, it was also a beginning. She scrolled through science articles, online forums, and medical sites. She read about homosexuality, transsexualism—wasn't that what drag queens were?—and something called transgender. She read for hours.

Related Characters: Nicole/Wyatt Maines, Kelly Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

When Wyatt's proclivity for more feminine clothes and activities begins to span years, Kelly recognizes her lack of information and knowledge about what he might be going through, and Nutt reinforces how that lack of knowledge contributes to her inability to help her son. Kelly strives, therefore, to remedy that ignorance, searching the internet for as much as she can find. Nutt takes readers directly into Kelly's thoughts to show, particularly at this point in the late 90s, how little common knowledge exists about the LGBT community as a whole and the transgender community in particular. Her questions about the terms homosexuality and transsexualism allows Nutt to segue into an explanation into what those terms mean and how they are different. Nutt inherently acknowledges that her readers might have many of the same questions that Kelly had, and in showing Kelly's own journey through this information, it allows Nutt to provide her readers with the same information. In this

way, she can fulfill one of the goals of her book: to inform her readers about transgender issues.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ "Are you going to let him wear *that*?" Wayne asked.

Kelly didn't answer. Instead, she raced up to Wyatt, hot tears now streaking his face, took him by the hand, and led him back into his bedroom. It was, she knew right then and there, the worst moment of her life. It wasn't so much the reaction of the people at the party, who were mostly stunned into silence—that was Wayne's issue—but rather the hurt her son was experiencing, and for no good reason other than that he wanted to wear his princess dress to the family's party.

Related Characters: Wayne Maines (speaker), Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines, Kelly Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

When the Maineses first move to Orono, Maine, they throw a party at their home to get to know their neighbors. But when Wyatt appears at the top of the stairs in a pink princess dress, Wayne yells furiously at him. The incident is a traumatizing one for all parties involved. Wyatt is embarrassed by his father simply for being who he wants to be, and Wayne is equally embarrassed by his son for the same reason. Kelly, meanwhile, is stuck in between them: all she wants to do is build a supportive environment rather than a degrading one for her son. She clearly chooses a side in comforting Wyatt, demonstrating that she is willing to prioritize her son's comfort over her husband's expectations of their family.

Wayne, for his own part, feels that all other aspects of his identity have been stripped away and that this is the only thing that people will know about their family. The irony of, of course, is that their neighbors would remember Wayne's outrage far more than they might remember Wyatt's dressing unconventionally. People's perceptions of a family, therefore, are based on their perceptions of the love that exists within it.

❝ Wayne was also trying to make sense of Wyatt, in his own way, but mostly he was hoping these were all things his son would simply outgrow. He didn't want to think about his son being gay. It was fine if the sons of other fathers were gay, because he had no problem working with gay people or his children having gay friends. He just didn't want that for his son. It would be too hard his whole life, and Wayne was afraid he wouldn't know how to be the kind of father Wyatt would want—or need.

Related Characters: Kelly Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines, Wayne Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

As Kelly does research about the different experiences that Wyatt might be having, Wayne mostly tries to ignore his son's behavior. Nutt gives some rare insight here into Wayne's deeper insecurities, however. On the surface, he seems to worry only about having a traditional family, and also seems to bear some prejudice against gay or transgender people. Yet his words belie another concern. He worries about the discrimination that Wyatt might face, and that he won't be an adequate father to help Wyatt through these challenges because Wayne's own childhood and family were so different. His insecurities, therefore, are more about his own shortcomings than Wyatt's. Yet his fears ultimately prove to be unfounded, as he is able to put his love for Wyatt above his other concerns and advocate for his child's rights. This is also why Wayne becomes such a good resource for other fathers, as he ultimately writes articles as resources for other fathers who think like him so that they might have an easier time understanding their own transgender children.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ You think you are the only person in the world that has this. In fact, we now know that there are tens and tens of thousands of people in this country alone who have this. One scholar says that it's as common as multiple sclerosis, it's as common as a cleft palate. It's something that many people in the country and across the world have, but these people are living in silence and shame because they are afraid to speak the truth.

Related Characters: Jennifer Finney Boylan (speaker), Kelly Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

When Wyatt is six years old, Kelly sees an interview on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* with Jennifer Finney Boylan, a transgender woman who is a professor of English at Colby College. Kelly is inspired by Boylan, who speaks about the harm caused by so many trans people being forced into silence because of their gender identity. Boylan is a perfect contrast to the people about whom she speaks: she is an example of how someone who is out and proud of her identity can advocate and serve as a role model for others. Kelly in particular is attracted to Boylan's story because Boylan is a trans woman who is able to live comfortably in society—an idea that Kelly had worried might not be possible for Wyatt. Boylan is also able to provide information about trans people that most of the population doesn't have. With the courage of being proud of her identity, therefore, Boylan is able to provide education and combat stereotypes that people might have.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ Wyatt was flooded with relief, knowing there was someone out there just like him. Wayne couldn't believe it. Wyatt, he realized, had all the same anger issues, and he and Kelly all the same anxieties, but Jazz's parents were openly discussing them on national TV. Wayne fought back tears for the rest of the hour.

Related Characters: Jennifer Finney Boylan, Jazz Jennings, Kelly Maines, Wayne Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

When Wyatt is about 10 years old, he, Kelly, and Wayne sit down to watch a *20/20* special on transgender children, one of whom is a transgender girl named Jazz who is about Wyatt's age. Just as Jennifer Finney Boylan provides an example and a role model for what Wyatt might be able to achieve in the future, Jazz provides a role model for what Wyatt might achieve in the present, particularly because she is around Wyatt's age. Seeing her represented on TV allows Wyatt to feel like his experience is more universal and normal—he is not the only person experiencing his inner conflict.

More than that, Jazz's parents also serve as role models for Wayne and Kelly. Jazz's parents demonstrate how they, too, can be proud of their transgender child and advocate for what she needs. Nutt relays this story to show how the whole Maines family's idea of what is possible for Wyatt is transforming.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ In other words, our genitals and our gender identity are not the same. Sexual anatomy and gender identity are the products of two different processes, occurring at distinctly different times and along different neural pathways before we are even born. Both are functions of genes as well as hormones, and while sexual anatomy and gender identity usually match, there are dozens of biological events that can affect the outcome of the latter and cause an incongruence between the two.

Related Characters: Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Nutt pauses Wyatt's narrative in the middle of her book to provide several contextual chapters about the scientific background for sexual anatomy and gender identity. Her aim, as she spells out here, is to provide readers with the common knowledge that is so frequently lacking about transgender people. Nutt recognizes that often discrimination against transgender people is borne of ignorance about what being transgender truly means and what causes someone to be transgender, and so Nutt attempts to remedy these misconceptions in order to make her readers more sympathetic to the transgender community.

Additionally, here Nutt sums up the point that gender identity is just as innate as sexual anatomy. This allows her to make another argument, proving to readers that the solution to the incongruence she mentions here is not a psychological condition that can be "fixed" with therapy; instead, it can only be eased by a medical transition into a body that matches a transgender person's idea of themselves.

The plea to hold off on surgery is based on the belief that sex assignment is a cultural pressure, not a biological one. Being intersex. Chase said, shouldn't be likened to being malformed or abnormal or freakish, and so surgical remedy shouldn't be the first thing doctors recommend.

Related Characters: Brian/Bonnie/Cheryl Chase

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Nutt uses the case of Cheryl Chase as another illustration of how the lack of knowledge about sexual anatomy variances, particularly in the past, has proven extremely harmful. Cheryl Chase was born with ambiguous anatomy and at 18 months, surgery was performed to remove her micropenis, and then again at eight years old to remove her testes. Chase was deeply disturbed upon discovering that she had been stripped of the agency to determine her own sex (as the doctors had simply decided that she should be raised as a girl).

Chase also serves as yet another example of how someone who is able to be out and proud of their identity can then advocate for others like them. Chase becomes a powerful leader for the intersex community, and also fights the prejudice against intersex people that leads doctors to try to "fix them" at birth, rather than allowing them to make their own choices about their sex and identity.

Chapter 18 Quotes

For Wayne, this was the first time he'd shown any kind of public support for Wyatt being transgender. His instincts as a father had been tested without his even realizing it, and he'd responded to the challenge. The petition was granted, and in a matter of days Wyatt Benjamin Maines would officially and legally become Nicole Amber Maines.

Related Characters: Kelly Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines, Wayne Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

When Wayne and Kelly petition to allow Wyatt to change his name to Nicole, the judge at first seems unsure of why they would want to change their son's name to a girls' name. Wayne then speaks in front of the judge in defense of Wyatt, explaining his transgender identity and demonstrating his support for his son. This incident becomes a turning point for Wayne. Up until this point, he himself had been unsure of Wyatt's transgender identity and had fought against the label because it meant acknowledging that his son is atypical. For Wayne, who had had an "all-American" childhood, this was devastating. But when tested as a parent, Wayne's true colors are revealed. He understands that Wyatt's rights and the ability to express himself are more important than the vision of a "perfect" family that Wayne had.

Wayne's support means that Wyatt is able to have this name change, which is also a true turning point for Nicole. Changing her name and pronouns allows for a shift in how other people view and think about her: not as a boy who likes feminine activities and clothing, but as a girl who just happens to have male anatomy. This is a crucial difference, and one that continues Nicole's transition into the girl she wants to be.

Chapter 23 Quotes

There was Jacob, staring her down. She knew exactly what was about to happen. The moment the door of the girls' restroom closed behind her, it opened again and there he was. Later, in the principal's office, Nicole was told she shouldn't have been using the girls' bathroom in the first place, which only made her feel like the school was pointing out: Here are all the normal kids, and here are you.

Related Characters: Paul Melanson, Jacob Melanson, Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

When Nicole starts fifth grade, her new building only has multi-stall bathrooms, and so she begins to use the girls' restroom. Prompted by his grandfather Paul Melanson, another fifth-grade boy, Jacob, starts to follow Nicole into the bathroom, claiming that if she can use it, so can he. Although Jacob is punished, the school dictates that Nicole must use the staff restroom instead of the girls' bathroom. Here, when the behavior repeats, the school punishes Nicole rather than Jacob. These incidents represent Nicole's first real experience with discrimination, as Jacob targets her specifically because she is transgender. For the first time, too, she starts to feel like her identity is

something to be ashamed of, and that she is abnormal in a negative way. This episode is placed in direct contrast with Nicole's pride in who she is and her joy in being able to share experiences with her female friends. Additionally, the school shows its own complicity in her discrimination because it focuses more on policing Nicole's behavior as the victim rather than the behavior of the person harassing her.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ Their receptor gene for the male sex hormone testosterone was longer than in gender-conforming males and appeared to be less efficient at signaling the uptake of male hormones in utero, resulting in a more "feminized" brain.

Related Characters: Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

In Nutt's first scientific chapter, she focuses on the biological development of sexual anatomy and gender identity. In this chapter, she shifts to explaining how those two separate processes can lead to a person being transgender. The example cited here demonstrates how biological factors can lead to a "feminized" brain even in someone who has male anatomy. This is part of Nutt's continued goal to educate her readers about transgender issues, helping them understand that being transgender is just as innate as being cisgender. With this established, Nutt is then able to argue how being transgender shouldn't be treated as a psychological issue because it is an identity with which someone is born and is therefore not something that can change or be chosen. Therefore, as she examines in later chapters as well, the only real treatment is a medical one, or at least the decision to present as the gender with which one identifies. These are the avenues that Nicole eventually chooses to follow, and though the therapy she undergoes is helpful, she doesn't have a true sense of belonging until others begin to treat her as a girl and she begins to take female hormones.

❝ Researchers in epigenetics seek to explain the no-man's-land between nature and nurture where environment influences a person's genetic makeup. This happens when changes in the environment trigger some genes to activate and others to deactivate. Identical twins may have the exact same DNA, but not the exact same molecular switches. Those switches often depend not only on environmental influences outside the womb—what the mother does, how she feels, what she eats, drinks, or smokes—but inside the womb as well.

Related Characters: Wayne Maines, Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

After laying out the science behind gender, sex, and being transgender, Nutt recognizes that her readers may have lingering questions about how Nicole and Jonas, who are identical twins, could share the same DNA but have different gender identities. She even quotes Wayne as wondering this when he assumes or refuses to believe that Wyatt couldn't be transgender because Jonas wasn't. But here, she refutes this belief as well, providing knowledge about epigenetics. Epigenetics is a field of study that helps to explain how the environment in a mother's womb can affect hormones and how a person then expresses that DNA. This becomes a final way of dispelling the idea that gender identity can be controlled or altered after birth. With this information, Nutt also wants to prove to the scientific community that psychiatric therapy is not the way to "fix" a transgender person and resolve the conflict between body and mind. Her research helps explain, in a scientific and also reader-friendly way, how Nicole's experience is possible.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ "The only dependable test for gender is the truth of a person's life, the lives we live each day," Jennifer Finney Boylan once wrote. "Surely the best judge of a person's gender is not a degrading, questionable examination. The best judge of a person's gender is what lies within her, or his, heart. How do we test for the gender of the heart, then?"

Related Characters: Jennifer Finney Boylan (speaker), Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

As Nicole faces discrimination in her own school, Nutt provides examples of other incidents in which transgender people across the country face the same type of discrimination in bathrooms and other public areas. But Jennifer Finney Boylan's quote hear demonstrates how this discrimination represents a mistaken understanding of transgender people. As Nutt has supported with many scientific studies by this point in the book, gender and sex do not necessarily have to align, and one's sense of gender lies in the brain, not in the body. It would make the most sense for someone who identifies as a woman (and thus often presents herself as a woman) to use the women's restroom. What is required, Boylan implies, is a transformation in how people think of transgender individuals, not a transformation in the individuals themselves. As there is no one indicator of gender, there can be no one test for gender. Thus, as Boylan writes here, one can only acknowledge and accept the "gender of the heart."

Chapter 28 Quotes

❝ Kelly and the kids would move to Portland, and Wayne would commute on weekends and holidays to be with them. They'd always thought they were on an upward trajectory in their lives, with success and promotions at work fueling an increasingly better lifestyle, but Jacob and his grandfather Paul Melanson had bizarrely changed all that. Suddenly, Wayne and Kelly were downsizing and their lives were in reverse.

Related Characters: Jacob Melanson, Paul Melanson, Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines, Wayne Maines, Kelly Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

As the situation with the school's bathroom policy and their treatment of Nicole grows steadily worse, the Maineses are forced to find a new school district entirely, moving from Orono to Portland, Maine. Their decision to uproot their lives over Jacob and Paul's behavior shows the extent of the harassment that the entire family is experiencing—from the Melansons, the school, and the Christian Civic League of Maine. But despite the hardships that they are forced to endure, the fact that they choose to move at all emphasizes that their love and support for each other is more important than anything else. Even though they have to split their family to some degree, they understand that ensuring Nicole can have a supportive school in which to learn is of the utmost importance, and their support for her is unwavering.

This move does have one additional consequence, which is that this discrimination becomes so bad that Nicole is then forced to "go stealth" in her new school to try to avoid more discrimination. This shows how it is not always possible to be out and proud of one's identity, because sometimes others are so prejudiced that their behavior (like the Melanson's) makes for an unsafe environment.

Chapter 30 Quotes

❝ The hardest times were keeping her mouth shut when she'd hear someone say "Oh, that's so gay," which kids often did. She knew if she tried to object, the other person would only say, "Why do you care? Are *you* gay?" And then she'd be stuck. She had good reason to challenge others' prejudices, but she couldn't because they hit too close to home. So she kept her mouth shut, buttoned down her anger, and sealed off her sense of self-righteousness.

Related Characters: Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

When Nicole and Jonas start their new middle school in Portland, the family decides that for Nicole's safety and the family's well-being, Nicole will not reveal her transgender identity and will instead "go stealth." But even though this shields her from the discrimination that Nicole faced in elementary school, it comes with its own challenges. It prevents Nicole from being completely open with her new friends, from being out and proud in her own community just as she had been in elementary school. Consequently, as in this passage, Nicole feels unable to advocate on behalf of the LGBT community when others are being discriminatory. This dilemma emphasizes the unfortunate catch-22 nature of Nicole's experience, and the frustration borne of this kind of prejudice. However, when Nicole does come out as trans, her struggle here makes it clear that she is courageous and that and that her ability to advocate for herself and others is extremely powerful. Nicole's passion for transgender issues and advocacy is highly influential and is only possible when she can claim her identity publicly.

Chapter 31 Quotes

❝ It was impossible for the Maineses not to feel the importance of their case among these hardworking people, and they realized that their lawsuit wasn't just about Nicole or their family. It wasn't even just their story anymore. The lawsuit, even though it was just a state case, had meaning and significance for many others. And now Wayne, Kelly, Nicole, and Jonas would carry the hopes of those others with them as they sought affirmation from the courts.

Related Characters: Jonas Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines, Kelly Maines, Wayne Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

After Nicole and the Maines family are forced to leave the Orono school district, they decide to sue the school because of its discriminatory practices. When GLAD gets involved, however, they recognize the lawsuit's true importance, and how a victory would affect more than just their own family and provide vindication for Nicole. The case could have a much wider reach to other citizens of Maine. Thus, even though the challenges Nicole experiences at the school were unfortunate, her willingness to advocate for herself paves the way for others to gain the rights that she didn't have. Ultimately the Maineses win the suit, forcing schools across Maine to reevaluate their policies so that transgender students can use the bathroom of their gender identity. Nicole also helps win several other key victories that expand the rights of transgender people across Maine through her advocacy and activism. These victories highlight the power and the courage of people like Nicole being open about their identity and advocating for themselves.

