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Note: This essay analyzes the following three-paragraph excerpt from the [January 2017 National Geographic article titled “Gender Revolution: How Science Is Helping Us Understand Gender”](#):

Eric Vilain, a geneticist and pediatrician who directs the UCLA Center for Gender-Based Biology, says that children express many desires and fantasies in passing. What if saying “I wish I were a girl” is a feeling just as fleeting as wishing to be an astronaut, a monkey, a bird? When we spoke by phone last spring, he told me that most studies investigating young children who express discomfort with their birth gender suggest they are more likely to turn out to be cisgender (aligned with their birth-assigned gender) than trans—and relative to the general population, more of these kids will eventually identify as gay or bisexual.

“If a boy is doing things that are girl-like—he wants long hair, wants to try his mother’s shoes on, wants to wear a dress and play with dolls—then he’s saying to himself, ‘I’m doing girl things; therefore I must be a girl,’” Vilain said. But these preferences are gender expression, not gender identity. Vilain said he’d like parents to take a step back and remind the boy that he can do all sorts of things that girls do, but that doesn’t mean he is a girl...

*As Vilain might have instructed, Mack tried to broaden her child’s understanding of how a boy could behave. “I told my child over and over again that he could continue to be a boy and play with all the Barbies he wanted and wear whatever he liked: dresses, skirts, all the sparkles money could buy,” Mack said in her podcast, *How to Be a Girl*. “But my child said no, absolutely not. She was a girl.”*

Henig's Perspective on the Gender Revolution

The introduction signals that the argument analyzed contrasts the ideas of two other thinkers.

The above excerpt is from Robin Marantz Henig's article in the January 2017 issue of *National Geographic* called "Gender Revolution: How Science Is Helping Us Understand Gender." Here she offers two interesting points of view: that of Eric Vilain, geneticist, pediatrician, and director of the UCLA Center for Gender-Based Biology, and Marlo Mack, a mom of a transgender girl and creator of the podcast "How to Be a Girl." Vilain states that children can't differentiate between gender expression and gender identity easily, and that they go through many phases of wanting to be impossible things. He says most studies on children questioning their birth-assigned gender suggest they are more likely to be cisgender than transgender later on. He advises parents of questioning children to "take a step back" and tell their children that they can do anything a child of another gender can do, but it doesn't mean they aren't the gender they were assigned at birth. Mack, however, has tried this with her daughter, who, even though she was told that boys can play with Barbies and wear dresses, insisted that she was a girl every time.

Summary of a summary of the ideas of the first thinker discussed in Henig's argument and the contrasting response of the second thinker.

Discusses how Henig establishes Vilain as an authority to be trusted, with partial success.

The author relies on Vilain's scholarly reputation. He is a doctor, scientist, and in charge of a gender-related facility at a prestigious university. However, from an intrinsic ethos perspective, the quotes included for him leave something to be desired. He said that most studies on children who show discomfort with their assigned at birth gender reveal that most of those children remain cisgender (identifies with their assigned at birth gender). This leaves the reader with questions. How did they define "discomfort" with their gender and for how long had they been expressing those feelings? A specific cited study that is well respected amongst pediatricians, endocrinologists, and psychologists working with trans children would have increased the support for his claim. The author let the reader ask these questions and look at his argument critically.

Compares the main strength of the Vilain argument--sound reasoning--with the main strength of the Mack argument, its appeal to sympathy with parental care.

As well as a trust strategy, Henig presents Vilain's argument with sound reasoning. What is quoted from him is logical. His claim is that children shouldn't be trusted to identify their gender. His warrant is that children go through many phases of wanting to be things they're not, and that children can't differentiate between gender expression and identity. Finally, his reason is that one's gender identity is not a phase, or gender expression. This is countered with Mack's argument which although it also has sound reasoning, is unique because of its appeal to emotion. Henig knows the *National Geographic* audience to be one composed of everyday people and families, so an argument with an emotional appeal that is relatable to readers is a convincing tool. She knows the values of her audience.

Shows how the summary of the second argument is effectively poised to counter the first.

The author introduces Mack one paragraph away from Villain's last words. He said "he'd like parents to take a step back and remind the boy that he can do all sorts of things that girls do, but that doesn't mean he is a girl." A better quote could not have been chosen by Henig for Mack to respond to. The author begins with "As Vilain might have instructed," to start Mack's account of her experience. Mack is a parent with a trans girl, and the article states "I told my child over and over again that he could continue to be a boy and play with all the Barbies he wanted...But my child said no, absolutely not. She was a girl." Not only does this respond directly to Vilain's call to action—or inaction, rather, but it breaks down his assumption. His assumption was that children go through many phases of wanting to be things they're not, and that children can't differentiate between gender expression and identity. If his argument were to stand, Mack's daughter would've told her mom that she didn't know boys could play with girl things. She didn't.

Shows how Henig's description of the arguments accentuates Vilain's weakness.

Perhaps Vilain has conceded to children in the past, and has personally had experience with those who do know the difference between gender expression and identity, such as Mack's daughter. This would have proved for a stronger argument from Vilain, and would have convinced the reader

Highlights Henig's indirect method of convincing the readers of one side through the argument's structure.

that he is reasonable, and not an extremist. Either such a case of his has yet to exist, or the author purposefully left it out. Henig provided us with a real example of someone trying Vilain's technique, and it failing over and over.

The similar use of language in Vilain's section and in Mack's section, as well as the placement of their arguments one after another, show that the author intended for the reader to choose one side over the other.

Here we find the positive evaluation of the effectiveness of Henig's argument as a whole.

Henig's article is an apparently unbiased piece on gender and how people come to identify. However, the positioning of Mack's response to Vilain's technique on raising gender-questioning children shows Henig's support for Mack, and therefore supports children deciding their own gender. She does this by choosing a quote from Mack that would convince the reader with intrinsic ethos. She gets a different perspective by having the counterpoint be presented by a mother of a trans child, as opposed to only showing scientists' perspectives. Henig positions Mack's story right after Vilain in this article. While it would still be relevant elsewhere, that positioning and the quote she chose indicates that it is a response to Vilain's statement just a couple paragraphs before. These strategies were effectively used by Henig to endorse one side of this controversial argument. Because of this, the reader is inclined to agree, and will come out of reading an almost neutral article with support for Mack and her experience.

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