

Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences

A major overview of the scientific data on sexuality and gender identity has found ‘a great chasm’ between what is commonly believed and what the evidence actually demonstrates. The 144-page study, published in a special edition of *The New Atlantis* journal, challenges the key orthodoxies that lie at the heart of the LGBT movement.

Co-authored by two of the world’s most respected scholars, Dr Lawrence Mayer and Dr Paul McHugh, the study carefully summarises and explains many of the most rigorous findings from the biological, psychological and social sciences regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and finds common assumptions wanting.

Dr Mayer is a scholar in residence in the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and a professor of statistics and biostatistics at Arizona State University. In his preface, he dedicates his work to the LGBT community and states: ‘I strongly support equality and oppose discrimination for the LGBT community, and I have testified on their behalf as a statistical expert.’

For his part, Dr McHugh is a professor of psychiatry and behavioural sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and was for twenty-five years the psychiatrist-in-chief at the Johns Hopkins Hospital. He is described by the editor of *The New Atlantis* as ‘arguably the most important American psychiatrist of the last half-century’.

Arranged in three parts, the report on *Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences*, first examines sexual orientation before proceeding to consider sexuality, mental health outcomes and social stress, and concluding with a section on gender identity. The key findings from each part of the report are reproduced below:

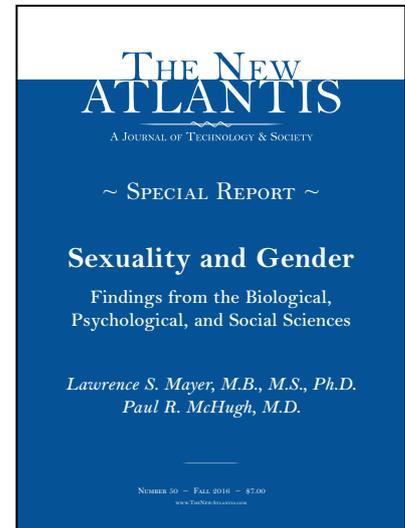
Sexual orientation

- The understanding of sexual orientation as an innate, biologically fixed property of human beings—the idea that people are ‘born that way’—is not supported by scientific evidence.¹

- While there is evidence that biological factors such as genes and hormones are associated with sexual behaviours and attractions, there are no compelling causal biological explanations for human sexual orientation. While minor differences in the brain structures and brain activity between homosexual and heterosexual individuals have been identified by researchers, such neurobiological findings do not demonstrate whether these differences are innate or are the result of environmental and psychological factors.²

- Longitudinal studies of adolescents suggest that sexual orientation may be quite fluid over the life course for some people, with one study estimating that as many as 80% of male adolescents who report same-sex attractions no longer do so as adults (although the extent to which this figure reflects actual changes in same-sex attractions and not just artifacts of the survey process has been contested by some researchers).

- Compared to heterosexuals, non-heterosexuals are about two to three times as likely to have experienced childhood sexual abuse.



Sexuality, mental health outcomes, and social stress

- Compared to the general population, non-heterosexual subpopulations are at an elevated risk for a variety of adverse health and mental health outcomes.

- Members of the non-heterosexual population are estimated to have about 1.5 times higher risk of experiencing anxiety disorders than members of the heterosexual population, as well as roughly double the risk of depression, 1.5 times the risk of substance abuse, and nearly 2.5 times the risk of suicide.³

- Members of the transgender population are also at higher risk of a variety of mental health problems compared to members of the non-transgender population. Especially alarmingly, the rate of lifetime suicide attempts across all ages of transgender individuals is estimated at 41%, compared to under 5% in the overall U.S. population.

- There is evidence, albeit limited, that social stressors such as discrimination and stigma contribute to the elevated risk

continued overleaf...

In this issue...

- *Sexuality & Gender*
- The transgender agenda in the Department for Education... and on children’s TV
- Notable quotes from *Sexuality & Gender*
- UK Supreme Court ruling on named person scheme
- *Do Fathers Matter?*
- Sex education not the answer to sexual harassment and violence
- The failure of sex education
- Amnesty International on abortion
- Parent-governor U-turn
- *Creative Schools*

Sexuality and Gender

Continued from front page

of poor mental health outcomes for non-heterosexual and transgender populations.⁴ More high-quality longitudinal studies are necessary for the ‘social stress model’ to be a useful tool for understanding public health concerns.

Gender identity

- The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex—that a person might be ‘a man trapped in a woman’s body’ or ‘a woman trapped in a man’s body’—is not supported by scientific evidence.
- According to a recent estimate, about 0.6% of U.S. adults identify as a gender that does not correspond to their biological sex.
- Studies comparing the brain structures of transgender and non-transgender individuals have demonstrated weak correlations between brain structure and cross-gender identification. These correlations

do not provide any evidence for a neurobiological basis for cross-gender identification.