Chapter 37 Quotes

❝ Jonas said, "Dad, should 1go get her?" It was always his instinct to shepherd his sister. Wayne and Kelly had asked a lot of their only son, and sometimes they forgot the sacrifices he'd had to make being Nicole's brother. Wayne hugged him and told him how proud he was of him for looking out for Nicole all these years, for worrying about her, and for stepping up whenever and wherever he was needed.

Related Characters: Jonas Maines (speaker), Wayne Maines, Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

Nicole, Wayne, and Jonas all go the White House for an event honoring the transgender community during Pride Month following their many instances of activism. At the end of the event, Jonas recognizes the need to monitor and protect Nicole, as he constantly does. Much of Jonas's life revolves around his sister, in a way that implies that he, like Wayne, might have felt better if he had had a more typical family. He even admits to Nutt that he doesn't want to be known for being "someone else's brother" as the title of this chapter suggests. Wayne recognizes this, too, which is why he feels the need to thank Jonas for all that he has done for Nicole. Despite the hardships, it is abundantly clear that Jonas bears no resentment over how his sister has changed his life. Instead, he has given her all the love and support that he could, which is what builds a true family.

Chapter 42 Quotes

❝ He always remembered that there was something to be gained from putting up with everyone else's nonsense—he was going to have the body that he always felt like he deserved and was meant to have. And that made it all—the harassment and the bad feelings and the discomfort and the awkwardness—worth it.

I feel like I need to have surgery because I promised him.

Related Characters: Nicole/Wyatt Maines (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

Just before Nicole's sex reassignment surgery, she writes down some of her thoughts in a journal. She reiterates why she is going through with the procedure: she feels that she owes it to Wyatt, the little boy she used to be. She recognizes that a large part of her transformation has already been complete: people recognize and treat her as a girl, which had been a major part of her dysphoria and why she had had so much anxiety as a child. Yet she knows that having male anatomy is something that had deeply distressed her as a child and is also why she had faced so much discrimination in elementary school.

Her transition is not about changing her identity—instead, it simply allows for an alignment of her outward appearance and who she has always felt herself to be. She recognizes that sex reassignment surgery is only part of the change that has allowed her to feel comfortable and confident in her own body. But much of that confidence had come from Wyatt, and his clarity in knowing who he was even as others doubted him, and so Nicole feels indebted to her younger self.

> Her good friend Lexie texted, "HOW U FEELIN?" And then, "YOU'RE LIKE ARIEL," the little mermaid who emerged from the sea in the form she'd always longed for.

Nicole's transition was now complete. She would still need to take female hormones the rest of her life, and she would never be able to have her own children, but she knew she wanted to marry a man some day and adopt.

Related Characters: Nicole/Wyatt Maines

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

After Nicole's sex reassignment surgery goes well, her friend Lexie texts her asking how she's feeling and once more compares Nicole to Ariel in The Little Mermaid. This comparison brings the symbol full circle. Like Nicole's disconnect between her body and identity, Ariel had been confused and insecure about her mermaid tail, knowing that she really belonged on land. Now Nicole has undergone that same kind of transformation as Ariel did when she received human legs. Using this universal and beloved story may help readers and other children understand what Nicole is going through: the sense of feeling that one belongs in a different body than one has.

This comparison reinforces the idea that Nicole always knew who she was meant to be—she simply needed a body that matched that idea. She was always very aware of and very confident in her gender identity, it was only her body that needed to change to fit this. This also reinforces another idea that Nutt argues throughout the book: that the treatment for gender dysphoria cannot only be found in psychological treatment, since medical interventions like Nicole's are often necessary for trans individuals as well. Like Ariel, Nicole now finds a true sense of belonging in the body that she was meant to have.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE: MIRROR IMAGE

The two-year-old Wyatt is mesmerized as he twirls in front of the black oven door with Mardi Gras beads dangling from his neck and a sequined pink tutu around his waist. His father, Wayne, watches and films his son. He asks, "Show me your muscles, Wy. Can I see your muscles?" Suddenly Wyatt is self-conscious, not sure what to do. He ignores his father and continues to look at his reflection. Wayne is disappointed and turns off the camera.

Nutt provides immediate evidence that Wyatt, even at two years old, has a very distinct understanding of his gender identity as a girl. It is the social expectations of his family and those around him—particularly Wayne—that prompt his unease.

Nutt writes that before love and loss, humans are "bodies breathing in space," and that we are defined by those bodies. Even though we are taught that appearances aren't as important as who we are on the inside, humans are "uncompromisingly physical, even self-absorbed." And if a person "does not love his body, what then?"

Nutt recognizes that much of a person's experience in life (particularly regarding gender and sex) is delineated by that person's physical characteristics, but she will come to demonstrate how gender and sexual identity are found in the brain. Even though one's anatomy is a piece of that identity, it is not the only thing that constitutes one's sex.

There are dozens of these videos of Wyatt and his identical twin brother, Jonas, who were adopted at birth by Kelly and Wayne Maines. Initially, they are nearly impossible to tell apart, but Kelly and Wayne quickly see differences. Wyatt is the one who stands next to his mother in front of the TV and imitate her Pilates moves, or who would unsnap his onesie to let the sides hang down like a skirt.

Nutt provides more examples of how Wyatt's gender identity is expressing itself at an early age. Although Wyatt is biologically male, he mimics his mother rather than his father and aligns himself with fashion choices that more typically belong to women, suggesting that he feels like a girl.

Kelly also notices that Wyatt is moodier than Jonas and sometimes lashes out at his brother. She also sometimes catches Wyatt staring at himself in the long mirror during bath time. Though it is impossible to tell what he is thinking, he seems puzzled by his reflection, "tense and anxious."

Nutt also introduces the unease that comes from Wyatt's recognition of his sexual anatomy. Though his understanding of his gender identity is very strong, his discomfort with himself stems from an anatomy that doesn't match that understanding.

Wayne and Kelly had adopted the boys just after they were born, having been unable to have children of their own. Wayne yearned for the day when he could buy his boys their first hunting rifles, fishing rods, and baseball gloves. That is the upbringing he'd had and he was excited to continue the tradition.

Nutt also introduces how societal expectations and gender stereotypes can also add to this unease. Wayne in particular will struggle with the fact that Wyatt (and also Jonas, to a degree) do not match his own traditional ideas of masculinity.

Nutt writes, "who we are is inseparable not only from who we think we are, but from who others think we are." W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about a "double consciousness" of African Americans, the sense of seeing oneself through the eyes of others. Du Bois knew, she notes, that those who are alienated from the majority community have a harder path, because they must bear the burden of an unspoken question: "What does it feel like to be a problem?"

Nutt emphasizes with the quotes from Du Bois that even though Wyatt's idea of who he is has always been strong, he constantly feels as though he is seeing himself the way others see him—that is, as a boy. This in and of itself is a form of prejudice, as he faces the struggle of having to push back against others' expectations and become the person he is meant to be.



CHAPTER 1: IDENTICAL TWINS

By the time that Wayne and Kelly adopt their newborn sons, the couple has been married five years. Kelly had suffered multiple miscarriages and months of painful fertility treatments. But then she got a phone call from a 16-year-old cousin named Sarah whom she barely knew. Sarah was pregnant and didn't want to have an abortion but was too young to raise a child. She asked if Wayne and Kelly would want to consider a private adoption.

Wayne, and to some degree Kelly, both spend a good deal of the book preoccupied with having a family that fits social expectations. But the irony is that their family is already unique, in that they adopt their two children at birth. This enables readers to see that families are built on love, not always on biology.

Kelly had grown up in the Midwest and but had come from a nontraditional family. Kelly's biological mother, Roxanne, got pregnant with her from a one-night stand. Two days after Kelly was born, Roxanne asked her sister Donna to adopt her baby. Donna did so, for which Kelly was grateful, as Roxanne's subsequent children had difficult lives.

Kelly's family serves as another counterexample to the idea that families have to conform to some kind of social norm. This is why Kelly has a much easier time recognizing Wyatt as transgender, because she doesn't feel the need to appear as though she has a "normal" family.

Kelly left home at 17, graduating from high school early. She took art courses at a community college and began working at an environmental consulting firm in Chicago. Once there, she attended a five-day education enhancement course about underwater wells and waste management in Ohio. There, she met Wayne Maines, who was at the time the director of Safety and Health Training at West Virginia University. They hit it off and spent a year dating long distance. After that year, Kelly moved to West Virginia to be with Wayne.

The foundation of Kelly and Wayne's relationship is relatively typical and stokes Wayne's expectations that they can build the kind of average American family that he had growing up, as Nutt later explains. But their family is built on clear bonds of love rather than social norms, which proves to be immensely important as they are forced to cope with difficult unconventional circumstances in the future.

Wayne, by contrast, was a "pure American boy." He grew up in a rural area of upstate New York. After graduating from high school, Wayne enlisted in the Air Force. He could learn a trade while serving, and so while stationed in Alaska he worked for an oral surgeon. One day, the surgeon embarrassed him in front of several others by asking him who the vice president of the United States was, assuming Wayne didn't know. Wayne vowed never to be made fun of again for not knowing something.

Wayne's background contrasts with Kelly: the fact that Wayne comes from a more traditional family makes it difficult for him to accept Wyatt, as evidenced by his reaction in the prologue. Wayne likely feels that Wyatt favoring traditionally feminine behaviors and tastes constitutes a kind of abnormality that he doesn't want to face.

After getting out of the Air Force, Wayne first attended community college before applying and being accepted to Cornell University. Wayne earned a B.S. in natural resources, and then spent five years at West Virginia University to earn a master's degree and doctorate in safety management. He remained in West Virginia, and then met Kelly. Less than three years later they married in Indiana before moving to rural New York to be closer to Wayne's parents.

Nutt makes an early reference to the importance of knowledge over ignorance. Spurred by his fear of being ignorant of something, Wayne spent the next several years in higher education in order to have a fuller picture of the jobs he would be taking on. This aspect of Wayne's personality is important, since it provides additional clarity as to why he is so hesitant to accept Wyatt at first—Wayne clearly fears having his beliefs challenged or his ignorance exposed.

Kelly hadn't seen her cousin Sarah since she was a baby, but she and Wayne decided quickly that they wanted the child. Kelly knew the importance of a stable environment, and so she invited Sarah to live with her and Wayne until she had the baby. Kelly also helped Sarah get her driver's license and high school diploma. Soon Kelly and Wayne learned that Sara was having twin boys, which seemed almost too good to be true: an "instant family." Wayne thought about the added expenses, but also the added joy: "two baseball gloves, two basketballs, two rifles for his two baby boys!"

Once again, Nutt highlights Wayne's typical vision of what father-son relationships look like and what might become their mutual activities. This vision only adds to his disappointment when he realizes that Wyatt doesn't want to engage in these activities, which Wayne views as a rejection of his values and his desired traditional family structure.

CHAPTER 2: MY BOYS

Wyatt and Jonas Maines are born on October 7, 1997 in upstate New York, two weeks early. Sarah has a slightly difficult delivery and loses quite a bit of blood, but she, Kelly, and Wayne are able to take the babies home three days later. Wayne holds his sons, saying, "My boys," over and over again.

Nutt reinforces here how the Maineses are already a somewhat atypical family because the twins are adopted. Yet she shows just as strongly that their family is built on love, and that Kelly and Wayne don't need to Wyatt and Jonas's biological parents for their family to be valid.

Wayne thinks about the fact that right now they are Kelly's boys, but soon he will have his own special connection with them. He thinks about the rites of passage that he wants to help them through, that he would be taking charge of—even the "silly things, such as arguing about sports."

Nutt provides yet another example of Wayne's expectations for his sons, and how he expects to interact with them. These preconceived notions are tied to social norms of gender and typical family structures.

A week after the babies are born, Kelly drives Sarah to Albany the night before her flight home. She takes Sarah out to dinner, thanking her for the gift she's given Kelly and Wayne. On the drive home, Kelly thinks about contingency plans: though Sarah has never expressed a desire to keep the babies, Kelly feels the need to steel herself against the possibility.

Peering into Kelly's inner thoughts allows readers to understand how much she is motivated by love for her children, even though they are not biologically hers. As becomes crucial to her reactions to Wyatt's gender identity, she cares less about what others will think of her family and more about taking care of her children.

CHAPTER 3: FINALLY OURS

Ten months later, Jonas and Wyatt receive revised birth certificates with their new last name: Maines. The boys are happy and healthy, Kelly stays at home, and Wayne works as a corporate safety director for a chemical plant in Schenectady.

In the first 10 months of their lives with Wyatt and Jonas, the Kelly and Wayne start to build their "traditional" family: a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and two baby boys. The family's typical beginning, therefore, only makes it harder for Wayne when he starts to realize that their family isn't completely ordinary.

Wayne and Kelly, Wyatt, and Jonas live in a farmhouse in Northville, New York, and Kelly and Wayne enjoy the beginnings of parenthood. But six months after the twins are born, Sarah's mother, Janis, begins to call regularly, gradually implying that she wants to take one of the twins. Kelly immediately starts the process of getting passports for the kids so that she and Wayne could flee the country if they try to take her children. She refuses Janis's offer, telling her that she can take both infants or neither, knowing that Janis, who already has four children, will back off.

Janis's offer serves as a threat to Kelly and her security in her family. But Kelly's reaction—to fight as strongly and as quickly as possible to maintain her new family—demonstrates how much love she already has for her children and how she would be willing to do anything to protect them.

On May 17, 1998, Wayne and Kelly go to court to make the adoptions official. A judge verifies that Wyatt and Jonas are, in fact, the babies to be adopted, and signs the adoption order. Once home, the family celebrates the good news. Wayne and Kelly are relieved that the boys are now officially theirs.

Although the court order makes it official, Nutt makes it clear that the Maineses' bonds of love have already been strongly built. Nutt demonstrates how neither biological relation nor the law is necessary in creating a family—it is solely this bond of love and support that matters.

Wyatt and Jonas have a clear physical bond, always wanting to be near each other. But as they grow, Wyatt loves Barbies, while Jonas loves *Star Wars* and *Power Rangers*. Wyatt takes his frustration out on Jonas, while Jonas is unusually gentle. Jonas plays the "boy" characters when they act out stories, while Wyatt plays the "girl" characters.

Even when the boys are as young as two years old, differences in their gender identity start to emerge. Wyatt's preference for stereotypically female activities and roles makes clear that he has an immediate and even innate understanding of his identity.

Wyatt is particularly obsessed with **The Little Mermaid**. Nutt writes, "Part human, part fish, Ariel, with her shiny green scales, is decidedly a mermaid below the waist. But above it, with her long hair and luscious red lips, she is all girl." Ariel's problem is that she lives in one world but yearns to be in another. She is comforted by the top half of her reflection, but the bottom half doesn't make sense to her. Wyatt watches The Little Mermaid incessantly and puts a red shirt on his head to imitate her long, flowing hair.

The Little Mermaid *becomes a perfect symbol for Wyatt's own distress concerning his anatomy, since Ariel has the upper half of a woman and the bottom half of a fish. Like Ariel, Wyatt will experiences unease concerning his "bottom half." He, too, feels stuck between two worlds: he has the feeling of being a girl, but the anatomy of a boy. Yet, like the Little Mermaid, he will ultimately undergo a transformation that allows him to be a part of the world he longs for.*

One day, before the twins are three, Wayne is renovating one of their bathrooms using a hammer. Wyatt joins him with his own toy hammer. Wayne "glorie[s] in the father-and-son moment." But when they take a break to have a snack, Wyatt says to his father, "Daddy, I hate my penis." Wayne is shocked. He scoops up Wyatt and tries to comfort him while also struggling with his own reaction. Jonas comes in as well; seeing Wyatt crying, he starts to sob, too. Wayne tells the boys, "Everything's going to be okay."

This incident touches on two themes: first, it shows the depth of Wyatt's distress over his anatomy, emphasizing how he instinctively understands that he is a girl. The second is Wayne's instinctive desire to comfort his son. Despite the fact that he is frequently frustrated and upset by Wyatt's behavior, at the end of the day the love he has for his child is more important than the desire to have a "normal" family.

CHAPTER 4: GENDER DYSPHORIA

To Kelly, Wyatt isn't strange or sick; he's just different. Wayne starts to distance himself from the situation, purposefully ignoring Wyatt when he skips around the house in his friend Leah's tutu. Kelly recognizes that wearing masculine clothing is torturous for Wyatt, so much so that he prefers to go bare-chested. So, Kelly starts to buy pink and purple clothes for Wyatt without Wayne's input. She is nervous about shopping in the girls' department but decides that what other people might think is their problem.

Nutt shows a few developments as Wyatt grows older: first, Wyatt's growing adamance that he wants to choose how he expresses himself. Second, Wayne and Kelly's reactions: while Wayne is concerned what people will believe about Wyatt, Kelly is more concerned for her son's well-being than the opinions or social expectations of others.

Wayne doesn't approve of Kelly's actions, which he feels are indulgent, but doesn't stop her. All he wants to do is have a "normal" family like everyone else. She insists that she never had a normal family, and so she has no expectations of what that means. Wayne feels that Wyatt is making a "mockery" of his idea of family, and often fights with Wyatt about wearing girls' clothes and wanting to be a girl.

Nutt continues to highlight the difference between Kelly and Wayne's reactions. For Wayne, who grew up with a traditional childhood, all he wants is the same for his son. But for Kelly, who did not have a normal childhood, all she wants is to make sure Wyatt feels cared for.

One evening, Kelly sits down and starts to look up info about "boys who like girls' toys." She reads for hours through info on homosexuality, transsexualism, and being transgender. Transgender, she learns, is defined as "of or relating to people who have a sexual identity that is not clearly male or clearly female." She thinks this description somewhat matches Wyatt.

Kelly's ignorance concerning what her son might be experiencing demonstrates how there is a fundamental lack of understanding and knowledge about what it means to be transgender. But, as Kelly tries to find out more, Nutt shows how the more knowledge a person has on the subject, the better he or she can support others.

