**Six-year-old should not be encouraged to change gender**

By Kayleigh Gates

High school students often look back to their early elementary school years with nostalgia. The pure innocence and carelessness of our lives back then do not exactly mirror the stressful and awkward moments of teenagers transitioning into adulthood.

For me, reflecting on my childhood brings back some of my happiest memories. Memories that were insignificant, yet memories that seem to show the lasting impact of the little things in life.

Young children of today are growing up far too fast. People Magazine has recently begun to feature the Keswani family in a web series dubbed, “The Keswanis: A Most Modern Family.” The Keswani parents and their youngest child, Devina, are stirring up controversy.

At six years old, Devina is a first grader who is undergoing a significant life transformation: she is transgender.

She was born 6 years ago as a male named Dev. “The day Dev could walk, the walk was feminine…the day Dev could talk, it was really feminine,” said her mother, Vaishali Keswani.

Since the support from her parents began, Dev has become Devina. Devina has joined the Girl Scouts, has big dreams of a modeling, acting, or dancing career.

At school, her transition has caused her to become a target of her fellow classmates. Devina explains in one episode that one particular boy at her school “hates transgender” people and has bullied her.

While the overwhelming majority of modern Americans are generally accepting of the growing transgender population, there is dangers of acceptance of young children transitioning.

Transgender youth are at an alarmingly high risk of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. The serious dangers of allowing children as young as Devina can be made evident when examining early childhood development. Many people do not think that sexual development is of any significance in a child’s development until puberty.

People fail to realize that sexual functioning actually starts in infancy. Kohlberg’s theory of gender identity development gives a model of how young children learn to understand gender as they grow and develop.

Kohlberg states that during ages 3 and 4, young children believe that gender can change and is not permanent. Children this age take part in gender labeling. While they understand a basic difference between a boy and a girl, they have trouble understanding that males and females have different body shapes while sharing similar humanistic characteristics.

According to Kohlberg, as children mature through their six and seventh years of life, they normally understand that gender is stable over time. However, most children this age often believe that changing their physical appearance or activities will change them into the opposite sex.

For example, allowing your six year old daughter to cut her long hair short may make her think she is a boy. Buying your six year old son a doll house set to play with may lead him to believe he is a girl.

Devina Keswani is being led down a dangerous path of uncertainty.

According to Kohlberg, gender identity is usually resolved at the conclusion of their seventh year of life. The overwhelming push from her parents to accept a transition is leading Devina down a path of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional developmental issues.

Sensationalizing parents who believe otherwise, like Devina’s, is wrong. Children are much too young to transition to the opposite sex.

Parents should think hard before chucking their daughter’s dress or son’s toy cars in the trash for good.