

---

# **SAFEGUARDING? CRITIQUING GENDER-CRITICAL DISCOURSE AROUND GENDER DIVERSITY AT SCHOOL**

SUSIE BOWER-BROWN

Thomas Coram Research Unit, University College London

---

## **Abstract**

More and more young people are identifying their gender in different ways, and gender diversity at school has become an increasingly debated topic. Within the United Kingdom (UK), sociopolitical discourse has become progressively fractured, with the UK Government recently releasing controversial draft non-statutory guidance prohibiting social transitioning, or the changing of names, pronouns and/or appearance amongst gender-diverse individuals at school. One term which has been increasingly utilized in this discourse is “safeguarding”, a term which refers to the practice of promoting child welfare and protecting children from harm. Safeguarding is a key consideration when discussing gender inclusion at school. However, harmful and discriminatory policies, such as “outing” gender-questioning children to their parents, are now being mislabelled as safeguarding practices. This article will argue that the concept of safeguarding, and wider discourses around child vulnerability, are being misappropriated in order to justify anti-trans policies. This article will explore the current UK discourse around gender-diverse children at school, demonstrating that gender-diverse youth are perceived as both vulnerable to “gender ideology” and a threat to others at school, a social positioning that serves to restrict their rights and agency. This article will discuss the ways in which the term safeguarding is being weaponized against gender-diverse children, before reviewing the social scientific research on risk and protective factors for gender-diverse youth, to understand what safeguarding gender-diverse children actually means.

**Keywords:** gender diversity; trans; school; cisgenderism; safeguarding; childhood.

---

## [A] INTRODUCTION

Within the UK, there are a number of ongoing sociopolitical debates about gender-diverse children, meaning children whose gender does not correspond with the sex that they were assigned at birth.<sup>1</sup> Gender-diverse children were 23 times more likely to be mentioned in the press in 2018/2019 than in 2012 (Baker 2019), demonstrating an unprecedented interest in their lives. Moreover, in recent years there has been an increase in anti-trans discourse within the United Kingdom (UK) (Pearce & Ors 2020), accompanied by the rise of gender-critical feminism, a trans-exclusionary form of feminism whose proponents argue that gender identity is a contested belief (Shaw 2023). Gender-critical theorists and policy-makers have previously focused their activism on excluding trans women from women’s spaces, but more recently they have turned their attention to children, parents and schools (Amery 2023), calling for schools to immediately inform parents if their child is questioning their gender (see eg Moore 2023). Indeed, gender-critical theorists suggest that schools *not* disclosing information about a child’s gender exploration to their parents is a “clear safeguarding red flag” (Benjamin 2023: 209). Gender-critical activists have also focused on the perceived problem of gender-diverse children socially transitioning at school (Amery 2023) where social transitioning refers to individuals changing their name, pronouns and/or appearance to align with their gender identity.<sup>2</sup>

The prohibition of social transition at school is now being espoused by the UK Government and, in December 2023, the Government released draft non-statutory guidance for schools, stating that “there is no general duty to allow a child to ‘social transition’” (Department for Education 2023a: 6), and that there will be “very few occasions” (ibid 13) where a school should agree to a child’s change in pronouns. This non-statutory guidance has been widely condemned as harmful, discriminatory and unlawful (see White 2024) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2024) has critiqued the non-statutory

---

<sup>1</sup> This term has been used within this article as an umbrella term, including binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning individuals. Where articles have used different terminologies, these have been employed.

<sup>2</sup> A recent article was published by the head of Transgender Trend, a prominent anti-trans organization, titled “The Government Needs to Put Safeguarding First. It Should not Allow Social Transitioning in Schools” (Davies-Arai 2023).

guidance for not clearly explaining and referring to key concepts in the Equality Act 2010, section 7.<sup>3</sup>

This article will argue that this guidance and the wider gender-critical discourse within which it resides have the potential to cause significant harm to gender-diverse children, as well as having worrying implications for children's rights more generally. This article explores one key question: how is the concept of "safeguarding" being utilized in discussions around gender diversity at school? In order to address this question, I will review the current sociopolitical discourse, before discussing the way in which key concepts of vulnerability and safeguarding are being weaponized against gender-diverse children. Finally, I will review the social scientific research on risk and protective factors for gender-diverse youth, to explore how we can effectively safeguard gender-diverse children at school.

## [B] GENDER-CRITICAL DISCOURSE WITHIN THE UK: A MORAL PANIC?

Cisgenderism is a global phenomenon that invalidates and pathologizes non-cisgender (ie trans) gender identities (Ansara & Hegarty 2012). However, the UK has been identified as a country with a unique and increasingly negative discourse around trans inclusion. Scholars have suggested that 2017 was a turning point in public discourse, with 2017 labelled "the year of the transgender moral panic" (Barker 2017), triggered in part by the UK Government's announcement of plans to reform the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (Pearce & Ors 2020). One aspect of anti-trans discourse that is particular to the UK is trans-exclusionary feminism, or gender-critical feminism (Faye 2021; Amery 2023). Gender-critical feminists seek to exclude trans women from single-sex spaces and from being defined as a woman, based on the argument that gender identity is a contested belief or a set of "extreme ideological ideas" (Moore 2023: 8). Faye notes that the term "gender-critical" is in some ways a misnomer, given the lack of criticality that gender-critical feminists display about gender (2021). Gender-critical feminists rely on biological and essentialist understandings of gender that contradict widely recognized definitions; the World Health Organization, for instance, notes that gender identity is "a person's deeply felt, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex

---

<sup>3</sup> The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination against trans children at school, under the protected characteristic of gender reassignment. Interpretations of this legislation vary, leading to different schools having considerably different policies (Long 2024). The UK Government has published numerous pieces of non-statutory guidance to support schools in making policy decisions; for more information about the legal context, see Long (2024).

at birth” (World Health Organization 2024). This clear definition from a major international health organization opposes the gender-critical belief that “gender identity” is an extreme ideological idea.

