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A Brave Journey in Identity

If you had to change your gender identity for your family and your own safety, would you exhibit fear or excitement at the prospect? In the book *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis, the character, Parvana, changed her gender identity in order for her family to survive, which exposed her to experiences - both traumatizing and rewarding - that she may not have had otherwise. Changes in a character's identity can be necessary for survival.

Concerned for her family's survival, Parvana is portrayed as a very brave young girl who's motivations consist of helping her family no matter the things she might risk. Solely because Parvana had not yet developed female body features, she became the logical member of her family to change her gender identity and assume a role. Parvana not only had to dress and act like a boy outside, but also inside in case a Taliban soldier caught her as a girl in their home. As the family continued to struggle so much with trying to get food and staying on their feet, Mrs. Weera and Parvana's mom brought up the idea of Parvana changing her gender identity; Parvana felt compelled to agree to help out her family's struggles. On page 61 it says, "They were going to turn her into a boy. 'As a boy, you'll be able to move in and out of the market, buy what we need, and no one will stop you,' Mother said. On page 63 it says, "Parvana realized Mrs. Weera was right. They could hold her down and cut off her hair, but for anything more, they needed her cooperation. In the end, it really was her decision. Somehow, knowing that made it easier to agree. 'All right,' she said. 'I'll do it.' " These quotes show how Parvana willingly continued to

agree to change her identity for what she thought remained best for the family, and there were even some things she liked about the identity change.

The aspects of what she had liked as a boy included that she didn't have to dress like a girl, wear a burka, and also not be recognized as a girl. She realized how different males and females remained treated. The Taliban did not control males as heavily as females, offering them more opportunities. For example, on page 1 it says, "The Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go to school." On page 53 it says, "Women were not allowed to go into the shops. Men were supposed to do all the shopping, but if women did it, they had to stand outside and call in for what they needed." These quotes portray how differently both genders remained treated. Parvana didn't agree with how males had more advantages and opportunities than females. However, she gained new perspectives throughout her experience and her view of the two genders changed. While she remained a tea boy with her friend Shauzia, they witnessed a traumatic event which she would never have experienced had she not changed her gender identity. On page 108 it says, "He was holding up a rope strung with four severed hands, like beads on a necklace." ... " ' Go home, boys,' the kind man told them. ' Go home and remember better things. ' " This made Parvana realize that even though males have more opportunities, their experiences weren't always positive.

Altogether, Parvana had the opportunity to help her family to survive but it required her to change her gender identity, which she consistently agreed to do. Her initial experiences as a boy made her believe that males had it so much easier and better than females. However, through additional experiences, she realized that wasn't necessarily true. The whole experience opened Parvana's eyes and provided her a unique perspective into the reality of living as both a boy and

a girl. Although it remained difficult at times, Parvana appreciated that she could help her family get the necessary items for their survival, even if it meant changing her gender identity.