- Compared to the general population, adults who have undergone sex-reassignment surgery continue to have a higher risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes. One study found that, compared to controls, sex-reassigned individuals were about 5 times more likely to attempt suicide and about 19 times more likely to die by suicide.
- Children are a special case when addressing transgender issues. Only a minority of children who experience cross-gender identification will continue to do so into adolescence or adulthood.
- There is little scientific evidence for the therapeutic value of interventions that delay puberty or modify the secondary sex characteristics of adolescents, although some children may have improved psychological well-being if they are encouraged and supported in their cross-gender identification. There is no evidence that all children who express gender-atypical thoughts or behaviour

should be encouraged to become transgender.

Although the focus of the report is strictly limited to the scientific evidence and does not stray into the realm of public policy, its findings certainly have policy implications. To take just one example, the research data demands restraint in the area of treatment given to children who feel that their ‘gender’ is at variance with their biological sex.

Mayer and McHugh note that: ‘the majority of children who identify as a gender that does not conform to their biological sex will no longer do so by the time they reach adulthood’. They add: ‘We are disturbed and alarmed by the severity and irreversibility of some interventions being publicly discussed and employed for children.’

In his preface, Dr Mayer writes:

‘The notion that a two-year-old, having expressed thoughts or behaviours identified with the opposite sex, can be labelled for life as transgender has absolutely no support in science. Indeed, it is iniquitous to believe that all children who have gender-atypical thoughts or behaviour at some point in their development, particularly before puberty, should be encouraged to become transgender.’

One of the tragic consequences of insisting that children are recognised, addressed and treated according to their preferred ‘gender identity’ as opposed to their biological sex is that it can result in ‘prolonged identification as transgender for students who otherwise would have naturally grown out of it’.⁵

Opposition

The publication of the *Sexuality and Gender* report has been met with strong criticism from ‘nearly 700 members of the Johns Hopkins community’ (264 alumni, 200 current students, 30 faculty members, and over 100 staff, medical interns, medical residents and fellows). They have signed a petition, calling on Johns Hopkins Medicine to distance itself from what it characterises as ‘a misguided, misinformed attack on LGBT communities under the protection of the Hopkins name’.⁶

There has also been opposition from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which describes itself as ‘the largest civil rights organisation working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Americans’. Later this year, the HRC Foundation’s ‘Healthcare Equality Index’ will rate hospitals according to how their systems reflect ‘responsible citizenship’ (for which, read the promotion of the LGBTQ agenda and endorsing LGBTQ orthodoxies). If Johns

The transgender agenda in the Department for Education

The Department for Education (DfE) is committed to working with other government departments to ‘progress positive social attitudes towards transgender people’. The commitment forms part of the DfE’s vision as set out in its departmental plan for 2015-2020. The plan states that the DfE will work with other departments ‘to champion equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, for example by... removing discrimination and progressing positive social attitudes towards transgender people, for example by providing advice to employers on recruiting and employing transgender employees as well as advice to service providers on transgender service users’.

...and on children’s TV

The BBC has come under fire for broadcasting a children’s programme promoting the idea that children can be born into the ‘wrong body’ and that it can be perfectly normal for children to identify as someone of the opposite sex and to take hormone blockers to inhibit the physical changes that take place at puberty.

The programme, *Just a Girl*, features a fictional character named ‘Amy’ who was born a boy but is now identifying as a girl. In video diary format it is a sympathetic and positive treatment of an 11 year-old’s transition from Ben to ‘Amy’, including the use of hormone blockers. Through ‘Amy’, we are introduced to her friend ‘Josh’ – a girl who wishes to be known as a boy. In one entry we are informed that ‘Amy’ has a crush on a boy named Liam. ‘Amy’ informs us: ‘Liam thinks I’m just a girl, but I’m not. I’m trans. And what’s he going to say if he finds out? Stop being my friend? Why? I’m still me, aren’t I?’

The 35-minute programme was shown on CBBC, a BBC children’s television strand aimed at children between the ages of six to twelve and remains on the CBBC website. Family Education Trust director, Norman Wells, commented:

‘Children who are genuinely confused about their gender need the support of their parents, teachers and doctors to help them to recognise and accept what they are rather than pretend to be what they are not. To give them puberty-delaying drugs will only reinforce their confusion and not solve anything.’

‘The truth is that we are born either male or female; it is not a matter of choice or feelings, but a biological reality. It is irresponsible of the BBC to introduce impressionable children as young as six to the idea that they can choose to be something other than their biological sex. It is sowing the seeds of confusion in young minds.’

‘The more we promote the idea that a boy can be born into a girl’s body and a girl can be born into a boy’s body, and that drugs and surgery can put things right, the more children will become utterly confused. Respecting and preserving a child’s birth sex should be seen as a child protection issue.’