Kelly continues to read, learning that gender is one's belief that one is male or female. It is innate, and not something that a person has to think about or tell others about, unless a person feels like one gender and is treated like another. Kelly keeps coming back to this word, transgender, learning that some people express dissatisfaction with their birth anatomy (a mental state called gender dysphoria) as early as two years old.

Kelly continues to try to remedy her lack of knowledge, knowing that this is the only way she will be able to help Wyatt fully understand who he is. Nutt also takes the reader on Kelly's journey so that they, too, can gain the knowledge that Kelly has accumulated over time.

Gender dysphoria (at the time known as gender identity disorder) is described as the "state of unease" that results when a person's sexual anatomy doesn't match with their sense of gender. The criteria for this diagnosis in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) includes a strong desire to be of the other gender, a strong preference for crossdressing in biological males, a preference for cross-gender roles and activities, a dislike of one's sexual anatomy, and "clinically significant distress" due to a person's mismatched anatomy.

It is important to recognize two concepts from the DSM-V. First, that gender is just as innate as sex, and that the two can be different. The second is that the state of unease is not from an individual's doubt about their gender; rather, it stems from the frustration of being treated like one gender while feeling like another. It is not the transgender person's idea of themselves that has to change to clear this unease, it is the minds of others that have to be adjusted.


Kelly recognizes a lot of these traits in Wyatt, who refers to himself as a "boy-girl" and sometimes asks questions like "When will my penis fall off?" as if he expects to develop into a girl. Wayne, on the other hand, finds it difficult to accept Wyatt's gender-bending behavior. He retreats to the woods to cut down trees or take long swims. He doesn't know how to deal with the situation.

Wyatt's questions demonstrate how his feelings that he is a girl are so innate and natural to him that he believes it would be equally natural for him to simply become a girl.

In 2003, after Jonas and Wyatt complete kindergarten, Wayne and Kelly decide to move to Orono, Maine, after Wayne gets a job at the University of Maine. Kelly isn't thrilled at uprooting the family but hopes that the university town will be more inclusive. Kelly also continues to think about gender, seeing a story on the news where a couple in New York City had had their child temporarily taken away from them when they let their young son go to school as a girl. She worries the same could happen to her.

This first news story provides a primary example of the discrimination that transgender people (or even people who don't fit squarely into gender stereotypes) face. Nutt recognizes that this discrimination, particularly at this time in the early 2000s, makes it very difficult for transgender people to be out and proud.

Kelly lets Wyatt grow his hair out and wear feminine shirts. Wayne, meanwhile, feels uncomfortable whenever they are in public and awkward situations arise as a result. People would get confused and call Wyatt their daughter; when they are forced to correct these mistakes, Wayne feels judged. He asks a friend what to do about Wyatt's proclivity for dressing as a girl and wearing makeup, but his friend isn't sure either. Wayne's "pain and confusion [are] palpable."

Wyatt's understanding of himself continues to be very clear as he starts to present more and more as a girl in public. The awkward situations that arise demonstrate how it is not Wyatt who has to change: the transformation is a mental one that must be undertaken by others.

CHAPTER 5: DOWN EAST

Orono is located in central Maine, and despite a few urban highlights surrounding the University of Maine, the town has a rural character. The Maineses' new house is a four-bedroom with a barn and six acres of woodland. Wayne cuts down trees to build a log cabin for Jonas and Wyatt. The kids seem to adjust well to the move, and though Kelly feels a little isolated, she is happy that they are close to school and Wayne's work.

The town of Orono helps Wayne to maintain this idealistic sense of what a traditional rural family looks like. Kelly cares less about the town's character—even finding it a little limiting—but is glad that her kids seem happy and that their family can be close. To her, the supportive bonds of family are the most important aspects of building a meaningful life.

With Wyatt and Jonas about to begin first grade, the Maineses throw a party to get to know their neighbors. But when Wyatt appears at the top of the stairs in a pink princess dress during the party, Wayne yells at him that he can't wear that. Kelly hears this and immediately comforts her crying son, pulling him away from the party. She gently tells him that it isn't the right time to wear a dress. Wyatt cries, saying it isn't fair that he doesn't get to wear what he wants when Jonas does.

Wayne's anger toward his son is again due to the fact that he feels Wyatt is threatening Wayne's ability to have a "normal" family. Kelly also shares these concerns in a gentler way, but it is clear that she recognizes Wyatt has a clear sense of who he is, and of the inequality between himself and Jonas.

Wayne, meanwhile, remains downstairs. He feels that his world has "just blown up," worried that everyone at the party would judge him for his outburst as well as Wyatt's dress. He is embarrassed by his son but also feels terrible knowing "he'd just broken that little boy's heart." He doesn't understand how Wyatt and Jonas could be identical twins and yet so different.

Wayne's question, of how Wyatt and Jonas can be twins and yet be so different, is one that the reader might have as well. Nutt answers this question in a later chapter, when she reveals scientific findings on the causes of being transgender. This scientific explanation is important in understanding how Wyatt's transgender identity is an innate part of his biology, not merely a whim or a psychiatric illness.

Kelly is frustrated by Wayne's behavior and the fact that he refuses to talk about his feelings about their child. Wayne simply hopes that Wyatt will outgrow this phase. He worries that his son is gay, not because he has a problem with gay people, but because he "[doesn't] want that for his son." It would be too hard for him, Wayne thinks. Wayne is also "afraid he wouldn't know how to be the kind of father Wyatt would want—or need."

Wayne is motivated by the desire to simply have a normal family, to be a normal father with a normal son. But Nutt reveals the deeper insecurity below this desire: that Wayne worries he would not be the kind of father that could help Wyatt if he were transgender.

CHAPTER 6: THINGS TO BE CAREFUL OF

Wyatt doesn't have the vocabulary for his gender identity, so he simply calls himself "a boy who wants to be a girl" or "a girl in a boy's body" or "a boy-girl." Other first graders don't seem to mind this definition, though some second graders occasionally call him "girly" to be mean.

Wyatt starts to have his first experiences with discrimination based on his gender identity. But the fact that this prejudice comes from those who don't know Wyatt reinforces the idea that ignorance breeds hatred, whereas if they knew him, they might think twice about their bias.

Jonas doesn't think there's anything unusual about Wyatt's behavior, but they occasionally get into fights—usually with Wyatt lashing out at Jonas. Wyatt explains these incidents with this answer: "because he gets to be who he is and I don't." Yet despite these occasional fights, their closeness is unmistakable. Every day, they act out TV shows or stories.

Jonas's viewpoint demonstrates how having a transgender sibling can affect the other children in the family as well. This is the first hint that Jonas's life will feel largely defined by that of Wyatt—yet despite this, Jonas still loves and supports him in any way possible.

Wyatt and Jonas get involved in soccer, but Wyatt rarely moves on the field. When Wayne, who is coaching the team, sees this, he pulls Wyatt from the game. Once after this happened, Wyatt runs across the field and into the street. Wayne yells at Wyatt to never do that again, furious. He explains that all he wants is for them not to get hurt.

Wyatt's discomfort at being on the soccer team stems from the fact that he feels like he doesn't belong in the group of boys. He so loathes being forced into a group of boys that he acts out in order to show his parents that they need to find a different activity for him.

Kelly worries about the kids' safety, particularly Wyatt's, and so she enrolls the kids in tae kwon do. Kelly also stays updated on news about transgender people, most of which involves violent attacks. In October 2002, a 17-year-old transgender woman named Gwen Araujo had been stripped naked, strangled, and beaten to death by a group of men because she was transgender. Stories like this make Kelly anxious.

Nutt provides another example of the dangers of being out as a transgender person—at this time, so many transgender people are targeted with violence and harassment, which makes it difficult for people to be open about their identity and advocate for themselves.

Kelly makes efforts to protect Wyatt in school and at friends' homes. She explains to his teacher before he starts school that Wyatt likes girls' things, which the teacher fortunately understands. One of Wayne's friends told him that her sons had corrected her when she said the "Maines boys." The boy had insisted, "Wyatt is a girl, and she just happens to have a penis."

This anecdote demonstrates how kids instinctually understand an idea that Nutt proves in later chapters: sex and gender aren't as binary or black and white as most people believe. It's telling that adults, despite having much more life experience, are less open to those who do not fit the mold of gender norms.

Later in the year, Wyatt illustrates a safety book called "Things to Be Careful Of." The cover shows a man-eating shark and a **mermaid** perched on an underwater rock. Inside are drawings of things to avoid, like strangers, slipping on ice, vampires, and playing with matches. But the first words in the book are the most realistic: "Bullies are mean to you so stay away from them."

Wyatt once more invokes the symbol of a mermaid to represent himself, caught between two worlds and yearning to be a girl. The sharks, on the other hand, represent the bullies who discriminate against him.


CHAPTER 7: THE PINK AISLE

In May 2003, Kelly is watching an interview with Jennifer Finney Boylan on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Boylan is an English professor at Colby College in Maine and is a "very pretty and normal-seeming woman." Kelly is surprised to learn that Boylan is transgender and is excited to learn about her.

In contrast to the anxiety that stirs in Kelly when she sees most news about transgender people, Boylan's story allows Kelly to recognize someone who can be a positive role model, and someone whose pride in themselves allows them to advocate for other transgender people.

Boylan explains that she knew from the time she was six years old that though she was born male, she felt entirely female. She knew that she would be ridiculed, and so continued to live as a man. But she describes how the secret ate at her; that she knew something was wrong. She explains, "I think people know what their gender is based on what is in their hearts." This is affirming to Kelly, who sees the same understanding in Wyatt.

Boylan's story foreshadows Wyatt's own struggle with being transgender, but not revealing this part of himself to his friends. This is yet another cost of not being able to be proud of one's own identity.


Boylan continues, telling Oprah that there are tens of thousands of people in America who are transgender, but are living "in silence and shame because they are afraid to speak the truth." Oprah asks Boylan about the origin of her condition. She says that no one knows, but that she believes there has to be a medical component because it feels so innate to her. Kelly believes this as well.

Boylan's words here highlight not only her own struggle with having to keep her identity a secret, but also the struggle of others. It implies that, if these tens of thousands of people were able to be out and proud, they could be a supportive and trailblazing community for one other. But of course, they cannot all be out because of the dangers and discrimination they face.


Boylan explains that there is now a protocol for transgender people to "transition" from one gender to the other. These include hormonal and surgical treatments that allow individuals to transition to the opposite gender of their birth. Kelly buys Boylan's book, knowing that she could be a role model for Wyatt and that her words might also help Wayne understand Wyatt's identity better.

Kelly recognizes that Boylan could be a role model for Wyatt, but also that she can help remedy some of Wayne's ignorance about what his son might be going through and the kind of life that he might be able to lead.

For Wyatt's seventh birthday, Kelly buys action figures from a TV show she thinks Wyatt had been engrossed in. When he is disconsolate at receiving them, he explains to her that he only watches the TV show because he likes the "pretty house" that the characters live in. Kelly feels like she has failed her son, and views this as the tipping point: she knows that he is transgender. The next day she goes out and buys him a **Little Mermaid** playset, and every Wendy, Dorothy, and Cinderella toy she can find.

The tipping point of Kelly's mentality demonstrates that it is not Wyatt who has to change his mindset, since he already has a very clear idea of who he is. It is Kelly who must change the way that she thinks about her son in order to make him happy and to allow him to be the person he knows he is.

CHAPTER 8: A BOY-GIRL

Halfway through Jonas and Wyatt's first-grade year at Asa C. Adams Elementary School, Kelly learns that she has thyroid cancer. She undergoes two surgeries in Boston as well as radioactive iodine therapy. Following this treatment, Kelly has many follow-up appointments. She frequently drives herself the 240-mile trek, reciting the mantra, "I need to live ten more years." All she wants is to be there for her children.

Kelly's thyroid cancer brings out her tenacity and determination to fight, but it also illuminates her priorities. All she wants is to make sure that she can be there to take care of her family—perhaps even privately worried that without her guidance, Wayne might not be able to support Wyatt in the way he needs.

Once, when the whole family makes a trip to Boston for Kelly's treatments, she and Wayne notice a young boy with no hair and a very thin face who is also staying in their hotel. She and Wayne privately give thanks for their own good fortune at having healthy children. When the months of treatment are finally over, the doctors give Kelly a clean bill of health, and Kelly is "more determined than ever to be there for her family."

Nutt continues to demonstrate the important aspects of being a family. It does not matter how "normal" their children may seem; what is truly important is that they are healthy, happy, and can lead meaningful lives. While Wayne's insecurities about Wyatt may stem from his concern that Wyatt will have a difficult life going forward, he is still able to recognize his fortune in having Wyatt at all.

Wyatt and Jonas love it when Kelly reads to them before bed. Each gravitates towards different characters. For Wyatt, his choices are either a princess, or Dorothy or the Wicked Witch from the Wizard of Oz. For Jonas it is the Tin Man or a pirate. Wyatt is also happy that his parents allow him to have pink sneakers, a pink backpack, and a pink Kim Possible lunchbox. However, when Wyatt returns home from school each day the first thing he does is to change into a skirt or dress.

Nutt provides even more examples of Wyatt's certainty concerning his identity, and how he flourishes when he is allowed to express that identity in the ways that he desires. Despite his parents' pressures to conform to gender norms at school, Nut makes it clear that Wyatt is doing this solely to please his parents.

Kelly and Wayne try to find a therapist for Wyatt, but it proves difficult to find someone who specializes in gender issues for children. Wyatt, meanwhile, is trying to figure out his own form of treatment. One day he tells Kelly that he "can have an operation that will fix [him]." He doesn't know the word transgender or anything about sex reassignment surgery, but he understands that plastic surgery could help him look more like a woman. He knows instinctively that this is what he wants.

The discovery of plastic surgery begins Wyatt's own journey of transformation, but it is important to clarify which aspects of himself he is transforming. Nutt argues that being transgender is a problem of the body, not an issue with his mind. Contrary to others' mistaken beliefs that he can be "cured" of being transgender by trying to change how he expresses himself; Wyatt merely wants to adjust his anatomy to match the gender he feels on the inside.

CHAPTER 9: WILD IN THE DARK

As Wyatt enters second grade, his mood fluctuates daily. In his notebook, he frequently describes wanting to hit Jonas or throw things. Wyatt's teacher, Wayne, and Kelly are concerned with this behavior. They also note Wyatt's anger turning inward: he pulls at his eyelashes and eyebrows, telling Kelly that he can't make himself stop.

Wyatt's frustration is evidence of the struggle of being transgender and why it is necessary for him to transition. The conflict between his gender identity and his anatomy makes him feel that others do not understand him, and he consequently lashes out against his own body, as well as Jonas, who shares an identical body and likely reminds Wyatt his own mismatched anatomy and identity.

Wyatt has his first appointment with child psychologist Virginia Holmes when he is nine years old. Kelly recognizes that his constant restlessness belies a deeper anxiety that he cannot explain. After his first visit, Holmes writes in her journal that Wyatt is very feminine and displays no worries about wanting to be a girl. Wyatt's main concern is instead his "automatic desire to choke himself."

Holmes, too, seems to instinctively understand that Wyatt's anxiety does not stem from his gender identity. It instead stems from the fact that others treat him as a boy and that his anatomy does not match his female identity, and so he is lashing out at his body.

CHAPTER 10: GIRLS WITH MAGICAL POWERS

Dr. Holmes counsels Kelly to go slow with Wyatt and not necessarily give in to everything he wants. Holmes thinks that Wyatt could be gay, not necessarily transgender. Still, Kelly lets him wear feminine clothes at home.

Dr. Holmes's advice strains Kelly's own desire to do whatever she can to make her son comfortable in his own skin, particularly because she has so little support from Wayne.

Wyatt also becomes obsessed with a series of animated characters called the Trix: witches with magical powers who are confident and aggressive. Wyatt starts to emulate this behavior. He increasingly pushes limits, asking Wayne to have bold and glittery dresses while in a department store. Wayne tries not to overreact. He is adamant that Wyatt cannot wear a dress to school—that he would forever be known for that if he did so. Kelly, however, insists that this is what Wyatt wants.

Wayne's concern stems not only from his own reservations at having a transgender son, but also recognizing the kind of discrimination that Wyatt could face in school and throughout his whole life. By contrast, wearing a dress to school (which he desperately wants to do) shows how proud Wyatt is of his own identity.

In fourth grade, Wyatt grows even more anxious, which seems to stem from wanting to fit in with the girls. Kelly allows him to wear a two-piece bathing suit and sneaks him into the girls' dressing room—something she has not told Wayne about. Dr. Holmes questions whether this is sensible, causing Kelly to be insecure about her decisions for Wyatt.

Even Dr. Holmes's questioning of Kelly's choice in this matter foreshadows the larger battle of Wyatt's ability (or inability) to use gendered public places like changing rooms and restrooms. This is one of the most significant battlegrounds for both Wyatt and transgender people as a whole.

Wyatt has his own insecurities: he tells Dr. Holmes that one girl called him a "fruit basket," which he did not understand. Dr. Holmes tells him about gay men, which she explains are men who love other men instead of women. Wyatt is adamant that he is not gay. He is not a boy attracted to other boys. He is a girl who wants "to be pretty and feel loved and one day marry a boy—just like other girls [do]."

This exchange highlights why knowledge is so important for Wyatt himself. In understanding what being gay means, he is able to recognize that this is not how he identifies. This conclusion pushes both Dr. Holmes and Kelly to feel more strongly that Wyatt is transgender.

CHAPTER 11: A SON AND A DAUGHTER

Wyatt continues to assert his femininity and plays with Jonas less, worrying that his brother doesn't accept him. Jonas, however, tells Dr. Holmes that he doesn't mind that Wyatt dresses and acts like a girl; he's just not interested in the same things as Wyatt.

