

Thank you very much for asking me to speak tonight.

I am aware that there are many women who have done more than I have and who know more than I do and I hope that we will be able to hear from all of them. (MBM and Susan Sinclair who blogs on the Scottish Women website, and the great work that Women and Girls in Scotland have done with their recent impact assessment on children. I know that many women have problems in speaking out.

I am not a lawyer, not a psychologist, or a teacher or a scientist. I am a social worker who has worked with families and with women and children and young people for many years. I do speak up about policies and practices that I disagree with - particularly when they actively hurt people and damage trust between citizens and our government. I have spoken out about policies that have been adopted in relation to children and young people. I was actively against the Named Person law - now struck down by the Supreme Court. Going to say a few words about that because it is relevant.

Many people thought I was wrong in speaking out against the NP. After all, the intentions of govt and supporters were benevolent towards children, and all the political parties agreed, and so did the education and social work establishment. So what was the problem? The problem was that it introduced unprecedented levels of intrusion into families lives and unprecedented breaches of confidentiality. The Supreme Court agreed that the parliament in Scotland had passed a law that breached human rights. So hold the thought that the "powers that be" can be very wrong, no matter how good their intentions are.

Today, I am speaking out against the harm that is being done to children by the wholesale adoption of policies advocated for and actually written by small but influential lobby groups. In July last year, I wrote an article on the issue and sent it off to the Herald. I was nervous. I had seen the levels of abuse and attack on people - mainly women - who had spoken out. I am fortunate in that I don't have an employer, and when I do work, I work for myself. Nevertheless, I knew I was putting my reputation on the line, and putting any paid work in jeopardy. But in fact I got lots of support. Some from women relieved I had written it because they had been watching in disbelief as things developed. And also from women who had been quite unaware of what was going on. I have written more since, and I have also met face to face with lots of other women we have all gained strength and courage from these meetings.

What I wrote about, and what I want to talk about tonight, is the harm being done to children specifically. All children. I don't put the responsibility for this on the transgender activists who are so alarmed by us meeting tonight. I don't agree with them but I support their right to advocate for policies that accord with their beliefs. That is free speech, it is democracy. If anyone was threatening their right to speak and to be heard I (and I hope everyone in this room) would defend their right to do so.

My criticisms are not against the lobbyists. No, what has appalled me and made me very angry on behalf of children, and of parents, is the wholesale support given to their beliefs and policies by the powers that be in Scotland at the highest level.

Take the Guidance on supporting transgender young people in schools. This was written entirely by two members of LGBT Youth and the TransAlliance Scotland. Both of these groups receive significant government funding. They seem to have a presence at every policy table in Scotland. Education Scotland, the NHS in Scotland, COSLA, the police, the prison service, human rights bodies - which sadly include the office of the Children's Commissioner for Scotland all welcomed and

endorsed and promoted the Guidance. All without asking for an evidence base and without any impact assessment. With Women and Girls in Scotland's great work dissecting the Guidance on Supporting Transgender Young People in School, we can see why good impact assessments are an essential part of any policy process. The children's commissioner's office should have completed that impact assessment and not left it to unfunded women's groups with no seat at any table. Not till now at any rate.

But asking for evidence and for impact assessments breaches the first commandment that we are all given - that there must be "no debate" about the basic tenets of transgender beliefs. Government and its agencies have sadly been only too happy to oblige. Some agencies threatening questioning staff with disciplinary action and even termination of contract. The demand that no one should dissent should have been a red flag. Instead it has acted as a gag. Harm has been caused. and is being caused.

I think that harm is being done on two levels. One is harm to all children by the teaching of stereotypical sexist views about being a boy or being a girl. This puts all children in a gender prison. It is particularly harmful to girls for obvious reasons. But it is also harmful to boys. The other harm that has been created is to vulnerable children and young people - who I believe are being pushed with "NO DEBATE" down the rabbit hole of denial of biological actual sex, with I think very unfortunate personal consequences for them. Possibly life long, possibly life threatening. It is sex and not gender that is the material reality. No amount of changing names or birth certificates or bodies will change a child's sex.

What are children as young as 4 or 5 being taught? Inclusive education plans are to make what is called gender education compulsory. They are being taught that they may have "girls brains" in boys' bodies and vice versa. That if don't feel like they fit with the pink/blue colour gender colour code, then it very likely means that their sex could have been "assigned wrongly" at birth.

Here is a quote from a children's book that is recommended in the guidance. JAZZ

"From the time she was two years old, Jazz knew that she had a girl's brain in a boy's body. She loved pink and dressing up as a mermaid and didn't feel like herself in boy's clothing. This confused her family, until they took her to a doctor who said that Jazz was transgender and that she was born that way."

This is an example of harm at both levels. All children and particular children.

Yes, there are definitely boys who wish to be girls and it seems more often there are girls who wish to be boys. Yes those children can be quite insistent on having boy's names and wearing only boy's clothes - or vice versa. Tomboys feature strongly in children's literature. Girls love them. George in the Famous Five was insistent that she was a boy with a boy's name and that she should be treated as a boy. She (and I use the pronoun advisedly) was the most popular character in the books. I don't know if George grew up and lived as a man. I doubt it. I suspect that she just lived as the kind of woman she was. Probably in trousers. Probably a feminist. maybe an explorer or a scientist or an explorer. The evidence that we have suggests that she would have gradually desisted, accepted physical reality, and usually made a good adjustment to her actual sex as either as a lesbian or a heterosexual woman.