Hopkins does not respond favourably to the petition regarding the report by Drs Mayer and McHugh, the HRC is threatening to ‘substantially reduce’ its score.⁷

Social commentator Thomas D Williams has described the HRC’s response as ‘a remarkable case of agenda politics eclipsing science’. The editors of *The New Atlantis* are viewing the opposition as an attempt to ‘chill academic research on controversial subjects in general’. In a public statement, they write:

‘This blatant effort to intimidate Johns Hopkins University by insisting that the entire university must answer collectively for everything written by its faculty is a disturbing strategy designed to make impossible respectful disagreement in the academy on controversial matters. The HRC’s claim that its efforts “pose no threat to academic freedom” is nonsense; intimidation tactics of this sort undermine the atmosphere of free and open inquiry that universities are meant to foster.’⁸



Dr Lawrence S Mayer



Dr Paul R McHugh

References

1. The report states: ‘Just as the concept of “sexual desire” is complex and difficult to define, there are currently no agreed-upon definitions of “sexual orientation,” “homosexuality,” or “heterosexuality” for purposes of empirical research.’
2. The report observes: ‘Genes constitute only one of the many key influences on behaviour in addition to environmental influences, personal choices, and interpersonal experiences. The weight of evidence to date strongly suggests that the contribution of genetic factors is modest.’
3. The report also notes: ‘The weight of evidence indicates that the rate of intimate partner violence is significantly higher among same-sex couples.’
4. The report states that the evidence supporting the ‘social stress model’ is ‘limited, inconsistent and incomplete’. It recognises that, while the hypothesis that ‘stressors like stigma and prejudice account for much of the additional suffering’ observed among LGBT people, this ‘does not seem to offer a complete explanation for the disparities in the outcomes’. ‘While non-heterosexual and transgender individuals are often subject to social stressors and discrimination, science has not shown that these factors alone account for the entirety, or even a majority, of the health disparity between non-heterosexual and transgender subpopulations and the general population.’
5. Ryan T Anderson, ‘Almost Everything the Media Tell You About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity is Wrong’, *The Daily Signal*, 22 August 2016.
6. ‘Petition to Hopkins to Address False LGBT Reports.’
7. Tari Hanneman, ‘Johns Hopkins Community Calls for Disavowal of Misleading Anti-LGBTQ “Report”’, Human Rights Campaign, 6 October 2016.
8. Editors of *The New Atlantis*, ‘Lies and Bullying from the Human Rights Campaign’, 10 October 2016.

● **Lawrence S Mayer and Paul R McHugh, ‘Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences’, *The New Atlantis*, Issue 50, Fall 2016.**

Notable quotes from the *Sexuality and Gender* report

The aim of the *Sexuality and Gender* study is to ‘present a complex body of research in a way that will be intelligible to a wide audience of both experts and lay readers alike’.

The authors express the hope that ‘such an exposition can contribute to our capacity as physicians, scientists, and citizens to address health issues faced by LGBT populations within our society’. The entire report is worthy of careful consideration, but the following extracts are examples of issues raised which are particularly pertinent to the current debate on sexuality and gender.

‘[W]e may have some reasons to doubt the common assumption that in order to live happy and flourishing lives, we must somehow discover this innate fact about ourselves that we call *sexuality* or *sexual orientation*, and invariably express it through particular patterns of sexual behaviour or a particular life trajectory. Perhaps we ought instead to consider what sorts of behaviours—whether in the sexual realm or elsewhere—tend to be conducive to health and flourishing, and what kinds of behaviours tend to undermine a healthy and flourishing life.’

‘Just as it does a disservice to non-heterosexual subpopulations to ignore or downplay the statistically higher risks of negative mental health outcomes they face, so it does them a disservice to misattribute the causes of these elevated risks, or to ignore other potential factors that may be at work. Assuming that a single model can explain all of the mental health risks faced by non-heterosexuals can mislead clinicians and therapists charged with helping this vulnerable subpopulation. The social stress model deserves further research, but should not be assumed to offer a complete explanation of the causes of mental health disparities if clinicians and policymakers want to adequately address the mental health challenges faced by the LGBT community. More research is needed to explore the causes of, and solutions to, these important public health challenges.’

‘Gender dysphoria—a sense of incongruence between one’s biological sex and one’s gender, accompanied by clinically significant distress or impairment—is sometimes treated in adults by hormones or surgery, but there is little scientific evidence that these therapeutic interventions have psychological benefits.’

‘The consensus of scientific evidence overwhelmingly supports the proposition that a physically and developmentally normal boy or girl is indeed what he or she appears to be at birth. The available evidence from brain imaging and genetics does not demonstrate that the development of gender identity as different from biological sex is innate. Because scientists have not established a solid framework for understanding the causes of cross-gender identification, ongoing research should be open to psychological and social causes, as well as biological ones.’