Wyatt doesn't care about maintaining a sense of having a "normal" family—his only wish is for his brother to love and support him.

Some of Wyatt's most difficult moments involve sports, particularly because they involve changing and showering. Once, an older boy says something cruel to him in the shower. Wyatt tries to confront the boy, and Wayne has to pull the two kids away from each other. When Wyatt and Jonas join the Cub Scouts, many boys make fun of Wyatt's feminine behavior and the parents don't discipline their children for this.

As Wyatt grows and participates in more male-gendered activities, he is subject to more and more discrimination by other kids who view him as an outsider or as abnormal. Yet the striking thing is that this mistreatment is not disciplined, showing how parents are just as complicit in the bullying as their kids are.

Wayne is disappointed because he had loved the Scouts, and this serves as "one more reminder to Wayne that his family [is] different from everyone else's." He responds to these developments by taking late-night swims and chopping down trees: anything to avoid dealing with his feelings about Wyatt.

While Wyatt's challenges continue to grow, Wayne is still preoccupied with the idea of having a normal family and of giving his son the same childhood that he had.

Wayne takes far more pleasure in doing "boy" things with Jonas, like Little League, but the irony is that Wyatt is more innately talented at sports. Jonas does not have the natural skills for Whiffle ball, but when Wyatt tries to hit the ball in a dress and heels, he hits four solid line drives. Instead, Jonas's passion is his imagination and acting out stories. Thus, Jonas doesn't quite fit the mold of other boys his age either. He is unsure of his own identity, though he is very sure of Wyatt's. One day he tells his father, "Face it, Dad, you have a son *and* a daughter."

Perhaps part of the tragedy for Wayne lies in the idea that neither of his sons are traditionally "masculine" in the way that he is, and so he doesn't feel strongly connected to either of his sons. This anecdote also helps establish that gender identity runs along a gradient, and no one (not even cisgender people) has to completely mesh with all gender stereotypes.

CHAPTER 12: TRANSITIONS

Through third and fourth grade, other kids refer to Wyatt using male pronouns, but in their minds, he is a "boy-girl." He finds a growing sense of self-esteem, due to Kelly's allowing him to wear more "girlish" clothes at home and in public.

The fact that Wyatt's confidence grows as he is able to wear more feminine clothing affirms the idea that the only transformation Wyatt requires is on the outside—he has a very firm sense of himself on the inside.

In the fourth grade, Wyatt draws a self-portrait for the school's open house depicting a girl with long curly hair, purple eye shadow, and jewelry. Wyatt's teacher isn't sure about hanging the photo for all to see, and so she brings the drawing to the school's counselor, Lisa Erhardt. Erhardt had a background in psychology but was also interested in education and working with children.

Wyatt's self-portrait foreshadows his eventual transition, which will enable him to look like what he believes himself to be. Even though the teacher might think this is a little too much for an open house, it is notable that Wyatt has the confidence to display this identity.

About a month after moving to Maine, Kelly stopped by Erhardt's office to explain Wyatt's situation and to ask Erhardt to keep an eye on him. When Kelly told her that Wyatt has Gender Identity Disorder, Erhardt pulled out the DSM and read the description in order to learn more. The description indicated a "persistent discomfort about one's assigned sex" and a "persistent cross-gender identification," both of which sounded like Wyatt to Kelly.

Like Kelly, Erhardt's instincts are to look up as much information as she can, knowing that she is somewhat ignorant of what Wyatt is going through. This allows her to better understand Wyatt and help him deal with these struggles throughout his time in elementary school.

Erhardt decided to learn more. She contacted the LGBT center at the University of Maine. When she arrived there, the students jumped into help her, giving her resources from their bookshelves and fielding her questions. She left 45 minutes later with information, suggestions, contact numbers, and an immense gratitude for their generosity.

Erhardt tries to expand her knowledge even further at the LGBT center at the University of Maine. The existence of this center also demonstrates how much change society has allowed for already in terms of the openness of LGBT people, and how their advocacy for themselves helps others in their community.

Erhardt and Kelly had spoken many times in the three years since their first meeting, and so Erhardt calls her when the issue comes up about Wyatt's self-portrait. Kelly recommends that the teacher make Wyatt redo the assignment to reflect the person he sees when he looks in the mirror. She wonders, though, if he really sees a woman with makeup and jewelry when he looks at himself. Later in the year, Wyatt starts asking everyone to use female pronouns for him—which makes sense to Kelly, as the only thing still "boyish" about him is his name. Kelly's ability to accept Wyatt had given him a kind of confidence to share that identity with others.

Even though Kelly recognizes the importance of creating boundaries for Wyatt, it is really for his protection and her worries about others bullying him. Most of her actions reflect how proud she is of Wyatt's ability to be himself, and she is able to advocate for him both in school and at home with Wayne. This, in turn, gives Wyatt the confidence to advocate what he wants for himself.

Kelly knows, however, how far society still has to go. Only a few states have laws preventing gender identity discrimination, and only in certain areas like employment and housing. At the beginning of 2006, 27-year-old Eric Buffong endures months of mocking and harassment as a cook at an upscale restaurant in New York when a co-worker discovered his high school yearbook, which listed him as Erica. Buffong was born female but had lived as a man for the past decade. After he was "outed," his work schedule was reduced and four months later he was fired.

Nutt continues to demonstrate the struggles of being transgender, and how often these challenges stem less from trying to understand one's own identity and more from the cruelty and misunderstanding of others. In Buffong's case, it is not he who had to change—he had already been living as a man for a decade. It is the perceptions of others, and their bias when learning that he was transgender, that has to change.

Buffong then filed a $3 million lawsuit claiming his dismissal was discrimination. At the time, New York had no protections against discrimination based on gender identity, but a judge in the county argued that "transgendered persons" were protected from workplace discrimination by the sex discrimination provision in the law. The decision was not universally praised. A law blogger wrote, "How different is the alleged harassment in this case from that one would encounter if one chose to wear a clown suit at all times?"

Buffong was able to advocate for himself and other transgender people in helping to set a precedent in New York. But the criticisms of the decision also reveal the fundamental misunderstanding that many have about transgender people. This hurtful statement equating being transgender with something as trivial and temporary as wearing a clown suit is willful ignorance and refuses to acknowledge the humanity of transgender people.

In the mid-2000s, the debate on transgender rights is very quiet. The U.S. Department of State requests proof of sex reassignment surgery for passports issued to transgender people with new sex markers, and 47 states have the same requirement for new birth certificates. Additionally, no one truly knows how many transgender people there are. Research is much more widespread on lesbian, gay, and bisexual people than on transgender people.

Nutt highlights some of the difficulties in trying to change the laws. Being out for transgender people can be dangerous or invite harassment and ridicule, and so it is difficult not only to get an accurate number of how widespread this phenomenon is, but also for them to advocate for one another in order to gain more rights.

Seeing Wyatt's teachers and classmates accept his feminine identity is slowly changing Wayne's perception of Wyatt. He starts to understand that Wyatt's "transition" needs to be nurtured. This is best symbolized when, at a Christmas concert given by the school, Wyatt stands directly between the boys (in pants, shirts, and ties) and girls (in skirts and blouses). He had been given permission to wear blouse and culottes (baggy pants that looked more like a skirt). He beams with "pride and joy" the whole time.

The more that Wyatt is able to express himself the way he wants to, the happier and prouder he is of himself. And in seeing his son's happiness, and the fact that he is accepted and loved by so many people around him, Wayne's idea of Wyatt starts to transform as well.

CHAPTER 13: GETTING THE ANGER OUT

In April 2007, Wayne and Kelly sit down with Wyatt one night to watch a *20/20* special on transgender children. The special profiles Jazz, a transgender girl about the same age as Wyatt and Jonas. Like Wyatt, she was born biologically male but identified as female from a very early age. And, like Wayne and Kelly, her parents encouraged a gender-neutral look, but gradually her parents realized that all she wanted to do was fit in with other girls. On Jazz's fifth birthday, they had a kind of coming out for her as a girl.

Like Jennifer Finney Boylan, Jazz provides a different kind of role model for Wyatt. He recognizes someone who has the same problems as himself, and Jazz's journey allows him to see that he, too, can be accepted as a girl by his family and friends. Kelly recognizes the value in finding these kinds of role models for Wyatt so that he can be proud of who he is.

Watching the special, Wyatt is "flooded with relief," knowing that there is someone else out there like him. Wayne is also shocked at the parents' willingness to talk openly about their child and the problems with which they've struggled.

Similarly, and perhaps unexpectedly, Jazz's parents become a kind of role model for Wayne and Kelly. In seeing Jazz's parents' pride in their child, they set an example for Wayne to advocate for Wyatt.

Wyatt continues to see Dr. Holmes and confesses that he sometimes feels like sticking his fingers down his throat (though not to throw up). He admits he is often angry and feels misunderstood. He even writes Kelly a letter after fighting with Jonas about how he feels that she constantly treats him like the "bad guy." He writes, "I feel like you think that he's the perfect child and I'm just the 'other' one."

As Nutt writes in the opening chapter, Wyatt's sense of himself is only part of what forms him: it is also others' sense of him. When he feels misunderstood due to the conflict between his sex and gender identity, this is so upsetting to him that he feels that he is mistreated and thinks about self-harm.

Wyatt undergoes a psychological evaluation in May 2007. The results are clear, and unsurprising to the family. He identifies deeply as female and his fears and frustrations about growing up male are likely fodder for his violence and thoughts of self-harm. Kelly decides that it is time to find a doctor to help continue Wyatt's transition.

As a result of Wyatt's violent impulses, Kelly recognizes that the only way to support her son is to help him achieve the identity that he truly wants.


CHAPTER 14: THE XS AND YS OF SEX

Humans have long held fanciful theories on how to control the outcome of a baby's sex. In Ancient Rome, it was thought that a pregnant woman carrying a chicken egg would ensure a boy. Ancient Greek physician Galen believed that if a woman bound her right foot with a child's white ribbon before sexual intercourse, she would conceive a male child.

Nutt opens her largely scientific chapter by establishing what people assumed about sex and gender historically, highlighting how little was (and is still) known about sex, gender, and what influences these characteristics. These examples, of course, are recognizably absurd because the modern reader now knows that carrying a chicken egg or a white ribbon would have no bearing on sex.


Today, those theories are only slightly more sophisticated: because sperm carrying X chromosomes swim slower and longer than those carrying Y chromosomes, the odds of having a daughter are thought to increase if intercourse takes place several days before ovulation, giving male sperm more time to die off. Nutt writes that humans all begin life essentially genderless. Our chromosomes make us either genetic males (XY) or females (XX), but at least 50 genes play a part in sexual identity.

At the same time, Nutt shows how little knowledge there still is concerning what causes sex and gender, and how those two developmental processes can be influenced. Nutt establishes quickly that these processes are far more complicated than which sperm can reach the egg.


Sexual anatomy, on the other hand, is determined largely by hormones. All humans begin in utero with an opening next to the anus and a genital "bud." The addition of testosterone allows for a penis and scrotum to develop and an inhibiting hormone prevents the development of internal female reproductive organs. Without testosterone, the opening becomes the vagina and the bud becomes the clitoris.

Nutt first illustrates how sex and anatomy are connected, as the presence of testosterone (and one's ability to receive that hormone) spurs the development of male sexual anatomy. Nutt will also demonstrate how testosterone is crucial to the development of sexual identity, but that there are key reasons why sex and sexual identity might be different.

The sexual differentiation of the genitals happens at about six weeks, but the sexual differentiation of the brain, including gender identity is at least partly a distinct process. Hormones again play a crucial role, causing subtle differences in brain structure. For example, the straight gyrus, which is highly correlated with interpersonal awareness, is 10 percent larger in women than men. But scientists caution that differences in biological sex are not absolute—regardless of biological sex, the larger the straight gyrus, the more "feminine" the behavior.

Nutt shows how sexual identity is a distinct process from the development of anatomy. Differences in brain structure can be correlated with differences in a person's behavior and gender identity. This concept begins to set up the idea that gender identity is innate, runs along a spectrum, and is a part of many other personality traits coded into the brain.

In addition, for most males, male hormones are crucial to the development of male gender identity. A mutation of the receptors for these hormones can cause "androgen insensitivity syndrome, in which virilization of the brain fails." In this case, a baby will be born chromosomally male and will have testes but will also have a short vagina and will outwardly appear female. Its gender identity is nearly always female. In other words, genitals and gender identity are not the same. There are "dozens of biological events that can affect the outcome of the latter and can cause an incongruence between the two."

Here Nutt comes to her primary point: that chromosomes, genes, and hormones all play a different part in the development of sexual anatomy and gender identity, and while these things are related, they are not necessarily the same. This statement, supported by the rest of the chapter, seeks to remedy the misconception held by many people that sex and gender are the same.

Some individuals have chromosomes of one gender but the sex organs of the opposite. Others are born with male genitals and testes, but internally have a womb and fallopian tubes. Some people have atypical chromosomal configurations, like XXX or XXY. Still others have different chromosomal arrangements in different tissues. Regardless of chromosomes, any change in the balance of hormones will tip the sexual development of a fetus in one direction or another.

Nutt provides yet more examples of how these different biological factors interplay and can have different variations. But regardless of these variations, Nutt makes it evident that much of our sex and gender identities are innate and determined before birth.

"No one thing determines sex," and small changes can lead to "nonbinary" results. As many as one in 100 infants are born with sexual anatomy that differs in some way from standard male and female anatomy. Historically, doctors decided gender at birth based on cultural expectations and stereotypes, chiefly the length of genitalia. A baby born with a penis smaller than 2.5 centimeters was assigned female. But in the case of ambiguity, infants were assigned a sex and then surgeons "corrected" the confusion.

After establishing how people can have a variety of anatomic combinations and gender identities, Nutt transitions to demonstrating how the lack of knowledge about this in prior decades led to poor choices. For example, "correcting" children's anatomies without understanding what their gender identity might be was a common practice.

In August 1956, a baby was born who had either a very small penis or an enlarged clitoris. Doctors were extremely unsure of the baby's sex, but finally they suggested the parents assign the infant a male identity. The parents did so and named the baby Brian. Eighteen months later, however, doctors discovered that Brian had a uterus and ovotestes (containing both ovarian and testicular tissue). Doctors told the parents that their initial advice was wrong and surgically removed the microphallus. They parents renamed the child Bonnie and were told raise the child as a girl, throw away photographs of Bonnie as a boy, and move out of the state.

Doctors here prove their ignorance surrounding intersex babies at the time. Additionally, it is notable that their decision to perform surgery on Brian stems largely from social pressures and stereotypes. Society would clearly be unaccepting of Brian as an intersex child (evidenced by the doctors' advice to his parents to move out of the state) and thus Brian's parents make uninformed choices that affect him for the rest of his life.

When Bonnie turned eight, she underwent surgery to (unbeknownst to her) remove the testicular part of her gonads. At 10 years old, she was told the truth and was deeply disturbed by what her parents had done. She grew up and graduated from MIT with a math degree. Later she formed the Intersex Society of North America under the name Cheryl Chase, and advocated that doctors not do surgery on intersex babies but let them make a decision themselves when they are of an appropriate age.

With so little knowledge surrounding intersex babies (like Brian/Bonnie), Chase advocates for doctors to acknowledge their ignorance in this area and allow for a child to have agency over their own body when they grow up. Additionally, it is notable that Chase's pride in her identity allows her to form the Intersex Society and advocate for others like herself.

Chase stood in opposition to proponents of behaviorism like Dr. John Money, who believed that gender identity was a social construct. He believed that in cases like Chase's, parents should simply choose the gender they wanted to raise they child and given that encouragement the child would adopt that gender.

Money stands in opposition not only to Chase, but also to Nutt's own arguments. Nutt proves repeatedly how one's gender identity is an innate part of a person, not something that they can change by social pressures (as Wyatt's case also clearly indicates).

Money's most well-known example was a child born in August 1965: a baby boy named Bruce. A cauterization to correct an obstruction accidentally burned off Bruce's penis as an infant. Money convinced the parents to raise Bruce as "Brenda," and so his testicles were removed, he was dressed and treated as a girl, and was unknowingly administered female hormones during puberty. Brenda neither felt nor acted female, however, and became depressed and suicidal as a teenager. His parents told him the truth, and he transitioned at 14 to being male.

Nutt provides another example in which the lack of knowledge surrounding gender identity proved detrimental for a patient. Money's belief that gender was not a part of one's "nature" but instead a part of one's "nurture" proved to be false, and the actions taken as a result of Money's theory altered the course of Bruce's life.

Brenda renamed himself David Reimer and had a mastectomy, testosterone injections, and phalloplasty surgeries to rebuild a penis. He married and adopted children but remained tortured by what had happened and committed suicide in 2004, at 38 years old. Throughout this process, Money published articles extolling the success of the experiment, until the 1990s when the psychiatrist who treated Brenda exposed the truth about Money.

Money's lack of knowledge (or more likely, his willful ignorance and refusal to accept that his belief was wrong) led to Reimer's psychological torment and eventual suicide. Nutt thus shows the danger in the belief that one's gender identity is socially constructed and changeable.

Gradually, it became more accepted that gender is innate, but Reimer's case did not explain how there could be a disconnect between anatomy and gender identity. The idea that someone born a male would want to be female was (and often still is today) considered a psychiatric problem, not a medical one. Transgender people were regarded as "scientifically inexplicable."

Nutt makes it a project of her book to prove just the opposite of Money's theory: that being transgender does not have a psychiatric remedy, it requires medical treatment instead.