Some children don't desist and I am not denying their distress as adults if they continue to feel that they can't live in their actual sex. It seems to me that we need a lot more research on whether and what treatments are helpful. also on the possible reasons - are adult men who insist they are

women- despite not wishing to change their bodies at all - the same as teenage girls who don't want breasts, periods and who would rather perhaps stay in androgynous prepuberty?

This guidance however starts from the single assumption that transgender individuals are born that way, somehow know that they are in boys or girls, and that they should be supported to transition to live in their gender identity and not their biological sex. Interestingly the guidance defines all children over 4 as young people. Interesting because that is also a bit of a red flag that the leaders of education services should have been alert to. It also advises that their parents don't need to be told if the child of whatever age does not want them to know, which is legally incorrect. Children who might have issues about this are to be re-educated or excluded. We don't know how many schools have been following the guidance. But we do know that training has been given to thousands of teachers in Scotland based on the guidance. We know that an increasing number of children are identifying or being identified as transgender. Some of them living double lives -their parents deliberately not informed if the child does not wish it. Parents who know and who object are also being threatened with child protection measures if they do not go along with measures advocated in the guidance. All of this With no evidence base. No impact assessment. where is the research? ~Academics who disagree seem to be particular focus of attack.

There is evidence that children who suffer from gender dysphoria suffer from other mental health problems. A high proportion of girls who are coming forward to say they are transgender are autistic. The connection between feeling different and not fitting in, and being attracted to transgender beliefs is pretty obvious. this might seem an easy diagnosis - someone misidentified you at birth. Encouraging children who are already distressed by feelings of difference and not fitting in to deny the material reality of their sex is not surprisingly associated with a rising incidence of mental distress and self harm.

the holes in the case are obvious and the arguments contradict themselves. Gender - which is a set of expectations based on sex - has become confused with sex itself. So instead of denying limiting and stupid gender expectations, children are being asked to deny the reality of their sex. It is an Emperor's new clothes tale for modern times.

The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir was published in 1949. She dissected and demolished the "othering" of women, the denial of ownership of the meaning of our own lives. feminism and gay liberation were part of decades of progress and enlightenment after the 2WW. Feminism like gay liberation was not exactly welcomed by the establishment, But by 1975 we had the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act. Right to control our own bodies, contraception and abortion. We won the right to divorce, we exposed the hidden level of physical and sexual abuse. Gay and lesbian struggles won the right to decriminalisation, to the same age of consent for sex, and just recently the right to partnerships and to marriage

What feminists of my generation knew with certainty was that all the gendered expectations of girls and women are just that. Expectations that we had no intention of fulfilling. We knew that children should not be taught that there are innate characteristics of being female. There is nothing wrong with girls who wanted to play football or with boys who wanted to cook. Those are basic feminist beliefs and values. Most of these beliefs and values were well accepted in the 21st century, so we thought. What a shock we have had. Gendered expectations are now being taught in schools and children informed that they may be in the wrong bodies. Pink and blue and barbie and ken are back.

One of the ways that these views have become currency among people is on the basis that being transgender is the same as being gay, being born in the wrong body like Jazz is just a normal occurrence in the population. and doctors will just diagnose you, give you a pill and wishes will be

horses. However, being lesbian or gay or heterosexual does not require a denial of biological sex, nor does it require any treatment. But transgender children face being set on a course of very specific treatment plans : immediate transitioning, then puberty blockers and breast binders, hormones, surgery. All of them with highly harmful impacts on health - on sexual function and on fertility, as Margaret McCartney and colleagues warned in the Lancet recently and also pointed to other unknown long term consequences. these are life changing decisions. Just as important are the psychological consequences. Of always performing to gender expectations, of always facing possible challenge, of not fitting forever.

I want to talk briefly about claims that what is called transitioning is a children's rights issue, children have many rights - to protection from harm and exploitation, to education, to parental support, to health care. It is usually the age of 12 where children are understood to have the capacity to make informed decision about some matters. But children - and their parents too - can not be presumed to be able to make informed decisions about being transgender and transitioning if the adults offering guidance are completely ignorant of the consequences of the choices that are being urged on them. And there is yet no evidence that assesses the long-term outcomes of transitioning. Because we don't know. The head of Education Scotland does not know, the chief medical officer of Scotland does not know. It is my bet that the NHS and the education system will face future claims for failure of care and breach of rights.

But because a connection with gay and lesbian equality and acceptance and with children's rights has been made we are all supposed to say "how enlightened" "how admirable" "how completely sensible" about policies and practices that are demonstrably unfair and are harmful to children. One day, we are all going to have to answer the question ;how could you let that happen? there will be enquiries and calls for enquiries. there will be angry and hurt people asking why this was allowed to happen.

Why have these ideas been accepted by people in power and in leadership positions in children's services in Scotland? Only they can answer that. I have a feeling that many of them will be wondering how they can cross back over the bridges they have so carelessly crossed.

I think that we may need to help them cross back over. We need to be heard as the voice or reason, asking for discussion, calling for evidence, asking to get round the table and talk about what is in the best interests of our children.

Our voice will only be strong enough to be heard if we meet and organise together like this. being face to face with a newly formed group of women in Edinburgh over recent months has been fantastic experience. I know that there are groups started in Glasgow, Dundee, Stirling and in other places.

I am looking forward to having a good discussion tonight about the future. what should our aims be? how should we share and learn from one another?

Thank you for listening