‘Yet despite the scientific uncertainty, drastic interventions are prescribed and delivered to patients identifying, or identified, as transgender. This is especially troubling when the patients receiving these interventions are children. We read popular reports about plans for medical and surgical interventions for many prepubescent children, some as young as six, and other therapeutic approaches undertaken for children as young as two. We suggest that no one can determine the gender identity of a two-year-old. We have reservations about how well scientists understand what it even means for a child to have a developed sense of his or her gender, but notwithstanding that issue, we are deeply alarmed that these therapies, treatments, and surgeries seem disproportionate to the severity of the distress being experienced by these young people, and are at any rate premature since the majority of children who identify as the gender opposite their biological sex will not continue to do so as adults.’

UK Supreme Court strikes down 'defective' and 'disproportionate' named person scheme

The controversial plan that every child and young person in Scotland should have a state-appointed professional to 'safeguard and support his or her wellbeing' from birth until at least the age of 18 was not introduced on 31 August as originally planned, following a ruling from the UK Supreme Court in July. The Court declared that the named person scheme is 'defective' and 'cannot be brought into force' in its present form.

As one of the four charities which brought the case to the Supreme Court, Family Education Trust welcomed the Court's recognition that the named person scheme represents a disproportionate intrusion into family life and undermines parents. The Trust's director, Norman Wells, commented:

'Whenever the state assumes responsibility for any aspect of bringing up children, it inevitably affects the way parents view their role. The result is that parents tend to become more passive and take less responsibility for their children. Over time this creates a vicious circle in which more child neglect leads to more state intervention in children's lives and an ever greater burden on the taxpayer.'

Unanimous ruling

In a unanimous ruling, the panel of five Supreme Court judges concluded that the powers granted to named persons to share private information about the children for whom they had responsibility were 'incompatible with the rights of children, young persons and parents'. The legislation therefore lay outside 'the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament'. The Court noted that the named person would have discretion to share a 'potentially very wide' range of confidential information about children without their consent or the consent of their parents.

The judgment further stated that the information-sharing provisions of Part 4 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 'may in practice result in a disproportionate interference' with the right of children and their parents to a private and family life.

"The first thing that a totalitarian regime tries to do is to get at the children, to distance them from the subversive, varied influences of their families, and indoctrinate them in their rulers' view of the world."

- UK Supreme Court

The stated purpose of the named person scheme was to promote the 'wellbeing' of children – a term which, the Court observed, was 'not defined'. The judgment makes reference to the eight factors by which 'wellbeing' is to be measured – safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, and included (known by the acronym SHANARRI). The Supreme Court commented that, 'These factors are not themselves defined, and in some cases are notably vague.'

Norman Wells observed:

'Under the named person scheme, the threshold for intervention in the family was placed at a very low level. Given the

gradual shift away from a reliance on objective measurements of child wellbeing and a growing focus on subjective impressions gained from speaking to children about their own feelings and perceptions, there was considerable scope for a well-adjusted child from a secure and loving home being adjudged to have a "wellbeing need" by a well-meaning but over-zealous professional.

'There was always a very real danger that children could have been subject to unnecessary and potentially damaging intrusion into their private and family lives on the basis of a named person's subjective impressions and judgments.'

Freedom and the family

The panel of judges, which included two judges from Scotland, stressed the importance of respecting the integrity of the family unit for the preservation of civil liberties. They stated that:

'There is an inextricable link between the protection of the family and the protection of fundamental freedoms in liberal democracies. The noble concept in article 1 of the Universal Declaration, that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" is premised on difference. If we were all the same, we would not need to guarantee that individual differences should be respected...

'Individual differences are the product of the interplay between the individual person and his upbringing and environment. Different upbringings produce different people. The first thing that a totalitarian regime tries to do is to get at the children, to distance them from the subversive, varied influences of their families, and indoctrinate them in their rulers' view of the world. Within limits, families must be left to bring up their children in their own way.'

The judgment proceeds to quote approvingly from a decision in the US Supreme Court stating that: 'The child is not the mere creature of the state.' Family Education Trust director, Norman Wells, remarked:

'The UK Supreme Court is absolutely right to recognise the vital role of the family in a free society. It is not the function of the state to determine what constitutes optimal parenting or to regulate how every child is brought up and educated.

'At a time when there is an alarming and widespread deference to expert opinion at the expense of parents, legislators and policymakers both north and south of the border would do well to pay careful



Pictured outside the UK Supreme Court on the day of the ruling, from left to right: Dr Stuart Waiton, Senior Lecturer, Abertay University; Norman Wells, Family Education Trust; Sam Webster, Solicitor Advocate, The Christian Institute; Simon Calvert, No to Named Persons; Alison Preuss, independent parents' advocate.

attention to the wise and perceptive comments of the Supreme Court judges.'

