

WESTERN Standard

HILTON-O'BRIEN: They're messing with our children's minds

A friend sent me a voice recording the other day. It was a voice recording because, she said, writing it down would lose the immediacy of the experience. What had happened was this: three children had come down the street outside her home. A girl of about 14 was explaining to a boy – who appeared to be about 13 – what “pansexual” meant. A younger girl, perhaps nine years old, followed them. Trying to get into the conversation, she loudly announced: “I am bi! Bi, bi, bi, bi, bi!” My friend was horrified.

The conversation was startling as a demonstration of child sexualization. There has been a lot of discussion about child sexualization over the last 20 years. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines sexualization as “occurring when a person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics.” This conversation, in which the younger child’s “in” to the older children’s society was the announcement of a sexual identity that implied behaviour, appears to be a *prima facie* case.

Child sexualization is a serious concern. As the chair of an APA task force released in 2007 remarked, “We have ample evidence to conclude that [sexualization has negative effects in a variety of domains](#), including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, and healthy sexual development.” In particular, the press release of the task force noted that sexualization can “undermine a person’s confidence in and comfort

with her own body” — in other words, gender dysphoria. This also leads to emotional and self-image problems, difficulties in developing a healthy sexual self-image, and is linked with serious mental health issues and sexual victimization.

Unlike the media influences the APA task force dealt with, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) intends to influence children. According to UNESCO, CSE specifically includes teaching that “sexual health is expressed through diverse sexualities and forms of sexual expression.” [In other words, teaching gender theory.](#) In Ontario for instance, [gender identity is taught in 8th grade](#) (if not earlier.) Even if parents want to opt their children out of it, the anecdote that started this article illustrates how hard it is to avoid it. Not only does CSE require that children adopt a sexual identity, but as our anecdote illustrates, children who want to fit in have to adopt one that is outside of the perceived norm — otherwise, they aren’t cool.

Our sex education programs, of course, are intended to protect children from the effects of premature sexualization. But what if they are having the opposite effect? According to a 2017 study presented at a Trans Youth Canada conference, [pediatric referrals for puberty blockers](#) or gender-affirming hormones soared from near zero in 2004 to over 1,000 per year by 2016. The graph is seemingly geometric, showing a near doubling of referrals for each year after 2012.

Unless a tremendous proportion of children were trans throughout human history, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Comprehensive Sex Education is making many children uncomfortable in their bodies — the effects that the APA associates with child sexualization. In other words, our sexual education programs are themselves sexualizing children.

Parents are concerned about this. [Ontario has already had to recall](#) its controversial sex-ed curriculum once, and may again. Other parents note that [schools seem to be actively encouraging students to “transition,”](#) over the parents’ objections. [One online article](#) characterizes CSE as “gay conversion therapy.” There is no appeal: even [a trip to a Human Rights Commission](#) is likely to protect an activist school, rather than the child. When Alberta educators post pictures of toddlers being prepared for “[drag queen story hours](#),” it confirms what Canadian parents fear — that our educational leaders are using sexual education to push social changes that are not in the children’s best interests.

Given what my friend saw in the street, Canadian parents are right to be concerned. Our sex education programs may be causing the very problems they are charged with solving.

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