ABSTRACT

Many communities mark transition from childhood to adulthood with elaborate rites of passages. For some of these communities, these rites involve circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls. There is now a worldwide outcry against such practices, the loudest being that against clitoridectomy. This article attempts to show: (a) that the communities which perform such rites still continue to believe that these rites bestow upon the individual a certain specific social identity without which the individual cannot be allowed to perform certain specific roles as a member of that community, (b) why the practice of bestowing this identity is attracting controversy in modern societies and, finally, (c) how the controversy could be resolved by identifying the educational role such rites of passage are meant to perform among the communities that practise them.