Costs

In a further ruling concerning costs, the UK Supreme Court ordered the Scottish Government to cover the legal bills of those who brought the legal challenge. The ruling relates not only to costs incurred in the appeal to the Supreme Court (heard in March), but also to the two earlier hearings in Edinburgh. It is estimated that after its own legal fees are factored in, the total cost to the Scottish Government could be in the region of £500,000.

Scottish Government 'absolutely committed' to press ahead with named person scheme

Following the Supreme Court ruling, the Scottish Government has reiterated that it 'remains absolutely committed' to the named person scheme. The Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, announced that the Scottish Government will undertake a three month period of 'intense engagement' in which input will be received from professionals, parents, charities and young people.

He stressed that the views of those with concerns would be taken into account as well as the views of those who supported the policy, and expressed the hope that new legislation would be put in place ready for the scheme to go ahead in August 2017, a year later than originally planned.¹

However, Mr Swinney has so far ruled out a meeting with a delegation from the No to Named Persons (NO2NP) campaign, which is supported by a broad range of organisations including Family Education Trust. He has also failed to respond to parents who have asked him to hold public meetings where he can be questioned about his future plans for the named person scheme.

The success of the NO2NP campaign was recognised at the Herald Scottish Politician of the Year Awards at the end of October. NO2NP received the award for the 'Public Campaigner of the Year' – an award 'to recognise an individual or group that has best engaged with the political system to change legislation'.



1. Deputy First Minister, Statement on Named Person, 8 September 2016.

Do Fathers Matter?

What Science Is Telling Us About the Parent We've Overlooked

Paul Raeburn

Scientific American/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015, 272pp, US \$15.00
ISBN 978-0-374-53535-3

It is frequently assumed that the mother is by far the most significant person in her child's life. Apart from the role he fulfils as a provider, the father is often regarded as largely irrelevant to the welfare, care and nurture of his children. This common perception of the father as an optional extra was reinforced in law by the removal of the requirement to take into account 'the need of a child for a father' when providing fertility treatment under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008.

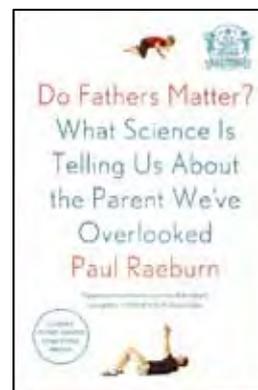
However, as science reporter Paul Raeburn demonstrates in this book, research on the significance of fathers is growing rapidly, with academic studies in the past two decades almost unanimously concluding that fathers make a unique contribution to the development of their children. Raeburn writes that the short answer to the question posed by the title is: 'Fathers are vastly important in their children's lives in ways that both scholars and parenting experts have overlooked.' But, he stresses, that is not to say that children raised in families without a father in the home are doomed to failure.

Rich contribution

Not all readers will be persuaded by the evolutionary presuppositions which surface here and there, and towards the end of the book the author himself sounds a note of caution about assuming that what is observed in certain animals will also be true of humans.

In a discussion of genetics, Raeburn shows that a father's genetic contribution to his children is richer and more complex than we might have imagined. He further notes that researchers have found that more remote father-child interactions in infancy are associated with a higher rate of aggressive behaviour in children regardless of the parenting style of the mother. Research is cited which suggests that fathers are not only important for children's language development, but that they matter *more* than mothers in this regard.

Reference is made to a broad range of beneficial social and psychological effects that flow from fathers' direct engagement with their children. Children whose fathers played with them, read to them, took them on outings and helped to



care for them had fewer behavioural problems during their earliest years at school, and less likelihood of delinquency or criminal behaviour as adolescents.

Fathers and teenagers

In a chapter on teenagers, Raeburn discusses the robust association between father absence – both physical and psychological – and sexual risk-taking in daughters. He cites evidence that an increased risk of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections was more common in daughters from disrupted families, or in daughters whose relationships with their fathers were marked by harsh conflict, little warmth or support, and a lack of parental supervision. Teenagers who engage regularly in activities with their families (e.g. eating meals together, participating in religious activities, or simply having fun together) are less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour. Likewise, those with fathers who know what their children are doing and who their friends are.

Having spent the major part of the book looking at the contribution of fathers through the eyes of anthropologists, geneticists and psychologists, Raeburn turns his attention to the negative consequences for children where fathers are absent and briefly touches on the pain experienced by those who not only do not know their fathers, but do not even know who their fathers are. One woman, who had never been able to identify her sperm donor father described sperm donation as 'deliberate spiritual robbery' – a procedure that had deprived her of any knowledge of her biological heritage. 'Do Fathers Matter?' Yes, they certainly do – for all manner of reasons.