Only in the past decade has gender come to be regarded as a spectrum. The first institutions to adopt nonbinary gender classifications have been mostly academic. Yet despite gender being regarded as a spectrum, transgender people can still be firmly rooted in one gender identity or another. Transgender people "may agree that gender is a spectrum, but they also know exactly where they fall on it." In a test meant to measure gender identity, there is no difference between the answers of transgender (biologically male) girls and cisgender (biologically female) girls.

This point serves as another culmination of Nutt's arguments. Gender and sex are not always black and white, male and female, as the beginning of this chapter laid out very clearly. However, one's sense of gender identity is usually innate and unalterable.

For transgender people, whose bodies are at odds with their ideas of themselves, the only way out of the alienation is to make the body congruent with the mind. But often in the past (and still today) doctors prescribe intensive therapy. Some parents, however, believe that forcing their child to go through puberty in a body that is foreign to them would be deeply damaging.

Nutt elaborates on how the problem is a medical one, not a psychiatric one. It is impossible to alter one's gender identity, but it is not impossible to alter one's own presentation or sexual anatomy to match that gender identity.

Prior to the 21st century, all sex reassignment surgeries were performed on fully developed men and women, and often the psychological consequences of doing so as a fully-grown adult can be devastating if the results do not meet expectations. On April 26, 2007, 50-year-old Mike Penner, a veteran sports journalist at the *Los Angeles Times* announced that he would be leaving for a few weeks' vacation and would return as Christine Daniels. He confessed to his readers that he was "transsexual."

Nutt demonstrates why transitioning as a person who has not yet reached puberty can be more effective than doing so as a grown adult, because that medical intervention is far easier. Christine's tragic story indicates some of the struggles with transitioning late in life.

Although Christine's public declaration was liberating, the adoption of a life as a woman was difficult. After Christine's first appearance at a sporting event with her new identity, another journalist wrote in his own blog, "I hate to be judgmental about these things, but Christine is not an attractive woman. She looks like a guy in a dress, pretty much." This was cruel and devastating to Christine.

Christine's struggles not only stem from the medical hardships that come from transitioning, but also from the discrimination and judgment of others. The abuse that Christine endures at the hands of others makes it difficult for her to feel accepted as a woman.

Later, Christine agreed to do a story about her transition with *Vanity Fair* magazine. But when the photo shoot became a disaster, the reporter pulled the plug. Meanwhile, Daniels' wife filed for divorce and she lost friends. Mired in depression, Daniels stopped taking female hormones and decided to revert to being male. Thus, it was as Mike, dressed in male clothes, that Penner took his life on November 27, 2009.

While this chapter focuses on a variety of different gender identities, Christine's story is emblematic of the issues that transgender people specifically face. Her tragic outcome illuminates why individuals are often so intent on transitioning at a young age—they want to avoid the same ridicule and cruelty that drove Penner to take his own life.

CHAPTER 15: PERPETRATING GENDER

For much of history, gender classifications have been very rigid. They were viewed as "integral to the creation of economies that depended on a division of labor, inheritance laws, even religious rites." Gender boundaries were maintained even at the highest levels of the Catholic Church. It was said that one pope was subjected to a genital examination in order to ascertain that he was, in fact, a man. This incident came out of a disputed claim that in the ninth century, a monk who was actually a woman was made pope.

While in her earlier chapters, Nutt explored some of the science behind sex and gender, Nutt takes a few chapters to demonstrate how having a binary sense of gender has become ingrained in society in a way that often leads to discrimination against those who fall outside of that binary. Once again, she aims to dispel the myths that have long been held.

Gender "frauds" have more frequently been perpetrated in the world of sports. At the 1936 Olympics, high jumper Hermann Ratjen competed as Dora Ratjen, an impersonation that went undetected for two years—though still did not place above fourth. At the same Olympics, a female sprinter named Helen Stephens was accused of being male, which was not true. However, one of Stephens' biggest competitors, Stella Walsh, was killed years later, and when Stella's body was autopsied it was discovered she had a nonfunctioning micropenis and mostly male chromosomes.

Transgender women competing in sporting events is one of those contentious arenas that has often led to discrimination. But as Nutt will prove, and as these two stories imply, people who have some biologically male attributes do not necessarily have an advantage over competitors who do not have those attributes, as in the case of Hermann Ratjen and Stella Walsh.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) instituted genetic testing in 1968, but were faced with difficult decisions in 1996, when seven of the eight women who tested positive for the presence of male chromosomes were determined to have androgen insensitivity syndrome, which caused them to be born with normal-looking female genitals but undescended testes and a short vagina (or none at all). The confusion caused the IOC to stop gender testing three years later, concluding that no one test could confirm that someone was 100 percent male or female. In 2004 the IOC allowed transgender athletes to compete as long as they'd undergone sex reassignment surgery and completed two years of hormone replacement therapy.

The IOC ultimately recognized its own ignorance when seeing what Nutt proved in her earlier chapters: gender and sex are a system that work together, but which can have many variations. In recognizing this fact, the IOC stopped discriminating against those women who do not necessarily have the same genetic makeup as others.

Still, transgender women are often a source of contention in athletics. In 2014, a transgender woman named Chloie Jönsson sued CrossFit after it barred her from competing in the women's division of its annual strength competition. She had undergone sex reassignment surgery eight years earlier and had been taking female hormones since then. CrossFit's letter read, "The fundamental, ineluctable fact is that a male competitor who has a sex reassignment procedure still has a genetic makeup that confers a physical and physiological advantage over women."

CrossFit's letter demonstrates its own ignorance and, additionally, its discrimination. Calling Jönsson a "male competitor" fundamentally misunderstands—and also insults—Jönsson's identity, and what gender consists of. Still, many readers likely hold the same belief that underlies CrossFit's letter—a belief that Nutt will go on to dispel.

The NCAA's handbook on transgender athletes makes it clear that CrossFit's argument is off-base: according to medical experts, "the assumption that a transgender woman competing on a women's team would have a competitive advantage outside the range of performance [...] that already exists among female athletes is not supported by evidence." Doctors and scientists agree that after a year on female hormones or male hormone suppressants, any advantage a transgender athlete might have had is gone.

Again, Nutt corrects mistaken assumptions and common knowledge that many people have. Transgender women do not have a competitive advantage over cisgender women, and therefore much of the controversy surrounding these athletes is simply due to prejudice.

CHAPTER 16: NATURE'S ANOMALIES

In 2007, there were few medical experts on transgender people, but Dr. Norman Spack had just opened the Gender Management Service at Boston Children's Hospital. He had begun his career as a pediatric endocrinologist and had worked at a nonprofit group that served homeless youth in Boston. Spack noticed that he seemed to see the same kids over and over—those who said they were gay or who were, he came to understand, transgender.

Spack's personal journey to become a specialist for transgender children is another example of the idea that gathering information is the best way to help those who face discrimination. Contrary to Wyatt's experience, kids are often kicked out of their homes simply because of their gender identity—and Spack aims to help them.

Spack agreed to treat his first transgender patient, a transgender man who was a student at Harvard, on the condition that he teach Spack about being transgender. Soon, Spack began to travel to learn more about the treatment of transgender people in other countries, particularly in the Netherlands. There, an endocrinologist named Louis Gooren taught Spack about the possibility of treating transgender kids before they go through puberty.

Spack tries to gather knowledge from the best possible source he can: first, from someone who is transgender, and from someone in another country who is a leader in the field. Armed with this knowledge, Spack is then able to help others in the United States. He is able to recognize, just as Nutt has detailed, that the treatment for transgender patients lies in a medical solution.

In 2006, Wyatt becomes one of Spack's first American transgender pediatric patients. Spack puts Wyatt at ease by telling him that he can take puberty-blocking drugs and would never have a visible Adam's apple, deepened voice, accelerated height, or facial hair. At 12, Wyatt will take puberty suppressants; at 16, he can take female hormones; and at 18, Wyatt can have sex reassignment surgery.

The initial steps for Wyatt's transition already put him at ease, as Nutt describes here. Spack alleviates much of Wyatt's anxiety by detailing how they can transform his body in order to match his gender expression and identity. This will allow him to live comfortably and completely as a female, both mentally and physically.

Wyatt asks why he can't start the hormones immediately. Spack tells Wyatt that it would stunt his growth, and so they will have to wait until it looks like Jonas is beginning puberty. Jonas is happy to contribute somehow to Wyatt's transition. For Wayne, he finally realizes that Wyatt's transition is going to happen "with or without him." For Kelly, she is relieved to have someone who is knowledgeable and to whom she could entrust her child's care.

This moment is a turning point for the family as they all gather together to support Wyatt's transition. Additionally, Kelly is thrilled by Spack's presence because for so long she had been trying to wade through information alone. Now, she has a supporter and someone whose information can help her take care of her child.

CHAPTER 17: BEING DIFFERENT

There is one large difference in the school when Wyatt starts fifth grade: this section of the school has multi-stall bathrooms divided by gender, which represents a "psychosocial leap of enormous proportions" for Wyatt. The use of bathrooms is fraught with controversy for transgender people, who typically prefer to use the bathrooms of the gender with which they identify.

Using the girls' bathroom is a natural step for Wyatt, as it aligns with his gender expression and identity. As Nutt notes in the following chapter, the only outward thing that is still "boyish" about Wyatt is his name. In all other ways he is a girl, and so it makes sense that his bathroom use would match that identity.

Erhardt submits a Section 504 form to the Special Services office of the board of education so that Wayne and Kelly can be involved in meetings with teachers and school staff to evaluate Wyatt's needs. The 504 is used to prevent discrimination against any children with disabilities or impairments. At first, Kelly's not sure it's appropriate, but Erhardt convinces Kelly that his gender dysphoria diagnosis qualifies him for it. The most important result of their first meeting is that all agree Wyatt should use the girls' bathroom.

At first, it seems like Wyatt's use of the girls' bathroom is protected by the Section 504 form, and it is notable that the school staff seems completely on board with this at the moment. But neither Wyatt's peers nor the school administration will prove to be so accepting, demonstrating that just because there are protocols of accommodation in place does not mean that others will conform to those guidelines.

Kelly also petitions the Maine Principals Association, which regulates team sports, so that Wyatt can play on the girls' softball team rather than the boys' baseball team. She educates the softball organization and consults with an attorney in order to explain that Wyatt's rights are protected by the state of Maine. Kelly also writes to the regional Little League office, referring to Wyatt with feminine pronouns and nouns for the first time: "Our daughter will be joining her team." Two weeks later, the regional office approves the request for Wyatt to play.

Kelly's successful efforts to allow Wyatt to play on the girls' team are important: first, her shift in language in reference to Wyatt is notable. It demonstrates a shift in the way she thinks about Wyatt, and thus the way she is asking the Association to think about Wyatt. She is not asking for her son *to join the team; she is asking for her* daughter *to join the team. This language allows for them to better understand Wyatt's situation and approve her petition.*


Wyatt is excited to play on the girls' team but is worried about having to wear a cup and an athletic supporter. He tells Dr. Holmes his concerns about how he is anxious about being different than the other girls underneath it all. Dr. Holmes understands his concerns and tells him how special it is that "he knows who he is in spite of all the evidence." Before Wyatt leaves her office, he gives Dr. Holmes a big hug.

Dr. Holmes's ability to understand Wyatt's situation and to lift him up rather than put him down for his identity proves key. She gives him a sense of pride and of feeling special by accepting his gender identity despite the concerns and taunts that he may face.


CHAPTER 18: BECOMING NICOLE

Kelly and Wayne gradually become more lenient with Wyatt's gender expression, now allowing him wear all the feminine clothes he wanted. They also decide that it might be an appropriate time for a name change. Wyatt chooses the name Nicole, after a character from one of his favorite TV shows.

Just as in the previous chapter, in which Kelly refers to Wyatt with feminine pronouns and nouns, changing Wyatt's name to Nicole provides a shift in others' thinking. It allows people to better understand Wyatt's gender identity and think of him as the girl that he feels he is.

Kelly discovers, however, that any official name change in Maine is by law announced in the newspaper. Kelly wants to keep this change out of the public eye, particularly because of the anti-gay, anti-transgender, and politically active Christian Civic League of Maine. She wants to make sure to protect Wyatt from their harassment.

Although Kelly is not ashamed of having a transgender child, it is important to her to keep this information out of the public view in order to avoid potential discrimination and harassment from the Christian Civic League.

Kelly and Wayne file a petition to have the name change kept from the newspaper. They appear in court in front of an elderly judge, who asks why they're changing their son's name to a girls' name. Their lawyer explains that Wyatt is transgender, and that the Maineses want to keep the change private because of recent protests by the Christian Civic League. The judge counters that maybe the Christian Civic League should "have their say."

The judge's line of questioning implies that he, too, bears the same kind of prejudice and might agree with the Christian Civic League. Yet the Maineses, too, are making judgments based on the judge's appearance, as they acknowledge when he rules in their favor.

At this statement, Wayne stands and speaks in front of the judge. He explains that Wyatt had been expressing feelings that he was a girl since he was two, and they are convinced now that he should be allowed to transition to living as a girl. Kelly is amazed: Wayne has finally admitted that he agrees with Kelly and wants Wyatt to make a full transition. Kelly also speaks on Wyatt's behalf.

This moment is a turning point for Wayne. Whereas before he had been primarily concerned with having a normal-seeming family, here, when it matters most, he is fully supportive of his child. He understands that his love and his ability to advocate for Wyatt should come before anything else.

The judge looks over the case and says, "I see no reason to deny your request […] You are obviously very concerned about your child's safety." Kelly and Wayne are relieved and realize that their own assumptions based on the judge's appearance had been wrong. The petition is granted, and Wyatt Benjamin Maines becomes Nicole Amber Maines.

Nicole's name change is a key part of her transition, as is using feminine pronouns. It allows for a change in the way people think of Nicole—not as a boy who enjoys feminine things, but as a girl.

CHAPTER 19: A NEW ADVERSARY

Jonas adapts easily to Nicole's new name, but Wayne is nervous about explaining the name change to his friends and family. But to Wayne's relief, his friends; his parents, Bill and Betty; and his brother Billy are completely unsurprised. There are no judgments or rejections. They simply say they want what's best for Nicole.

Like Wayne, his relatives know that the most important thing is to support Nicole. This also represents another hurdle that Wayne is able to overcome, in fully acknowledging to his family that he has a transgender daughter.

Nicole begins the fifth grade in 2007 and immediately her nerves are dissipated. She wears her first skirt on the third day of classes. She is quickly elected class vice president, signs up for choir and viola, and joins a team of girls in a program for math, science and arts.

Nicole's transition in school also demonstrates how, for the most part, kids are accepting of difference and have an innate sense of equality—often more so than adults. They know that Nicole had once been Wyatt but are completely accepting of her being proud of her identity.

There are hints of issues coming up, however: one day, the mother of another fifth-grade girl calls Lisa Erhardt and says that she had become a little worried about Nicole using the girls' bathroom when she is still anatomically a boy, since her own daughter is about to go through puberty. Erhardt assures her that the last thing Nicole wants is for anyone to see her "birth genitals." Now knowing this, the mother agrees that it is fine for Nicole to use the girls' bathroom.

This episode represents another aspect of why it is important to educate others on transgender issues. When the mother of this fifth-grade girl is informed about Nicole's perspective, and because Lisa Erhardt has done the research to be able to give her that information, she becomes much more tolerant of Nicole's presence in the girls' bathroom.

Soon after, there is an issue with another fifth-grade boy, Jacob, and his grandfather and guardian, Paul Melanson. Melanson believes "men and women [are] not interchangeable" and that people should not be allowed to "choose" their own gender. Melanson visits the acting principal, Bob Lucy, to complain about Nicole using the girls' restroom, but Lucy refuses to hear his complaint. Melanson tells Jacob, then, that there is "only one thing to do" about the situation.

Melanson's discrimination against transgender people as a whole, and against Nicole in particular, is also borne of ignorance about the issues. Nicole does not think that men and women are interchangeable either, nor does she "choose" her gender: she simply innately feels that she is a girl despite having male sexual anatomy.

CHAPTER 20: FREAK

A few weeks into the school year, Nicole and her friend are using the girls' bathroom when Jacob walks in. He calls Nicole a "faggot" and uses one of the stalls. A moment later, their teacher Mrs. Molloy storms in demanding to know what he's doing in the bathroom. Jacob explains that he's just "a boy using the girls' bathroom," and that if Nicole can go in, so can he.

It is in this incident that Nicole has her first real experience of discrimination. It is also worth noting that Jacob's prejudice is not of his own making—his bullying and attempts to make Nicole feel like an outsider are due to coaching from his grandfather. Prejudice isn't innate; it is learned.

Mrs. Molloy marches Jacob into Erhardt's office. Erhardt then speaks with Bob Lucy and Nicole and her friends. Nicole's friends reveal that Jacob had been calling her a faggot behind her back. The girls return to their classroom, but Jacob does not. When Nicole gets home from school, she began to cry to Kelly. She'd done nothing wrong, and yet she'd been embarrassed in front of her friends. For the first time, she felt "freakish."

Jacob's behavior and language shows how discrimination can be so hurtful. It makes Nicole ashamed of her identity, which is not something that she is able to change. He is bullying her even though she has done nothing wrong.

Kelly tries to call Erhardt, but Bob Lucy had instructed Erhardt not to speak to the Maineses about the incident. She is furious, and calls the school administrator, Kelly Clenchy. She and Wayne want Jacob moved into a different fifth-grade classroom and want Nicole, who's been temporarily barred from the girls' bathroom, to be able to use it again. Clenchy says they can't allow that.

The school also begins to show its complicity in Jacob's discrimination toward Nicole. Not only does the school not want Kelly and Wayne to be able to speak to staff about Nicole's safety, but they are also taking no steps to ensure that the incident doesn't repeat itself.

