

***Becoming Nicole* through an Ecological Lens**

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ART 291H

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22 February, 2022

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Having grown up in the 60s, I assume Wayne Maines did not knowingly meet any transgender persons in his small, traditional, American town. That being said, his small-town worldview surely changed once Nicole came into his life. The family environment he was familiar with growing up was not the same environment he adapted to with his own family. Following an ecological perspective, Wayne Maines allowed cultural influences, adaptations, and life stressors to form a new worldview in order to become a deserving and empathetic father for Nicole and Jonas.

Wayne had a traditional upbringing, where he was raised to fit into his earlier environment in his small town. He adhered to his “small town values” and simple lessons from his father (Nutt, 2015, p. 8) that defined his cultural influences growing up. One of Wayne’s earlier influences was following his family’s tradition of joining the military and not pursuing any further education. Wayne experienced adaptation when he made the conscious choice to enroll in college and change his current environment as “just a kid from rural upstate New York” (Nutt, 2015, p. 10). Although Wayne was able to break away from his family’s traditions through strength and “sheer force of will” (Nutt, 2015, p. 11), Wayne’s historical and cultural context from being born in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century still influenced his worldview when he prepared and welcomed his newborn twins.

When Wyatt wore a dress to his family’s neighborhood party, Wayne experienced a life stressor after bringing attention to himself and his son. “He felt strangely alone” (Nutt, 2015, p. 37), as if he had no one or nowhere else to run for comfort, indicating a stressor. Following this event, he withheld his feelings from his environment and developed coping strategies to

assumingly sustain himself from facing the reality of his son. He kept himself busy by working later and exercising extensively (Nutt, 2015, p. 38). Although Wyatt's slow transition to Nicole was initially seen as a loss of a son for Wayne, he eventually used the stressor as an "opportunity for growth," which led to a positive understanding of his daughter and being transgender (Chang et al., 2009, p. 29).

After meeting with Dr. Spack, Wayne realized he had to accept Wyatt's transition because his family's environment was going to change regardless (Nutt, 2015, p. 108). He adapted to the new reality of having a daughter, gradually changing his cognition and acknowledging the fact in front of a judicial environment. Wayne knew he had to adapt under oath in order to improve his fit between his internal needs for his daughter and for the judicial environment to reciprocate a safe decision (Nutt, 2015, p. 117). Evidently, Wayne understood he had to provide a supportive fatherly environment for Nicole, so she could become herself, even if it would take him longer to adapt to her name change (Nutt, 2015, p. 151).

Naturally, because Wayne was raised in a different home environment than his current one, he worried about what others thought about him and his family. Wayne depicted that "we are hard-wired as humans to fit into our environment" (Zeisler, 2022, slide 35). Following Nicole's name change, he was immensely relieved after realizing his neighbors and family already adapted to Nicole's transgender environment (Nutt, 2015, p. 121). Although Wayne accepted and supported Nicole, he continued to unconsciously worry about the public eye. He then made the conscious choice to remove himself from his own selfish environment and fully acknowledge Nicole as his daughter (Nutt, 2015, p. 143).

When Kelly and the twins made the adaptive change to leave Orono, another adaptive event followed Wayne and his family. After living under the radar in Portland for two years and

attempting to fit into their new environment, the Maineses had to follow a strengths perspective and once again allow a change to be made after the LD 1046 bill was introduced (Nutt, 2015, p. 201). This time, Wayne admitted to a broader judicial environment that he knew he needed to change himself and support his daughter in order for her to live a safe and equal life. Along with constant lobbying with Nicole, Wayne followed a force field perspective and used compelling forces to promote equal rights for his daughter by simply telling his family's story (Nutt, 2015, p. 236).

Growing up in a conservative small-town, it never crossed Wayne Maineses' mind that he would have a transgender daughter. Although initially perceived as a life stressor, Wayne persevered through his strength and continuously adapted, along with his family, through Nicole's transition and legal battles. By following an ecological perspective, it allowed for a greater understanding of Wayne's personal conflicts and how he was able to endure them all.

Before reading *Becoming Nicole*, I was oblivious to cultural narratives relating to gender. Seemingly ignorant, I failed to include transgender persons in the cultural narrative of gender. Being a female is part of my cultural narrative, however, I do not view my gender as significant as Nicole does. This may be because I was born appearing as a female and identify as one as well. As for Nicole and other transgender persons, this is not the case. Although Nicole and other transgender women feel as womanly as me, they are not able to easily live their lives as I have been able to. I am now aware that I am privileged to have this stance on my gender without being discriminated against.

As a cradle Catholic in the South, I was raised majorly conservative and was not taught about transgender persons. I knew who they were, but they were not a recurring topic of conversation in my household. While reading, I remembered learning in grade school about

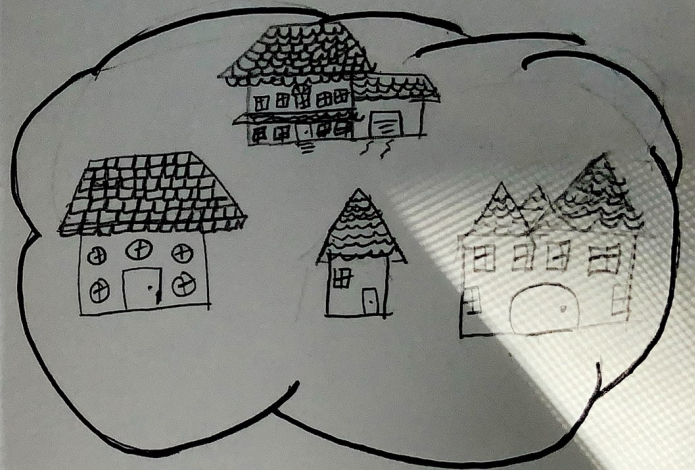
children who were born knowing they were the opposite gender. At the time, this topic appalled me, so I never gave it a second thought. However, as I have grown older, I have opened my worldview and have become interested in other people's worldviews. So, I enjoyed scouring the internet and reading more about this phenomenon. Although I was raised in an ignorant environment, I was taught to love everyone regardless, so I intend to continue to do so.

### References

Nutt, A. E. (2015). *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American family*. Random House.

Chang, V., Scott, S. and Decker, C. (2009). *Developing Helping Skills*. Cengage Learning.

Zeisler, L. (2022). *How are Cultural Narratives Formed?* [PowerPoint slides]. Canvas.



Growing up, I was raised to focus on family and not worry about outside events. This led me to only know one "house"/environment, which was my own. Reading Becoming Nicole served as a gateway for me to notice other "houses" and their perspectives. My oblivion to the world is shown on the left side of the drawing and my broader sense of the world now, is shown on the right.