A date for your diary...

The 2017 Annual General Meeting and conference of the Family Education Trust will take place at the Royal Air Force Club, 128 Piccadilly, London W1 on:
Saturday 24 June 2017

Further details will accompany the next issue of the bulletin.

Statutory sex and relationships education not the answer to sexual harassment and sexual violence

In its report on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, published on 13 September 2016, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee predictably recommended that sex and relationships education should be made a statutory subject in all schools, alongside Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE). In response, Family Education Trust issued the following press release.

The deep-seated cultural and social factors that lie behind sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools will not be solved by putting sex and relationships education (SRE) on the national curriculum, according to national family charity, Family Education Trust.

Responding to today's report from the Women and Equalities Committee, Family Education Trust director, Norman Wells, commented:

'The rise in the incidence of sexual harassment and sexual violence must be seen in the context of a highly sexualised culture in which we have made an idol of sexual pleasure. As a society, we have tended to view sex as a casual recreational activity rather than as an expression of total, lifelong commitment. And all too often, sex and relationships education in schools is contributing to the problem. Young people are being given the impression that sexual urges and impulses cannot be controlled and must be expressed.

'It is important to maintain a sense of proportion. Sexual harassment and sexual violence do not feature in all schools, and where they are present they do not occur in every school to the same degree. This is therefore primarily an issue to be addressed by school communities at the local level rather than by central government.'

Undermining parents

The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee report stresses that 'parents have a central role', and yet its key recommendation for statutory sex and relationships education would undermine that role. Norman Wells observed:

'If SRE were to be made part of the national curriculum, it is inevitable that there would be more central prescription and that parents would have less say as to what is taught. In such a sensitive and controversial subject area, that would be

unacceptable and would go against the fundamental principle of education law that pupils should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents.

'Parents are best placed to supervise and monitor the exposure of their children to the media, their access to the internet, their engagement in social networking and their use of mobile phones. Schools should be actively engaging with parents over problems relating to sexual harassment and violence. The last thing we need is a centrally-prescribed approach to SRE that rides roughshod over parental concerns.'

More harm than good?

Some of the leading campaigners for statutory SRE favour an approach to the subject which is likely to do more harm than good in relation to sexual harassment and sexual violence.

For example, in 2014 the Sex Education Forum, the PSHE Association and Brook published 'supplementary advice' for schools on SRE. The advice states that SRE should treat sex as 'a normal and pleasurable fact of life', but fails to set it in the context of an exclusive, committed and faithful relationship. However, placing the emphasis on sexual pleasure and self-gratification rather than on self-giving in a lifelong relationship will not discourage and reduce the incidence of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

There is also evidence that presenting sex as a normal part of growing up is placing children and young people at risk. Serious case reviews in Rochdale, Rotherham and Oxfordshire revealed instances where authorities failed to act in order to protect young teenage girls from child sexual exploitation because they regarded underage sex as a normal 'lifestyle choice'.

Norman Wells added:

'Far from being the solution to sexual harassment and sexual violence, some kinds of SRE can exacerbate the problem. Many parents are deeply troubled about



Norman Wells

the growing number of sex education resources aimed at both primary and secondary school pupils which are seeking to push back the boundaries and expose children to explicit material which fails to teach them about the importance of marriage and stable family life.

'Schools need to take great care over the messages they communicate to children and young people regarding sexual relationships. It is vital that schools remain accountable to parents and shape their sex education policies, and select materials and resources, in close consultation with parents, being sensitive to their wishes and concerns.'

Additional notes

1. The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee report on *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools* follows an inquiry launched in April 2016.
2. The Family Education Trust submission to the Committee's inquiry may be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/zl2nezb>
3. The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee report claims that the vast majority of parents support statutory Personal, Social Health and Economic education (PSHE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE). There is, however, no clear evidence to support this claim. (See 'Do parents really want statutory PSHE?' Bulletin 161, February 2016)

● **House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools*, Third Report of Session 2016–17, HC 91, 13 September 2016.**

The failure of sex education

Sex education lessons in school are failing to reduce teenage conception rates and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, according to a new report published by the prestigious Cochrane Library.¹

The team of academics conducted a global review of school-based interventions for preventing HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and teenage pregnancy and found that 'sex education programmes have no impact in lowering numbers of young people affected'.²

Previous research has focussed on the extent to which sex education improves the knowledge of young people and reduces self-reported risk-taking, but this study is the first of its kind to look at measurable biological outcomes. Dr Amanda Mason-Jones, Senior Lecturer in Global Public Health at the University of York and lead author of the review, commented: 'Previous studies have focused on self-reported outcomes only - this is the first review and meta-analysis to look at only measurable biological outcomes.'