Over the next few days, Jacob continues to watch Nicole and follow her whenever she's in the hallway. In early October, Jacob follows Nicole again into the girls' bathroom. She comes home crying once more. Kelly calls special services director Sharon Brady, who agrees that Jacob had violated their agreement with the school but says that they can only guarantee Nicole's safety in the staff bathroom, not the student bathroom.

Due to the school's lack of punishment towards Jacob, there is nothing discouraging him from further abuse towards Nicole. And even though Nicole is following the school's initial recommendation that she use the girls' bathroom, they have taken no actions to guarantee that she can use that bathroom safely.

The next day, Kelly and Wayne call the Orono police department. The police visit Paul Melanson at his home, but Melanson does not back down. He insists that Jacob should have the same rights as "that boy," referring to Nicole. Melanson assures them that he would stop what he was doing if they assured him Nicole would no longer use the girls' restroom.

The irony of Melanson's actions is that he feels that Nicole is somehow infringing upon Jacob's rights. However, Jacob isn't losing any rights—it is Nicole who is then deemed unable to use the restroom that the school assigned to her.

CHAPTER 21: THE CHRISTIAN CIVIC LEAGUE OF MAINE

One day at school, Jacob sits next to Jonas during lunch. Jonas resists the bait, but Kelly and Wayne immediately send more emails to the staff at the elementary school, as well as attorney Bruce Bell at the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD) organization. They want everyone to know that Nicole is suffering and depressed because of Jacob's actions.

As Nutt demonstrates later in this chapter, Nicole's experience with discrimination under the law is hardly unique, which is why organizations like GLAD are so important in fighting the inequality that she faces.

The staff decide that they will monitor Nicole and Jacob to avoid any "unplanned encounters" between them. Officer Andy Whitehouse will visit the school to establish a police presence, and a bathroom sign-in/sign-out procedure will be instated. Kelly and Wayne are confused; this plan is not what they were expecting. There is no commitment to addressing Jacob's behavior; only about policing Nicole.

Again, the school doubles down on the fact that it is complicit in the Melansons' discrimination, despite the fact that Jacob's continued actions are clearly bullying and are deeply upsetting to Nicole. Instead, however, they simply continue to take away Nicole's right to use the girls' bathroom.

A front-page headline is later published in the *Bangor Daily News*: "Grandfather Plans Rights Suit Over Boy Using Girls' Bathroom." Though the Maineses are not identified by name, they now felt targeted by people beyond the school, including the Christian Civic League of Maine. The League promotes itself as trying to bring a biblical perspective to public policy, including the idea that gender is assigned at birth by God and is evidenced in sexual anatomy. The executive director, Michael Heath, called gay people "pure evil" and advocates of gay rights "children of the devil." He writes an op-ed in response to the first article arguing that adults and children should not be allowed to "decide the gender of biological males."

Nutt continues to show how the discrimination against Nicole is aided by these various institutions. The Bangor Daily News *headline contributes to people's misunderstanding of Nicole's identity. By characterizing her as a boy using the girls' bathroom, the article completely disregards Nicole's gender identity as a girl. And again, in publishing Michael Heath's op-ed, the paper continues to spread misinformation. Nicole is not "deciding" her gender, as the first part of the book has made abundantly clear. She is expressing the gender that she feels herself to be innately.*


Nicole's situation is hardly unique. Several weeks later, Brianna Freeman is having lunch with friends in a Denny's in Auburn, Maine, when she gets up to use the restroom. A restaurant manager tells her that because her sex at birth was male, she can only use the men's restroom. Freeman is in the process of transitioning and presents in every way as female: she has long red hair, wears makeup and feminine clothes, and is taking female hormones. She sues the owner of the Denny's franchise, asserting that using the men's room would be inappropriate and unsafe for her.

Nutt zooms out to provide some context for the discrimination Nicole is facing, and how many transgender people face the same discrimination. It is particularly present in the realms of bathroom and other public facility use, as Nutt has noted in an earlier chapter. Having clarified Nicole's experience, Nutt guides her readers to have a more sympathetic view of transgender people as a whole.

By December, the antagonism against the Maineses has increased. Michael Heath continues to write editorials on their website excoriating the Maineses, though never by name. He writes that "ten year old boys should not even be thinking about whether they are a boy or a girl," and closing his editorial by asking for financial contributions. Kelly and Wayne fear that the League is just beginning its fight.

Nutt also conveys how this discrimination invites the growth of more prejudice, as Heath asks for financial contributions that will presumably aid legal battles against the Maineses. This ongoing struggle is what ultimately prompts the Maineses to make drastic decisions about their family's safety, showing just how detrimental ignorance can be when weaponized through highly public outlets like newspapers.

CHAPTER 22: DEFENDING NICOLE

Ever since Nicole publicly transitioned, Wayne explained to Jonas that he needed to protect his sister—a thought that was confusing to Jonas, as Nicole was always more aggressive than he was. Sometimes this means answering questions from others about Nicole's gender identity, but usually it just makes Jonas paranoid that someone might threaten Nicole.

Just as Kelly and Wayne find their individual ways to love and support Nicole, Jonas is charged with his own way to support Nicole: to make sure that she is safe within their elementary school. This is yet another dimension of the strong, immutable bond that exists between the twins.

One day, Jacob joins a game of four square in which Jonas is playing. The two quickly get into a fight, and Jacob calls Nicole a "fag." Jonas jumps on Jacob's back, and Jacob swiftly flings Jonas to the ground. Both boys are punished, losing recess for the next two weeks. When Kelly and Wayne hear of the incident, they tell Jonas that they understand his frustration but that he can't get into physical fights.

This fight illustrates how Jacob's discrimination is affecting the whole family. They are proud and supportive of Nicole, but consequently, they, too, become targets of the harassment she experiences.

On Tuesday, December 18, 2007, Paul Melanson appears in front of the school board at a meeting. He expresses his distress that "this little boy is being treated as a little girl." A board member stops him, saying that the student is using the appropriate bathroom, and that they would not discuss the matter further.

Melanson's comments demonstrate his continued ignorance—perhaps even willful ignorance—regarding Nicole's situation, in that he insists that she is a "little boy" even though she clearly identifies as a girl. Melanson's belief that gender is solely determined by sex is, as Nutt has proven, misguided.

The incident makes the local news and papers. None of the outlets mention the Maineses by name, but the story is being discussed everywhere, including online forums and blogs. Some comment that Wayne and Kelly should be "arrested for child abuse" for helping Nicole "persist in the mental illness."

The commenter's statements prove a point that Nutt makes in an earlier chapter: for so long, variance in gender and sexuality was treated as a psychological problem. Nutt argues, on the other hand, that it is more important and successful to treat it as a medical one.

A letter to the school from Melanson's lawyer argues that they are discriminating against Jacob because of his "sexual orientation" because they are letting another boy use the girls' bathroom and not him. Melanson himself believes that his rights "are being infringed upon every time his country invent[s] new ones for special interest groups."

Nutt displays the irony in Melanson's thinking. He believes that Nicole using the girls' bathroom means Jacob is somehow losing rights, when in reality his discrimination only causes Nicole *to lose the right to use the student bathroom.*

CHAPTER 23: MAY I HAVE THIS DANCE?

Nicole continues to use the staff bathroom at school, which doesn't bother her too much. However, gradually she starts to feel as though she is being punished for something that Jacob had done. As the second half of the year begins, Nicole starts to use the girls' restroom again without permission. Jacob notices soon after and starts to walk in with her. Later, Nicole is told that she shouldn't have been using the girls' bathroom, which makes her feel like the school is pointing out that she is not normal.

As Jacob's bullying continues, Nutt demonstrates how the school becomes complicit in the discrimination that Nicole is facing. Not only is she given unequal treatment, in that she is forced to use the staff bathroom, but she is also punished and made to feel abnormal for the harassing behavior of another student.

Kelly tries to educate the school about transgender issues to help turn them around, but she slowly realizes that ignorance on the issues isn't the only reason for the school's stubbornness. She decides to file a complaint with the Maine Human Rights Commission alleging that the school had violated the Maine Human Rights Act by excluding Nicole from the girls' bathroom.

Kelly recognizes that the school's bias goes past its ignorance on the issue at hand. Jacob's behavior would presumably be unacceptable if Nicole were not transgender, but the unusual situation of her gender identity seems to stop them from punishing Jacob for his actions.

A few months earlier, Nicole had announced that there would be a father-daughter Valentine's Day dance, and Wayne agreed to go. The dance is a family affair, and they all dress up. Wayne knows that he has been on a longer journey than anyone else in the family to accept Nicole. When they arrive, Wayne asks his daughter, "May I have this dance?" They glide together, finding their rhythm. At the end of the dance, Nicole says, "Thank you, Daddy." He answers, "I love you, Nicole."

Wayne accompanying Nicole to the Valentine's Day dance demonstrates the kind of transformation that he himself has undergone in how he thinks of his daughter and her rights. Wayne is able to see that loving his daughter is more important than having a "normal" family, but he also has the added benefit of being able to be just like all the other fathers and daughters, dancing together proudly.

CHAPTER 24: SHE'S ALL GIRL

In early 2008, Melanson holds a press conference with the Christian Civic League, arguing along with several students from the school that Nicole should not be allowed to use the bathroom until she has a "sex change." The following day, a poll is included during election day asking whether a 12-year-old boy who identifies as a girl should be allowed to use the girls' bathroom. 82.8 percent say no.

The fact that the poll is so skewed speaks to the problematic way in which it was taken. Not only does it frame Nicole as a boy, rather than the girl that she is, but it also makes no effort to educate people on the issues. Thus, it is likely that many go into the poll without understanding what it means to be transgender, and therefore are unsympathetic to Nicole.

Despite these numbers, the Maineses receive many messages from friends and parents in the school district arguing that Melanson's behavior is a perfect example of how not to conduct themselves. They also receive many responses from young people, explaining how they've learned about being transgender and that there's nothing wrong with Nicole using the girls' bathroom.

The ignorance highlighted in the poll is perfectly contrasted with the responses from friends and family members—that is, people who know Nicole and understands what it means for her to be transgender. Her mere presence in the school and Kelly's constant advocacy for her daughter give the other students and parents the tools to understand and sympathize with Nicole's situation.

Reading some of the negative articles emboldens Wayne and shows him how Nicole needs him to fight for her rights. He also starts to realize that he'd "spent too much time dwelling on the loss of a son and had never really considered the special rewards of a daughter." One day, when he's taking the twins to go shopping, Wayne reaches out to hold their hands to cross the street. Jonas pulls his hand away, but Nicole takes her father's hand and they swing arms all the way across the street.

Wayne had spent so much of Nicole's childhood viewing her as an atypical boy, but when he is able to transform his way of thinking about her, he realizes that he can think about her as just a typical girl, and starts to recognize all of the special aspects of having a relationship with a daughter.

CHAPTER 25: EYES ON

By the end of fifth grade, a staff person follows Nicole everywhere in an "eyes-on" policy meant to protect her. When sixth grade begins, not much changes except for the building, which is adjacent to the elementary school.

Even though the "eyes-on" policy is meant to protect Nicole, it starts to feel like yet another way of singling her out and making her feel that she is being punished instead of Jacob.

A few weeks after the start of sixth grade, Nicole takes an all-day workshop with an arts organization, spending the day in the high school. On a break for dinner, Nicole tries to use the girls' restroom, because there is no gender-neutral bathroom in the high school. But older students top her, taunting her and telling her she can't use the restroom. When Kelly reports this incident, the assistant principal essentially argues that it was Nicole's fault because she is meant to be using the gender-neutral bathroom. He concludes that Nicole "was not harassed during this incident."

Because Jacob's behavior goes unpunished, other students also take it upon themselves to bully Nicole and limit her behavior. The school seems to completely ignore not only the fact that it has not provided her with the proper facilities, but also the fact that these students' behavior is harassment, regardless of whether or not Nicole is following the rules. It is not up to the other students to determine what Nicole can and cannot do, and their teasing simply reinforces the fact that the school is actively discriminating against her.

The school's policies—particularly the "eyes-on" policy on Nicole—begin to wear on the family. In the spring of sixth grade, the school takes the kids on an annual whitewater rafting trip. Nicole is told that she will not be allowed to sleep in the girls' tent and will need a separate tent. Kelly marches into Bob Lucy's office, asking if he thinks Nicole is a predator and whether the gay kids are sleeping in a separate tent too. He has no response. Kelly decides that this is the last straw.

Much of the school's policy on Nicole, and much of the way other kids treat her, seems to stem from a harmful false association that existed (and still exists to this day), in which people assume that transgender and gay people will somehow bring harm to the other people who sharing the public accommodations. But just because Nicole is transgender, as Kelly notes, does not mean that she is a predator.

Nicole is anxious and angry. She started seeing a new mental health counselor, named Christine Talbott, after Dr. Holmes retired. Talbott tries to help Nicole have a positive outlook and find better ways to ease her own anxiety than plucking out her eyebrows. Still, Nicole is exhausted: Jacob harassed her twice in May, including mocking her for having a "mustache." She frequently imagines killing Jacob and the girls who tease her.

The fact that the discrimination Nicole faces at school is so persistent makes it clear that being out as a LGBT individual can sometimes, as in this instance, be very unsafe because of others' prejudice and harassment.

One day in April, Nicole admits to Kelly and Wayne that she had been about to go into the girls' restroom when Bob Lucy had noticed her, whistled loudly at her and pointed at her to use the staff restroom. She had been mortified. She tells her parents, "I hate being transgendered." In a journal entry addressed, "Dear Universe," she asks why her behavior seems so threatening to everyone else and expresses concern that so many transgender people are suicidal, yet their sex reassignment surgeries aren't covered by insurance companies. She wishes that the LGBT community could be safer.

Bob Lucy's treatment indicates to Nicole that the school is not actually interested in making sure that she is protected and has equal rights. It is more concerned with avoiding the controversy that was instigated by Paul and Jacob Melanson. Additionally, Nicole's plea to the universe addresses several other aspects of the obstacles that the LGBT community faces.

CHAPTER 26: THE TRANSGENDER BRAIN

Nutt examines the physiological evidence for being transgender. One source may lie in the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis (or BNST), an area of the brain that is responsible for sex and anxiety responses, which is twice the size in men as in women. Scientists find that the BNST in transgender women looks exactly like those of cisgender (biologically female) women and is not affected after sex reassignment surgery or hormonal treatment. For cisgender (biologically male) men treated with estrogen for testicular cancer, the scientists found no shrinkage of their BNST.

Nutt returns to another scientific chapter in order to provide yet more information: in this case, what the biological source of being transgender might be. The fact that the BNST is the same in both transgender women and cisgender women, but not cisgender men treated with hormones, provides a strong case for the neurological basis of one's sense of gender.

In 2008, Australian researchers discovered a genetic variation in transgender women: their receptor gene for testosterone was less efficient at signaling the uptake of male hormones in utero, resulting in a more "feminized" brain.

While both of the examples Nutt gives are due to adjustments in the brain, it is important to note that these are not changes which can be solved with therapy, as many (wrongly) suggest is the sole way to treat transgender people.

Nutt then addresses how two identical twins like Nicole and Jonas could share DNA but have a different gender identity. The answer, she posits, can be found in epigenetics, which looks at the environmental triggers that turn certain genes "on" or "off." Those triggers often depend on the environment inside the womb, which differs for each twin since he or she each floats in his or her own amniotic sac and has his or her own umbilical cord. This is why identical twins also have unique fingerprints.

Nutt provides even further information on a confusion borne of Nicole and Jonas's situation specifically: she enlightens her readers as to the fact that twins may share the same DNA but do not have all the same physical features or genetic expressions. She reminds readers of a common knowledge example of this idea in order to make it more readily understandable.

Epigenetics causes researchers to question the Darwinian principle of sexual selection: the idea that there are two genders because it helps ensure the survival of the species. Under these rules, traits like homosexuality are outliers, decreasing survival because they do not aid in reproduction. Nature contradicts these Darwinian theories, however. Sex change is a normal process in many fish species. There are intersex deer and male kangaroos with pouches. In 2015 researchers discovered a species of Australian lizard that changes sex when the temperature rises. These examples complicate the idea that only two genders enhance survival.

Nutt makes a concession to some of the theories that hold that being gay or transgender isn't supported by sexual selection, but then counters that these variations are found innately in nature. Her examples support the point that multiple sexes and genders exist beyond the binary in nature. This is an important fact, because people who exist outside of this binary often face discrimination (as Nutt elaborates on in the next chapter) and are widely considered outsiders.

Some human societies embrace the reality of multiple genders. In Papua New Guinea, a third gender is recognized: individuals who appear mostly female at birth but masculinize at puberty. This same group is recognized in the Dominican Republic. In India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, millions belong to a transgender group known as the *hijra*, who, according to ancient myths, could confer luck and fertility. In Indonesia, the Bugis people believe there are five genders. Gender might be necessary, but not necessarily binary.

Nutt admits that having two genders is biologically necessary due to how humans have evolved, but that does not mean that only two genders must exist, nor that biological differences aren't already found. She also cites other societies that have accepted these variations throughout history in order to contrast those societies with the U.S., which has often been intolerant and unaccepting by comparison.

CHAPTER 27: GENDER OF THE HEART

The legal rights of transgender people are often limited based on antiquated ideas and stereotypes of gender. In 2013, a girl was sent home from her Christian school saying that she had to start dressing more like a girl in order to follow suit with her "God-ordained identity." In the same year, a 13-year-old boy was suspended from his school in Kansas for carrying a purse. And in 2015, a North Carolina school told a nine-year-old boy to leave his *My Little Pony* lunch box at home because it was a "trigger for bullying."

