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## The Impact Of Bacha Posh Ritual On A Child'S Gender Identity

To some people, gender identity is something trivial that can change in a matter of time, but I believe it is something more than just the way someone dresses or acts. Gender identity is how a person identifies himself or herself in terms of character, feelings, mannerisms, and beliefs. In most parts of the world, it is your physical appearance that determines your gender identity and the gender roles that will be bestowed upon you. There is simply more that goes into creating a person's gender identity. Bacha posh is the dressing of a daughter as a son when the family has no sons in order to gain or keep a family reputation status. In Afghanistan, it is practiced very commonly and has been in existence for centuries.

Girls will be groomed, treated, and have their name changed to that of a boy during this period. They can now play outside with the rest of the boys, go shopping alone, attend school, and take on the house errands of a male (Qadiry, 2012). In every society people can be cruel, and some of these children that are bacha posh must survive the bullying demands from others wanting proof of their gender to them. No one, especially a child who is trying to figure out the world they are in, should have to go through something so humiliating as having to prove themselves that they are a girl or a boy. Once they begin to physically develop their sex characteristics, or around age 10, they are converted back into a girl. These girls are thrown back into a world where they no longer have the same opportunities as they once had when living as a boy; they are now being restricted in what they can do, wear, and even go (D'Aki, 2018). They cannot freely explore the world or get an education like a boy is allowed. The girls that go through this in their life not only end up going through immense lifestyle changes when they are converted back to female, but also go through a huge cognitive dilemma as to who they are as a person.

The things that they did as a boy throughout their years of childhood, such as playing outside with other children, going out in public without any restrictions or chaperones, being given a higher level of respect than the rest of the children at home, created the person they are. Everything they could do and challenging the rules of society allowed for them to grow socially and develop a higher sense of self confidence and the belief that they could do anything they set their minds to. The male-like mannerisms or behaviors and ideas have been rooted in them throughout their childhood since becoming bacha posh. They've since then been performing the tasks of a young boy who is supposed to become a man one day, and when the time of their conversion back to female comes, this is all stripped away from them. The foundation for the identity of who they were on the path of becoming is taken away from them over night. How is one not to believe that a child at this point is not going to become confused and upset? They

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are very well capable of asking themselves, “Who am I and what do I do now?” They are being forced back into a gender role that they are not familiar with by their parents and cultural society.

For the bacha posh children who are not as accepting to the idea of being a girl and the role that they will partake in, this situation can create a great deal of frustration and relationship problems within the family as we see happening in the tale of Ukmina Manoori (Manoori, et al, 2014). The child that had once been a son who was close to his father is now a daughter who spends most of her time at home doing household tasks with her mother. Hate and mistrust can develop in the child towards their parents, and quarrels can arise between siblings as they no longer know how to act with them. It is hard to for a child to have something so personal to them taken away and not have any repercussions. Socializing can be hard for anyone, but to a child that has grown to speak and act as a male role, and to have played with mainly boys all their life, this can be very hard. They are now meant to socialize with an unfamiliar audience that comprises of mainly females.

For some it comes within a small amount of time, but for others this a real struggle for them that can be frustrating. Aside from the criticism they went through as being bacha posh from those who knew, they now must endure the harsh remarks of those finding out the truth. The feelings and emotions that go through a child in these moments will be carried on in their development and can impact their future as they may develop mental health problems later in life. The situation and stress from the pressure placed on these girls’ shoulders is not something that should be imposed on any child. I feel that it is a form of psychological abuse on the parent’s part. I understand the perspective of the parents and what they’re trying to accomplish in doing this, but I do not believe it is acceptable for parents to decide this for a child that is so easily influenced during childhood. Childhood is a crucial period for the foundation of who a child will become to be built upon. It should be nurtured and positively influenced, and it should in no manner be manipulated or toyed with to this extent.

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