Well-designed trials

The researchers from the University of York, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, the South African Medical Research Council, the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University studied eight trials involving more than 55,000 participants from sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Europe.

The published report records:

'Some of the trials included in this review were large, complex, well-designed, and well-conducted trials whose participants were followed up on a medium- to long-

term basis. The cost of these trials has been significant, yet they have not been able to show effectiveness for educational curriculum-based interventions on biologically measured adolescent sexual and reproductive health outcomes.'

Advocates of compulsory sex education frequently trumpet the effectiveness of 'high quality' and 'comprehensive' sex and relationships education programmes, but the authors of the Cochrane review found that even the most highly-vaunted programmes are failing to deliver. They write:

'The trials included in this review evaluated educational programmes that incorporated many of the specific characteristics that have previously been recommended for well-designed adolescent sexual and reproductive health interventions. However, despite this, they failed to demonstrate any reduction in the prevalence of STIs or adolescent pregnancy.'

Radical rethink required

In an article published on *The Conversation* website to coincide with the release of the Cochrane review, Dr Mason-Jones wrote:

'What is clear is that we really don't know what works and for whom when it comes to curriculum-based sex education in schools. We are often told that we do know, but the studies quoted previously have been based on self-reported behaviours of young people which are prone to bias.'

*'Sex and sexuality are sensitive topics, especially when there are legal or moral ramifications for someone admitting to having sex. This new review, by contrast, has for the first time only included studies featuring measurable biological outcomes from records or tests of pregnancy and STIs. The fact that it points to sex education not working to reduce pregnancy and STIs among the young, therefore, is all the more significant. It seems we need a radical rethink.'*³

Family Education Trust director, Norman Wells, commented:

'This study explodes the exaggerated claims that are frequently made about the effectiveness of sex education programmes.'

'The government is under considerable pressure to make sex and relationships education a compulsory part of the school curriculum at all ages and stages and says it is currently considering all the options. As it does so, it should take careful note of the findings of this study and not be rushed into pursuing an agenda that may do more harm than good.'

References

1. Cochrane Reviews are systematic reviews of primary research in human health care and health policy, and are internationally recognised as the highest standard in evidence-based health care resources.
2. University of York press release, 'Classroom-based sex education programmes largely ineffectual, but incentives to stay at school can help', 8 November 2016.
3. Amanda Mason-Jones, 'Keeping girls at school may reduce teenage pregnancy and STIs - but sex education doesn't', *The Conversation*, 8 November 2016.

● **A J Mason-Jones, D Sinclair, C Mathews, A Kagee, A Hillman, C Lombard.** 'School-based interventions for preventing HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy in adolescents', *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2016, Issue 11. Art. No.: CD006417. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD006417.pub3.

In brief...

U-turn on parent-governors

Education Secretary Justine Greening has signalled that the government will not now be proceeding with its plan to remove the requirement for parents to be represented on the governing bodies of academies. Family Education Trust was among a number of groups which opposed the proposal (see Bulletins 162 and 163). Ms Greening told the Education Select Committee in September, 'I don't think we should be saying MATs [multi-academy trusts] don't need to have parents. Parent governors play a vital role actually.'

Amnesty International's 'hypocrisy' over abortion

Family Education Trust spokesman, Mary Russell, has charged Amnesty International with hypocrisy over its support for the decriminalisation of abortion.

During a recent debate on BBC Radio Ulster's *Talkback* programme, Amnesty International's Northern Ireland Programme Director, Patrick Corrigan challenged supporters of capital punishment to state what method of execution they preferred. In reply, Mrs Russell asked Mr Corrigan to clarify what method of abortion he favoured - partial-birth abortion, surgical abortion, chemical abortion, or lunchtime abortion?

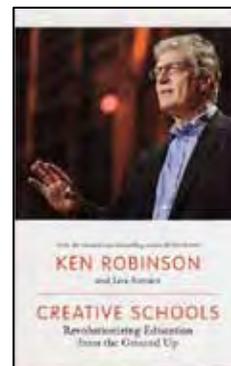
Amnesty International's representative responded angrily to the suggestion, asserting that it was 'utterly abhorrent' to bring abortion into a discussion on the death penalty. He commented: 'Women and girls have rights over their reproductive system and that includes, on occasion, that they have rights to access termination of pregnancy.' He added that to equate accessing abortion to the death penalty was 'frankly ridiculous'.

Mrs Russell made the point that it is hypocritical for the human rights charity to vehemently oppose capital punishment for convicted murderers while insisting that it is acceptable to terminate the life of an innocent unborn child.

Creative Schools

Revolutionising Education from the Ground Up

Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica, Allen Lane, 2015, xx + 292pp, £18.99
ISBN 978-0-241-00395-4



This book is written out of the conviction that many educational reforms around the world are being driven by political and commercial interests that misunderstand ‘how real people learn and how great schools actually work’. It sets out to show how the standards culture is harming children and to present a different and more holistic way of thinking about education.