Nutt illustrates how a rigid, old-fashioned acceptance of the gender binary hurts even those who are not gay or transgender. Even those who simply prefer styles, activities, and clothing associated with a different gender than people perceive them to be, often face the same kinds of discrimination and do not have the freedom to truly express themselves.

There are also some positive stories, such as a woman who complained about a transgender woman using the female locker facilities at Planet Fitness and had her membership revoked because her behavior was "inappropriate and disruptive to other members."

The Planet Fitness anecdote stands in direct opposition with Nicole's experiences at school. Instead of discriminating against the transgender woman for her mere presence, the gym refuses to allow the prejudice to continue and doles out a punishment accordingly.

There are also controversies in all-women's colleges, who largely still consider only those who identify themselves as female on their applications. Some trans men, however, want to go to the school or transition while at school, arguing that they feel physically and psychologically safer at women's colleges. Jennifer Finney Boylan writes that the only test for a person's gender is "what lies within her, or his, heart."

This is another realm in which society's opinions are slowly transforming. Universities are reconsidering how to navigate questions of gender identity in the context of gendered institutions. Nutt's conclusion, quoting Jennifer Finney Boylan, suggests that a person's gender identity and where they feel they belong—particularly when they have been historically marginalized—should be taken at face value.

CHAPTER 28: SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL

On June 5, 2009, the Maine Human Rights Commission rules that there are reasonable grounds to move forward with the Maineses' suit against the Orono school district. The Commission recommends "conciliation," which is what Kelly and Wayne want—for Nicole to be integrated into the school in the way other girls were.

The initial ruling helps to validate the Maineses' opinion that the school was complicit in discrimination against Nicole and that the best solution is to stop separating Nicole from her peers and treating her unequally.

While they wait, the Maines family learns that Wayne's father, Bill, was hurt in an accident in which his clothes caught on fire. He was unable to recover from his burns. The family attends the funeral together, and Nicole thinks of all the good memories she has of her grandfather. But she is saddened by the fact that he will never see her in "the body she was meant to have."

Nicole's grandfather's death reminds her of the love and support that her family (including Bill) has always showed her, but also that she still doesn't feel like her body fully belongs to her yet. This tragedy re-inspires her commitment to transitioning to a body that fully expresses her gender identity.

The school does not respond to the Human Rights Commission's recommendation, and so the Maineses decide to file a civil lawsuit asserting claims for unlawful discrimination in education and public accommodation on the basis of sexual orientation. At the heart of the suit is the question of whether forcing Nicole to use a separate staff-only restroom is constitutional.

The fact that the school refuses to respond to the Human Rights Commission's recommendation only further confirms its unwillingness to change discriminatory policies, which prompts additional legal action and gets GLAD involved in advocating for Nicole.

In the previous 10 years, laws against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity had been gaining traction. In 2015, 18 states prohibit workplace discrimination against transgender people, and 16 have fair housing laws that protect transgender people. Maine is one of those states.

Nutt reminds readers that society and the law are still in a state of transformation regarding transgender rights. More and more states affirm that it is illegal to discriminate based on gender identity as society begins to think of it not as a problem or an oddity but simply another aspect of a person's being.

In June, Kelly has another face-to-face meeting with principal Bob Lucy. She asks what the arrangements will be for Nicole in seventh grade, knowing that the situation had become incredibly toxic. Lucy tells her that the situation will remain the same. Kelly tells him that they will likely have to move because of this. Lucy doesn't respond, but simply smiles.

Lucy's reaction to Kelly's announcement that the Maineses will likely have to move essentially confirms his own prejudice, or at least his complicity in her harassment. He would rather Nicole leave the school and avoid controversy than implement policies to ensure her equal treatment.

Kelly starts to make plans to move to Portland, Maine, 140 miles south of Orono. No one in the family is particularly happy with the news, but they understand that the situation is untenable. Wayne can't leave his job, however—finding another that is equally good seems impossible. And so, they decide to rent a small place in Portland for Kelly and the kids, while Wayne will remain in Orono for the work week. Suddenly, they feel like their lives are "in reverse."

The Maineses' decision to move, despite the fact that it will greatly complicate their lives, shows the extent of the discrimination and how toxic the situation at school has become. Additionally, it shows the unquestionable love among the family and for Nicole, that they decide her safety and well-being is worth uprooting their lives for.

What is worse, no one knows whether the situation will improve in Portland. Nicole and Jonas will go "stealth," and only the principal and teachers at King Middle School will be told that Nicole is transgender. Nicole and Jonas will not be able to tell their new friends about the circumstances that have brought them there.

Nutt hints at one of the biggest struggles they will face in Portland: Nicole will be unable to be out and proud about her identity. Even though this is for her safety and to prevent further discrimination, it comes with its own drawbacks, as well, since she feels like she can't be fully open with her friends.

CHAPTER 29: GOING STEALTH

Wayne helps Kelly, Nicole, and Jonas move into their new home in Portland, which is only two blocks from the University of Southern Maine. The neighborhood has a worn feel from the students using it as off-campus housing, and it takes a while to get used to the noise. Wayne finds himself panicked and depressed at having to break up the family.

Even though the Maineses have made their move in order to help support Nicole, it comes at a cost to their family, too. With Wayne forced to be apart from Kelly, Jonas, and Nicole during the week, he feels that he can't support Kelly in the way he wants to.

Nicole isn't feeling much better. A few weeks after the move, she tells Wayne that transgender kids either "commit suicide or they're killed." She had seen a documentary about a transgender Native American teenager, who had been murdered by an 18-year-old using a rock to bash in his skull. Wayne tries to comfort her, but also warns her that she has to be careful about who she lets into her circle of trust and where she goes.

Nicole feels the burden of discrimination more and more acutely as she continues to see examples of violence against transgender people. This also highlights the importance of positive visibility for transgender youth—the ability to see someone like themselves lead a normal, healthy, safe life like Jennifer Finney Boylan is extremely beneficial in counterbalancing other heartbreaking stories of discrimination and violence against trans people.

On November 25, 2009, Kelly and Wayne file a civil lawsuit against the school, arguing that its policy had intentionally and negligently inflicted emotional distress and had created a hostile educational environment that forced them to leave.

The lawsuit that the Maineses file against the school becomes incredibly important, as winning the case could mean preventing discrimination not only in Nicole's elementary school, but in schools across Maine.

CHAPTER 30: ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

The twins have a difficult time in their new middle school. It is large and unfriendly, and they feel they don't belong. Nicole is acutely aware of leading a "double life" due to her inability to reveal that she is transgender. Two months into the seventh grade, a boy asks her out on a date. She is taken aback and says that she can't, knowing that the boy would likely find out she is trans and expose her secret. She is frustrated that she has fought so long for her transgender identity, yet she is still unable to fully live as a girl Portland.

Nicole is clearly proud of her identity, having been on a long journey in order to be recognized by her family and friends as a transgender girl. But at the same time, she knows that being out could lead to further hardship, and that it seems to be what prevents her from beginning or maintaining a romantic relationship.

Jonas has an equally hard time, withdrawing into his room and into playing music. He is frequently mocked by other students and sometimes gets into physical fights with others, something he is hesitant to tell his parents about. Wayne counsels him not to fight, but instead to tell him and Kelly.

Jonas's and Nicole's difficulties in middle school only heighten the pain of what they faced in elementary school. Although they have escaped the abuse Nicole faced at their old school, it's clear that Nicole having to keep her identity a secret in Portland is having a detrimental impact not only on her, but on the Maines family as a whole.

Nicole has problems with other students, too. The hardest times are when students say things like "that's so gay." She knows that if she objected, she could be outed. She can't challenge others' prejudices because they hit too close to home. She and Jonas also feel acutely that they can't become too close with anyone because they might find out too much.

This is a particularly salient example of the catch-22 of Nicole's situation. She wants to be out in order to fight the prejudice that people carry against the LGBT community, but she cannot be open about who she is for fear that it might lead to her being unsafe again.

Jonas becomes depressed and unengaged, admitting to Kelly that he thinks about cutting himself. He starts seeing a therapist, but also retreats further into his own head. Nicole isolates herself, too, particularly after two incidents in which she is nearly outed. In one incident, a girl asks her point blank if she is transgender, which she denies. Another girl asks her why she always dresses in a stall for gym but doesn't wait for a reply.

The more that Nicole and Jonas feel they aren't meeting the social expectations of their peers, the more isolated and depressed they feel. This worsens to the point where it seems like they can't even rely on or support each other because they are each having such a difficult time. The family is undergoing an enormous amount of strain—one that is potentially worse than it was at Asa C. Adams.

Eighth grade is not much better for the twins. Nicole had been miserable for the last two years at Asa Adams Elementary but was also miserable for the first two years at King Middle School. She begs her mother to be able to tell one person that she is transgender, but Kelly is steadfast. She says that if it goes downhill, they may all have to move again. Eventually, Nicole and Jonas develop a small group of friends, but they always feel emotionally distant. When conversations veer toward more intimate topics, Nicole always holds herself back. People know her, and yet they don't.

Nicole's desire to tell others about her transgender identity, despite the fact that she knows the risk involved, illustrates just how torturous it is to feel like one can't be proud of who they are. For Kelly's part, even though she wants to do right by her daughter, she also wants to make sure that she is supporting the family as a whole and that they can all be safe.

In February 2010, the Maineses are at a breaking point. The cost of living in two different places exceeds $105,000. They also owe $33,800 in fees to their first attorney, whom they have just dropped because he wasn't on top of the case and his son had made disparaging comments about Nicole. Kelly is also worn-down with worry. But a bit of good news arrives in March 2010, when Kelly and Wayne receive word that GLAD will represent them in their legal battles.

GLAD's presence becomes particularly helpful to the Maineses because the organization (which specifically takes on legal battles for the LGBT community) understands the importance of the cases to the community as a whole, and they recognize that Nicole's particular case can have far-reaching consequences for other students.

CHAPTER 31: PUBERTY BEGINS

In early January 2009, Dr. Spack notices signs that Nicole is beginning puberty, and so she immediately starts injections of a puberty-suppressing drug. Meanwhile, Nicole pleads with her parents for a bra and small false breasts. Kelly finally relents, and she finds silicone breasts and bras with pockets for women who have had mastectomies. She finds the smallest ones available and gets them from Nicole, who thinks that they are perfect. Wearing them is "transformative," and Nicole walks around with a new confidence.

Nicole's false breasts are yet another way for her to feel more authentically female. It is not that they physically transform her body, considering that Kelly makes sure they are as small as possible. Instead, they transform the way in which Nicole thinks about herself gives her a newfound confidence in the fact that she can more easily fit in with other girls.

About a year after moving to Portland, Wayne sells the Orono house and moves into graduate student housing at the university there, while Kelly and the kids move into a better neighborhood in Portland. Meanwhile, on the next visit to Dr. Spack in Boston, he tells Nicole that she can start estrogen immediately—sooner than they'd planned. Nicole is thrilled.

Nicole is desperate to start female hormones so that she can continue to transform her body, and finally have it match her understanding of her own gender.

On the same trip to Boston, the family also meets with the lawyers from GLAD, who tell the Maineses how strongly they feel about the importance of the case. They hold a reception for the family at a home of a GLAD board member, and the Maineses start to realize that the lawsuit has meaning and significance for many others as well.

Even though Nicole can't be out in Portland, she starts to understand the power of advocating for others in response to the discrimination she has faced. This is what ultimately becomes the conduit for her to be out and proud when she enters high school.

CHAPTER 32: BORN THIS WAY

Before Nicole starts eighth grade, she attends a week-long sleepaway camp for transgender children named Camp Aranu'tiq (a Chugach word for "two spirit"). Within two days, the camp feels like a home away from home for Nicole. She gets to know many of the camp's 41 attendees and is happy to be able to be herself and take part in the camp's many activities. By week's end, she has made fast friends with two other transgender girls.

Again, Nutt emphasizes the power and the joy of being out and around people who are accepting of one's identity. The camp is in contrast to the shame and secrecy that Nicole feels at King Middle School, where she can't tell anyone about her gender identity.

CHAPTER 33: A TIME FOR CHANGE

A few weeks after eighth grade begins, Lady Gaga comes to Portland to speak out against the "don't ask don't tell policy" in the military, and Nicole and Wayne attend her rally together. Wayne had been proud to serve in the military, but he is angry that the military has dismissed so many honorable men and women because of sexual orientation. He knows how "corrosive" it is to live in hiding.

Nutt explores another arena in which people, like Nicole in school, feel the same shame because they cannot be open and honest. Wayne even understands this as a form of discrimination in and of itself, because it does not afford the same rights to LGBT people as it does to straight people in terms of being able to speak freely about one's life.

The Maineses had all stayed quiet about Nicole's identity in Portland through most of eighth grade. But in April, the Maine Legislature considers a new bill, LD 1046. This act would allow the owners of any business to decide who could use their restrooms, and if someone was denied access to the facility of their gender identification, they would be unable to claim discrimination. The whole family is disgusted by this development.

The LD 1046 bill clearly targets transgender people specifically. The family is so upset by this that they decide they can no longer hide from the issues. Nicole recognizes the power she has to speak up on the issue, and how necessary her voice might be in helping to change the minds of these lawmakers.

CHAPTER 34: WE CAN'T LOSE

Wayne appears before the House Judiciary Committee of the Maine legislature. He reads a statement, explaining that he has a transgender daughter and how Nicole's experiences have transformed how he thinks about these issues. He explains that this bill would mean that Nicole would not have the same rights as her classmates. He asks them passionately, through tears, not to pass the bill. A lawyer from GLAD also speaks, explaining why a biological sex accommodation rule won't work because a business could only enforce LD 1046 through physical inspections, which invade privacy.

Wayne shows his own transformation in this moment. Not only is he supporting Nicole and her rights, but he is also advocating for the rights of other transgender students like Nicole. Even if these lawmakers can't fully understand Nicole's experiences, they can empathize with the sincere experiences of a father who has grown to understand what it means to have a transgender daughter.

Wayne also notes how little information there is online for fathers of transgender children. Every few months he writes a piece for a blog on the Huffington Post. He takes the responses as opportunities for further discussion and education. Someone suggests that perhaps Nicole is transgender because they'd given her dolls at a young age, but Wayne and Kelly know that nothing they did would have affected Nicole's identity. Kelly also quips privately, "What you're saying is, every man is just one doll away from being a woman?"

Wayne also helps to educate other fathers and parents on online forums, knowing that there is so little information out there for people like him who initially struggle with their child's transition. He aims to educate people on the idea that being transgender is just as innate as being cisgender, and that it is a core and unchangeable part of a person's identity.

Nicole and Wayne do more campaigning against the bill. For two days, they walk around the statehouse to talk to representatives about defeating the bill. She speaks with 60 or 70 of the 151 representatives. Wayne, for his own part, hands out leaflets about Nicole and how children like her deserve better treatment by lawmakers. Kelly is exceptionally proud of both Wayne and Nicole.

Nicole and Wayne advocate even further, going directly to the lawmakers in order to try to win their support—something that Nicole is only able to do by being open about her experience and proud of her identity.

Jonas and Nicole are also soon to begin ninth grade at a new school called Waynflete, a private pre-K through 12th grade school which has fewer than 600 students. Nicole and Jonas make friends during Wilderness Week, an outing for incoming students. Jonas and Nicole are shocked by the kindness of the students at Waynflete as compared to those at King Middle School.

The Maineses recognize how key love and support is in all aspects of life, not only in one's family. For whatever reason, Nicole and Jonas were considered outsiders at King Middle School, and they are thrilled to find a community that cares more about kindness than tearing others down.

The whole family decides that they have had to stay quiet for too long about Nicole's identity, and so she decides to be "out" at school. She bonds with another girl during Wilderness Week, and on the way home, the girl admits to Nicole that she is pansexual. Nicole smiles and says that she is transgender. "Cool," the girl replies. Nicole is relieved and comes out to someone nearly every day the following week. No one has an issue.

Nicole's acceptance at school is not only a testament to her journey to want to be out, but also society's transformation as a whole on these issues. Different genders and sexualities are much more accepted when Nicole is in high school than when she was in elementary school, signifying a general trend toward social progress.

CHAPTER 35: FIRST KISS

Nicole gives her first scripted public remarks at the 2011 GLAD Spirit of Justice Award Dinner, introducing her father. Wayne and Nicole are recognized that evening for their activism. Nicole enjoys the attention and being out as trans.

Nicole's activism and advocacy for her community (in conjunction with Wayne's efforts) are deemed so vital that she is recognized by the organization that is advocating for her.

Nicole still has insecurities, however. One day, she volunteers at a training program for the sheriff's office on how to respond to an active shooter. She plays the part of a teenager killed in the shooting and meets another boy who is volunteering. While pretending to be dead, they whisper to each other through the exercise, and he gives her a quick kiss. Nicole is embarrassed and delighted but knows that the boy doesn't know she is transgender.

Nicole's insecurities about her gender identity with regards to romance stem from her knowledge that she is still different from other girls. She recognizes that her body, even though she is transitioning, still doesn't feel like it fully belongs to her since she still has male anatomy.

That evening, Nicole tells Kelly about what happened. Nicole starts to cry, wondering what she'll do. Kelly tells her she probably won't marry the boy, but that she should be excited about her first kiss. As a child, Nicole had wanted to be seen as a girl more than anything, but now she wonders if a boy could still want her knowing she was transgender.

Nicole confesses to her mother that she knows she doesn't fit society's mold of what a "normal" girl is, and that this boy has different expectations of her gender identity. But Kelly's support for Nicole reminds her that she is loved by her family and that she can be loved by others too.

CHAPTER 36: SMALL VICTORIES

Two weeks after Nicole lobbies against LD 1046, the bill is defeated in the state senate and house, and the following day a new bill is introduced that would strengthen the state's anti-bullying laws. The Maineses feel a sense of vindication.

