

Ms Anne Longfield
Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings,
Great Smith St,
London SW1P 3BT

11th February 2016

Re: Gender Survey Sent Out To Schools

Dear Ms Longfield

I write to you on behalf of the organisation Transgender Trend regarding our concern about the recent "gender survey" which was sent out to some schools in the UK. Transgender Trend is an international group of parents and other individuals based mainly in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, who are concerned about the current trend to diagnose "gender non-conforming" children and young people as transgender. We are also concerned about legislative and regulatory efforts to eliminate women-only spaces by prioritizing transgender rights above those of women and girls. Transgender Trend's membership is politically, religiously, and professionally diverse and includes experts in child development and psychology and individuals who, either based on their own experiences or those of their children or peers, question prevailing "gender identity" theory.

We understand that the original commissioned gender survey has been withdrawn but that a modified version will be sent out at a later date. We were unable to see the full survey as it was taken down so quickly, so this response is based on the small portion we did see, which we take as representative of the whole.

We are concerned about the premise of a survey about 'gender identity' being sent to teenagers for the purpose of research, for the reasons set out below.

We believe that it is important that children understand the difference between biological sex (which cannot be changed) and 'gender' as a social construct denoting 'masculinity' and 'femininity.' The inclusion of biological sex categories (male, female, intersex) and descriptors of those categories (boy, girl, young man, young woman) in Question 13 'How Do You Define Your Gender?' suggests that the authors of this survey do not understand that difference themselves.

Muddling up the two distinct terms 'sex' and 'gender' is likely to mislead teenagers into believing that their biological sex is a matter of self-chosen personal identity, rather than just a biological reality.

Inclusion of the category 'girl,' for example, alongside 'gender-fluid' and 'gender non-conforming' suggests that ticking *only* the 'girl' box indicates complete conformity to a girl

stereotype. The meaning of the word 'girl' itself therefore changes from 'biological female' to 'stereotypical girl,' so becomes a subjective judgment rather than a biological fact.

For the purposes of research, this is very misleading: any girl who does not see herself as a stereotype is compelled to also tick another box to make that clear. Given that the government, in its recent Transgender Inquiry Report, places 'gender variant' children under the 'transgender' umbrella, this is very worrying in its implications for accurate statistics on 'transgender' youth.

We are all 'non-binary' in terms of gender, nobody has exclusively masculine or feminine traits and we should not be suggesting to teens that they are unusual, or a special category, if they do not fit a gender stereotype. Non-binary people are still male or female, but this question allows for an either/or interpretation.

We understand that this question will be withdrawn from a future survey; however, its inclusion here is indicative of existing confusion between the terms 'sex' and 'gender' which we feel needs to be fully clarified before any questionnaire goes out to schoolchildren.

We also understand that a question was included about how safe teenagers feel in single-sex toilets, and whether they would prefer unisex facilities. Clearly if a teenage girl feels uncomfortable in a single-sex toilet, she is unlikely to feel safer in one which is shared by teenage boys. The implication behind this question is that its intended recipients are only gender-confused boys. The sub-text, therefore, is that the needs of this group are the priority.

It is unfair to include this question in a survey which is also for teenage girls; it is a leading question which in itself normalises the idea of unisex toilets and manipulates girls into considering this option. We strongly object to the way the question is framed to discount the needs of teenage girls for privacy, comfort and safety in their own toilets, which should be taken as a given. Girls are already socialised to be caretakers and put boys' needs above their own and they should not be influenced to consider forgoing their rights, but to recognise and to stand up for them.

From these two questions, it seems clear that this survey has a background agenda in promoting transgender theory and rights, which is inappropriate and dishonest in this context. Any survey needs to be very carefully constructed so that the risk of leading questions which influence children into a belief or an ideology is eliminated.

The theory of 'gender identity' as a reality stronger than biological sex is a minority belief from an advocacy group of transgender activists, and as such, should not be introduced to teenagers who are at a crucial stage of identity development.

The internet is already full of transgender activism which is harmful for troubled and confused teenagers. Tumblr and Reddit forums and transgender YouTube videos are already urging teenagers to define themselves as 'trans' if they feel in any way different to

the stereotype for their sex. Teenagers reading this survey will not understand all the terms, and a Google search will potentially draw them in to these forums.

We know that this is having a particularly harmful effect on the more vulnerable teenage girls: there is currently an unprecedented spike in teen girls who hate their bodies presenting to gender clinics across the UK. The very common rejection of femininity and/or body-hatred amongst this group makes them particularly susceptible to the easy answer that they are 'really boys.'

Identifying as a boy is not an option we should be introducing to teenage girls, nor validating through a survey sent out by their schools. There is no research into the current percentage of girls who, on reaching full maturity in their mid-twenties, realise that transition was a mistake, but there is a proliferation of blogs and social media accounts from these young women (and some young men). Young women who try to 'detransition' may find they are left infertile, and they will suffer permanent effects such as a deeper, hoarsened voice and increased body hair.

A transgender person faces a lifetime of medication with powerful, off-label hormone treatment, and possibly surgery, with no existing research into the long-term health effects. This is not an option we should be offering lightly to teenagers as part of a menu of identities they can choose from, nor normalising through a survey based on transgender theory.

Teenagers should be free to develop their own identities without being introduced to the idea that they also have to define their 'gender identity' and label themselves at this young age. Identity development is a long process; it is not 'fixed' in the teenage years as this survey suggests.

Clearly the survey is intended to help and support a minority of young people who may be transgender. We respectfully submit these misgivings to you in the hope that any future survey will be more carefully considered in its effect on the much larger percentage of teenagers who are simply troubled and vulnerable.

Thank you very much for your consideration,

Yours sincerely,

Stephanie Davies-Arai
UK Spokesperson
Transgender Trend
transgendertrend.com