In 2006 Ken Robinson gave a TED conference talk on the subject of ‘Do Schools Kill Creativity?’ which has subsequently been viewed over 30 million times. He argued that the education system is all too often stifling the immense natural talents of children and that a more balanced, individualised and creative approach to education is required. He writes: ‘If you run an education system based on standardisation and conformity, that suppresses individuality, imagination and creativity, don’t be surprised if that’s what it does.’

Mass systems of education

Robinson contends that mass systems of public education, organised on the principles of mass production and developed largely to meet the labour needs of the Industrial Revolution, are ‘inherently unsuited to the wholly different circumstances’ of the 21st century. *Creative Schools* offers a critique of the way things are, a vision of how they should be, and a theory of change for how to move from one to the other and to spark a revolution in education from the ground up.

The aims of education are defined as: ‘to enable students to understand the world around them, and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens’. Yet Robinson observes that in spite of massive investment in education, too many people do not possess the skills required to fulfil the work that needs to be done. In some fields a degree is ‘an expensive irrelevance’ and some essential

spheres of work such as those fulfilled by electricians, builders, plumbers, chefs, paramedics, carpenters, mechanics, engineers and security staff tend to be regarded as second-rate options for those who have not made it academically.

He argues that students’ individual talents take many forms and should be fostered in similarly diverse ways. Robinson’s critique of standardisation is often pithy. For example: ‘The principle of *linearity* works well for manufacturing; it doesn’t for people. Educating children by age group assumes that the most important thing they have in common is their date of manufacture.’ He cites examples of schools which have broken the mould and treated education as an organic process rather than an industrial one.

Flexibility and personalisation

Convinced that all students have considerable natural abilities, Robinson is also fully persuaded that ‘the key to developing them is to move beyond the narrow confines of academicism and conformity, to systems that are personalised to the real abilities of every student’. Such a vision will require flexibility in the curriculum so that, in addition to what all students need to learn in common, there are opportunities for them to pursue their individual interests and strengths as well. Within this structure, the role of the teacher is to engage, enable, expect and empower.

Robinson identifies four basic purposes of education: economic, cultural, social and personal. These suggest to him eight

core competencies which schools should facilitate: curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, compassion, composure and citizenship. In order to meet these purposes and competencies, the curriculum must have diversity, depth and dynamism.

Parents have a key part to play in Robinson’s vision for a more personalised approach to education. He argues that parents have an essential role in helping schools evolve a more rounded understanding of their children’s unique qualities and capabilities. He also has a positive attitude towards home education – ‘the ultimate expression of family involvement in personalised learning’. He cites ‘many compelling reasons to consider homeschooling as an option’: it avoids a reliance on teaching to standardised tests, gives children room to discover their passions and interests, and there is also evidence that home educated students tend to outperform their peers on academic achievement tests.

Robinson concludes: ‘Effective education is always a balance between rigour and freedom, tradition and innovation, the individual and the group, theory and practice, the inner world and the outer world... [W]e now have technologies that make it possible to personalise education in wholly new ways.’

Few will agree with this provocative book at every point, but Robinson’s stimulating, refreshing and inspiring approach is calculated to challenge many of our cherished preconceptions about educational theory and practice.

Family Bulletin

Annual Subscription
£10.00 (UK) £20.00 (Overseas)

Published Quarterly

Trustees

Mrs Sarah Carter
Arthur Cornell MEd F.Coll.P
(Chairman)
Martin Doe MSc MIAP MBCS
CITP
James Eaton CA CTA
(Hon Treasurer)
Betty, Lady Grantchester
Eric Hester BA (Vice Chairman)
Dr Joseph Lim BPharm
MRPharmS PhD
Mrs Anna Lines

Dr Julie Maxwell MB BCH
MRCPCH
Mrs Valerie Riches
(Founder President)
Dr Trevor Stammers MA
FRCGP DRCOG

Executive Committee Members

Mrs Ann Allen MA
Mrs Gillian White
Director
Norman Wells FRSA

Sponsors

Professor Brenda Almond BA
MPhil doc.hc (Utrecht)
Professor John Bonnar MA MD
FRCOG
The Viscountess Brentford OBE
Peter Dawson OBE BSc FRSA
Michael McKenzie CB QC
The Duke of Montrose
The Baroness O’Cathain OBE

Family Education Trust

The Atrium
31 Church Road
Ashford
Middlesex TW15 2UD
Tel no: 01784 242340
Fax no: 01784 252343
Email: info@famyouth.org.uk
Website: www.famyouth.org.uk
Registered Charity No: 1070500
A Company Limited by
Guarantee No: 3503533