Nutt demonstrates the power of Nicole's pride and advocacy, as she has a hand in successfully defeating a bill that would discriminate against the transgender community.

A few months later, a reporter from the *Boston Globe* writes a feature about the Maineses and what they'd been through. It is an "unprecedented" story for a major American newspaper, and the Globe is flooded with calls and emails and media requests. People are moved by the Maineses' story. Kelly tries to keep the requests at bay, making sure that her children can experience life as average teenagers.

Again, the idea that the Maineses are able to do this interview without fear of further harassment demonstrates a real change in society. Rather than the huge amount of hate they received in Orono, now they have a flood of support.

CHAPTER 37: SOMEONE ELSE'S BROTHER

While Nicole gains confidence, Jonas experiences more depression and anxiety. Even though he's proud of Nicole and always has her back, he frequently feels like his life revolves around hers—that his biggest role is "being someone else's brother." He finds some solace in his music, however.

Nutt implies here that Jonas, too, struggles with not having a completely "normal" family, in that his sister often gets attention and her needs come first. But despite this, he still loves his sister more than anything and knows their bond holds the family together in many ways.

Sometimes it is exciting to be Nicole's brother, however, as when Wayne, Nicole, and Jonas join other activists at the White House for LGBT Pride Month in 2012. They listen to President Obama laud them for their "extraordinary courage" as they push for equality.

Nicole and Jonas are elevated from being known as activists in Maine to being nationally recognized by the President. This emphasizes the importance of the Maineses' advocacy, and in many ways makes their struggles worth it.

When it is time to leave, Nicole lingers to take photographs with the White House reporters. Jonas immediately asks Wayne if he should go get her—his instinct always to take care of her. Wayne hugs him and tells him how proud he is of Jonas for looking out for Nicole and making sacrifices for her for so long.

Wayne acknowledges how much Jonas has done to support Nicole over the years, and how his protection of her has been so key to maintaining the safety of their family. It is likely immensely gratifying for Jonas to be recognized like this, since he has struggled with feeling like his place in the family is insignificant compared to Nicole's.

CHAPTER 38: ONE STEP BACK

In September 2012, the proceedings begin for the Maineses' lawsuit. Nicole is only identified as "Susan Doe" and never appears as a witness or at the counsel's table, but the Maineses' lawyers from GLAD decide to use photographs of Nicole in the fifth and sixth grade to show a "snapshot of a sweet-faced, ordinary nine-year-old girl, except that Nicole wasn't an ordinary nine-year-old girl."

The picture of Nicole helps inform the judge's understanding of Nicole's gender identity. Like her name change, seeing Nicole as an "ordinary nine-year-old girl" helps people recognize that in almost all ways, Nicole is like any other girl and should have the same rights as those other girls.

The proceedings finish after two hours, and a ruling could take several months. No matter who wins, the Maineses can always appeal. Additionally, that morning, the Maineses learned that Bob Lucy had allowed students to cheat on a standardized exam. When the Orono school district found out, it eliminated his position and Lucy was forced to resign from a new position he had taken in Bangor.

Even though Lucy's termination was not due to his discriminatory policies, his removal surely allows for some sense of vindication on the part of the Maineses because the schools were able to recognize Lucy as morally corrupt, a side of him that manifested in his discrimination toward Nicole.

Two months later, the decision comes out. The judge writes, "The court is not unsympathetic to [the girl's] plight," but finds that the school did not harass Nicole, nor was it deliberately indifferent to the harassment she experienced from Jacob. It is a victory for the school board. The Maineses are crushed, but Nicole and Jonas immediately press to appeal to the state supreme court.

Even though the court does not make the decision that the Maineses had hoped for, Nicole and Jonas are both adamant about continuing the case. They recognize its wider importance and understand that they cannot give up advocating for Nicole and other trans people.

In April 2012, Wayne and Nicole visit a satellite campus of the University of Maine for their annual Rainbow Ball. Wayne is amazed at the diversity of gay, transgender, and genderqueer youth all around him, dancing and having a good time. He notes "everyone [is] different and no one care[s] how or why."

Nutt shows why this community and its pride are so important. Despite everyone's differences, their different sexualities and gender identities, people's attitudes toward one other are very open and accepting. It serves as a model for society, in which everyone accepts one another and treats each other equally, regardless of differences.

In August 2013, Wayne finds something that Nicole had written on her Facebook page. She had watched an episode of Family Guy in which a character had sex with a transgender person, and after the character found out he screamed and vomited. Nicole posts about her reaction to the episode: how she thought she would never find someone who would want to be with her. Several friends comment, calling out the transphobia in television. Wayne's heart bleeds, and he comments on her page that he loves her with all his heart, and that he knows someday she will find someone who will love her as much as he does.

Nutt contrasts the episode at the Rainbow Ball with this story, which demonstrates how far society still has to go to fully accept different kinds of people. This again emphasizes the need for positive role models and storylines in the media for transgender people. As a result of this episode, Nicole feels like no one can love her, but Wayne immediately dispels this idea and affirms how much he and other people care for her.

CHAPTER 39: IMAGINE

After a difficult period of highs and lows, Jonas starts to come out of his shell. During the summer following his freshman year, he takes college-level courses, wins a poetry contest, and is part of the school's winning Model United Nations team. He is a deeply reflective person and wants to make sure that his life has meaning. He is starting to feel a sense of who he is, particularly through theater.

After feeling like so much of his life has revolved around Nicole, Jonas starts to develop his own identity and gain a new level of confidence too. Jonas's transformation is not one of gender, but he also goes through a similar process of growing up and transforming into a more fully actualized version of himself.

One day, Wayne is asked to be a keynote speaker for a Civil Rights Day program at a middle school in South Portland. He asks Jonas to join him as his "roadie." At the presentation, some of the students ask Jonas what it's like to grow up with a transgender sister. He tells them to imagine trying to explain being transgender with a "sixth-grade vocabulary." Wayne is struck by Jonas's self-awareness.

Jonas highlights why education about these issues is so necessary, even at a young age. Given the vocabulary to describe his sister, Jonas might have been able to help others understand her as well.

On June 12, 2013, the lawyers from GLAD argue the appeal of the Maineses case in Maine's Supreme Judicial Court. They want to make sure that the judges understand that Nicole had been forced to use a separate restroom from other girls, even when staff had deemed the boys' restroom inappropriate for her. Nicole makes statements to the press about wanting transgender kids to be able go to school and not worry about being treated unfairly.

Nicole takes yet another stand in order to advocate for herself, but Nutt makes it clear that Nicole and the lawyers from GLAD are also thinking about the larger implications of the case on other transgender students in schools across Maine.

On August 12, 2013, California governor Jerry Brown signs AB 1266, making California the first state to establish a law aligning bathroom use with gender identity. Conservative opponents had argued that the law was trying to bring about a "genderless future," and that separating sexes in public facilities allows for "camaraderie among those who share the whole life experience of manhood or womanhood." To Nicole, these arguments make no sense. The Maineses argue that the female experience is exactly what Nicole had been denied, and that she didn't want a genderless society. It was about equality and recognizing her for the gender she was.

Nutt notes toward the end of the book that transgender rights have quickly evolved, even from the time that she began writing this book. The dates here demonstrate that Nicole's case stands at the tipping point of those rights, as people start to understand more and more what it means to be transgender. The arguments against California's bathroom law demonstrate ignorance, on the other hand, as opponents don't seem to understand what it is transgender people like Nicole are truly fighting for.


CHAPTER 40: OUR STORY

The Maineses are an "average, middle-class family," but at the same time they are not. They simply act as they believe families should—with love and support. In 2013, Wayne sends out the family Christmas card detailing the family's accomplishments at school, at work, and in social justice. He notes that he himself is continuing to teach others about transgender youth, "breaking down barriers that have existed for generations."

Nutt makes it explicit that the Maineses are not an average family. However, families are not defined by social expectations of what "average" means. Instead, they are defined by exactly the love and support they have shown each other throughout this book—particularly Wayne, in overcoming his own biases to accept his daughter and educate others about her.


On January 30, 2014, Wayne receives a call from the lawyers at GLAD. The Maineses have won their case in the state Supreme Court. Activists in various fields acknowledge that the decision is a "momentous" one for transgender rights. The opposing counsel says that the Orono school district would "take every step to comply with the law." Nicole is so thrilled that when Kelly texts her, she immediately stops the school assembly that she is attending and announces the news to the school. The students applaud wildly.

The Maineses' victory shows how important Nicole's courage and advocacy have been, as this case enables other students to receive rights that Nicole did not have. In addition, Nicole demonstrates pride in her identity once more by sharing this victory with her peers—something that she could never have done in elementary or middle school.

Others are less happy, including Michael Heath (who had resigned from the Christian Civic League) and Paul Melanson. They are determined to keep speaking against gay and transgender rights. As for Jacob, who has moved to live with his mother, he doesn't have much of an opinion. He only believes it was wrong for someone born a boy to "pretend" he was a girl. But Jonas knows, however, that Nicole had never been a boy. He once told her, "You were always a sister to me."

Although Heath and Melanson's discrimination clearly comes from bigotry, in some ways Jacob's harassment seems to come only from ignorance and being coached by his grandfather, demonstrating just how detrimental it is for a lack of knowledge to be reinforced rather than remedied. Nicole isn't "pretending" to be a girl—she firmly identifies as one. It is simply Nicole's body that doesn't match her identity, and by this point Nutt has shown that to her readers.

CHAPTER 41: COMMENCEMENT

In March 2015, a school board in Millinocket, Maine, created a transgender student policy. The Maineses' case had forced schools state-wide to examine their rules. The Millinocket guidelines hold that a transgender student should be permitted to use the restroom that fits their gender identity, and that locker rooms should be assigned based on the student's preference and their safety and comfort.

Even though Nicole faced an immense amount of discrimination and the school did little to protect her, the case forces schools across Maine to make sure that they, too, are not found liable for discrimination. Thus, Nicole's advocacy and courage helps legions of other students like her attain rights that she was not afforded.

At nearly the same time, Boston University School of Medicine releases the results of the first comprehensive review of the scientific evidence for gender identity as a biological phenomenon. It holds that for transgender people, "the best outcomes for these individuals are achieved with their requested hormone therapy and surgical sexual transition as opposed to psychiatric intervention alone."

The study at Boston University sums up the point that Nutt has been making through her various scientific studies: gender identity is innate in the brain and unmalleable, and therefore treatment should focus on adjusting one's body, not trying to "fix" one's mind.

The University of Maine, however, writes to Nicole telling her that her sex reassignment surgery is not covered by the university's insurance (managed by Cigna) because it is considered "cosmetic." The Maineses know this evaluation is absurd. Wayne and GLAD talk to the University of Maine and he submits a second appeal. Two months later, the University of Maine completely reverses its policy, not just for Nicole but for all its health insurance beneficiaries. It is another victory.

Nutt shows the importance of knowledge and the existence of these studies. Without this argument, Nicole's sex reassignment surgery would not be considered a necessary part of her treatment, which it is. Additionally, this victory represents another realm in which Nicole's advocacy and courage help her attain more rights for herself and others.

In the spring of 2015, Nicole and Jonas are nearing the end of high school. They've both been accepted into colleges, with Jonas studying theater and psychology at the University of Maine in Farmington and Nicole pursuing theater and art at the University of Maine in Orono. At the beginning of the year, Wayne receives an email from GLAAD asking if Nicole would be interested in auditioning for a guest role as a transgender teen in *Royal Pains*. After a second callback, Nicole is offered the part.

After seeing so many transphobic programs, or ones that showcase violence against the transgender community rather than uplift it, Nicole finds a new arena for her advocacy. She wants to be a good role model for transgender youth, just as Jennifer Finney Boylan and Jazz Jennings were for her.

Nicole and Wayne travel to New York City together to shoot the episode. The limo driver who takes Nicole to set chats with them and admits that he isn't keen on transgender people (not knowing that Nicole is transgender). When Nicole reveals that she is transgender later in the week, the driver is embarrassed, but Wayne tells him what it means and that it is an identity, not a given set of politics.

Nicole and Wayne take every opportunity to educate people on transgender issues. They don't want to shame the driver but do want to make sure that he understands what it means to be transgender, and that one can be both conservative and a supporter of LGBT rights—just as Wayne is.

In the first week of June 2015, Nicole and Jonas have their last high school prom. Nicole's date is a boy she'd met at an anime convention in Portland the year before. Jonas goes with a close friend. Nicole wears a formal black gown and high heels, and they dance happily all night to the music of a DJ.

Although Nutt merely hints that Nicole's date is a romantic interest, it implies that contrary to her fears, she will be able to find people who can love her for all that she is. She now embodies confident, feminine young woman who she drew in her self-portrait years prior.

A week later, Waynflete holds commencement. Jonas receives his diploma while giving a bear hug to each school official. Nicole curtsies to each person and strikes a pose after accepting her degree. Kelly and Wayne are amazed that the time has gone so fast, and they hold back tears, hoping that they had given their children a good foundation. Wayne thinks how much Kelly has done to get them to this place, and how far he, personally, has come in just a few years.

Wayne recognizes that without the love and support within the family, their children (and Nicole in particular) surely would not have been able to have as much success as they find in high school and beyond.

A year earlier, an oral history project called StoryCorps had contacted the family and asked if they could record the family interviewing one another. They agreed. When Jonas asks Nicole what her most special memory of being an identical twin is, Nicole says she remembers a time when they were very small, and Nicole climbed up over the bars of her crib and then helped Jonas up over his when he couldn't make it.

This interview between Nicole and Jonas highlights for a final time how much they, specifically, have supported each other. Jonas never questioned Nicole's gender identity, and protected, loved, and supported Nicole as much as he could—even when he himself was struggling.

CHAPTER 42: TRANSFORMATION

Nicole knows that she is not defined by her anatomy, and that too often people focus on the surgical part of transitioning. But she also knows that her sex reassignment surgery is a necessary part of her transition. Her surgeon is Dr. Kathy Rumer, a transgender surgical specialist. Dr. Rumer explains the procedure to the family: Nicole will be losing her penis and testicles, but her sensitive parts will be retained to create a clitoris and tissue will be used to form a vagina. When Nicole is fully healed, it will be almost impossible to tell that she had been born with male anatomy.

Nicole has always been confident in her own gender identity and knows that it is other people who have to adjust their ideas of who she is. But at the same time, Nicole recognizes that much of the source of her insecurity comes from the fact that she feels she doesn't belong in her body, and sex reassignment surgery serves as the final step for her to achieve that sense of belonging.

Nicole writes down some of her thoughts about the upcoming surgery, acknowledging that it isn't going to be a "magic fix to everything." She'll still be unable to become pregnant, something she'll have to make peace with. She concludes, however, that this is the only way to complete her transition, and that she feels like she needs to have the surgery for Wyatt, the little boy she used to be, so that all of the hardship he put up with could be worth it.

Nicole understands that she will always face some form of discrimination due to her transgender identity. But at the same time, she recognizes that her transformation had been crucial for her younger self to be able to be accepted as a girl, and so she want to make sure that she can fulfill that desire.

On July 28, 2015, the family arrives at Dr. Rumer's hospital outside Philadelphia. Nicole is dizzy, having not eaten solid food for 48 hours and having had an enema that morning. She worries that the dysphoria might come back but insists to Kelly that she has to go through with the surgery.

Nicole understands that having a body that she feels comfortable in is worth the risk of feeling some insecurities about her transition, particularly due to the fact that she fought so hard to be recognized fully as a woman.

Nicole is wheeled into the operating room at 7:35 a.m. At 11:06 a.m. Dr. Rumer announces to the family that "She did great." Nicole sleeps most of the day, and Jonas posts an update on Facebook thanking all of their friends for their support. Nicole's friend Lexie texts her, asking how she's feeling and then typing "YOU'RE LIKE ARIEL" from **The Little Mermaid**. Nicole's transition is complete. She will need to take female hormones the rest of her life but wants to marry a man someday and adopt. There is no confusion when she looks in the mirror anymore.

Lexie's comparison of Nicole to The Little Mermaid *again shows the story's parallel to Nicole's own journey. Like the mermaid, Ariel, Nicole has always known where she was meant to be—she just had to transform her body in order to achieve a full sense of integration and belonging.*

EPILOGUE

Transgender rights continue to evolve. As of 2015, 18 states and more than 200 cities and counties in the U.S. bar discrimination against transgender people. In July 2015, the Obama administration lifts the restrictions against transgender people serving in the military.

Nutt concludes her book by reinforcing the fact that transgender rights continue to evolve as society itself transforms into a more accepting place.

Children are also growing up in a world where marriage equality is the law of the land. Children quickly understand fairness and equality and accept differences. This is demonstrated clearly in a conversation between third graders at Asa C. Adams Elementary School that Lisa Erhardt overhears, and which she relays to the Maineses.

Nutt also emphasizes in her concluding story that when the knowledge about marginalized groups becomes second nature to children, they are much more open and accepting than adults are, and will hopefully grow up to encourage more open-minded generations in the future.

The conversation Erhardt hears involves a transgender boy who is coloring a giraffe teal and pink, for the transgender flag. He and another girl discuss what it means to be transgender, and how there had been a girl in school who was transgender: Nicole. The girl remembers Nicole but says she didn't know she was transgender. The boy says, "Yeah, but it isn't a big deal, you know." The girl responds, "Oh, I know. It doesn't really matter. As long as she's happy."

For these children to describe being transgender as "not a big deal" (even though this incident occurs only a few years after Nicole was forced to leave the school), it provides some hope for the future that someday, to all people, being transgender will simply be another aspect of a person's identity—not a definition of who they are and how they live, and not a justification for their discrimination.

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