Gender-critical activism has been primarily focused on the perceived threat of trans women in women’s bathrooms (Westbrook & Schilt 2014); however, this is now increasingly being targeted towards children, parents and schools. Prominent groups, such as Transgender Trend and the Safe Schools Alliance, have been campaigning in this area for many years, but their concerns have recently reached a wider audience, with gender-critical activism becoming more prominent and views more polarized (Amery 2023). Gender-critical activism rests on the assumption that children are vulnerable to “gender identity ideology” or “gender ideology”, a term recently defined by the UK Government as “the belief that a person can have a ‘gender’ that is different to their biological sex” (Department for Education 2023a: 3). Indeed, gender-critical activists see “gender ideology” as a predatory and dangerous narrative that aims to confuse children about their gender (Amery 2023).

The perceived threat of gender ideology to children can be seen as a moral panic (Balieiro 2018). According to Cohen’s (2002) original definition, a moral panic occurs when a social object becomes defined as a threat to societal values and is presented in a sensationalized way by the media. “Experts” are drawn upon to cope with the panic, before the panic ultimately reduces or dissipates. Cohen also notes that moral panics involve disproportional reporting, hostility, concern, a consensus that “something should be done” and volatility. Such a conceptualization clearly applies to the current discourse around gender ideology as a threat to children: proponents of this belief suggest that trans communities and their allies are “transing” LGB children in huge numbers (see eg Bindel 2023), despite the overall number of gender-diverse youth remaining small.<sup>4</sup> These beliefs are reported often and in a sensationalized way in the media (Baker 2019; Shaw 2023).

Parallels can be drawn between the current panic around gender ideology, and the historical moral panic around LGB identities that was exemplified in section 28, legislation which was introduced in the Local Government Act 1988, and not repealed until 2003, that prohibited educators from promoting homosexuality at school (Robinson 2008). Cohen (2002) notes that moral panics can also trigger changes in legal

---

<sup>4</sup> For instance, despite Bindel’s (2023) concern about the “ever-increasing numbers of children ... put on an irreversible medical pathway”, BBC News recently reported that fewer than 100 young people in England are being prescribed puberty blockers by the NHS (Parry 2024).

and social policy, and this can clearly be identified in the Government's recent draft guidance. The language and approach differ dramatically from a previous inquiry into trans equality in 2016, in which the Government used the term "gender identity" without qualification (Women and Equalities Committee 2016: 74). The Government's new labelling of gender identity as a "contested belief" (Department for Education 2023a: 6) demonstrates the way in which media and public discourse have influenced policy. To understand this changing sociopolitical landscape further, it is important to consider the ways in which concepts such as vulnerability and childhood are conceptualized in public discourse.

## [C] VULNERABILITY IN CHILDHOOD DISCOURSE

Childhood is often associated with concepts such as innocence and vulnerability, and these concepts are highly relevant to debates around gender-diverse children at school. Appell argues that children's vulnerability and dependency perform differently "along racial, class, and gender lines" (2009: 706) and critical childhood scholars have explored and questioned the unique discourses of vulnerability relevant to different groups of children, such as those experiencing political violence (Gilligan 2009). With respect to gender, the socially constructed nature of vulnerability is made clear by the contradictory treatment of trans and intersex children—the former are discouraged from early medical intervention, on the basis that they are making irrevocable decisions that they do not understand, and the latter are encouraged towards (if not subjected to) early irreversible medical procedures, in order to fit within binary sex categories (Paechter 2021). These opposing practices are both deemed to be in the child's best interests, highlighting the way in which vulnerability can be conceptualized in vastly different ways (Appell 2009).

As discussed, trans children are framed by gender-critical discourse as being vulnerable to "gender ideology", a supposedly dangerous narrative which aims to confuse children about gender and harm them through medical procedures (Balieiro 2018; Nash & Browne 2019; Sadjadi 2020). Transness amongst children is framed as a new phenomenon, contradicting extensive cross-cultural and historical evidence (Gill-Peterson 2018), and this "newness" contributes to the vulnerability of children to this supposedly predatory ideology. Moscati (2022) highlights that the legal system conceptualizes gender-diverse children as vulnerable and in need of protection, whilst also disregarding their agency, rights and capacity to express themselves. In the case of *Bell & Ors v The Tavistock*

and *Portman NHS Foundation Trust* (2020), the High Court decentralized the voices of children and disregarded qualitative evidence from gender-diverse children themselves (Moscati 2022). Notably, the press release for the UK Government's recent draft guidance labels the guidance a "parent-first approach" (Department for Education & Ors 2023), rather than a "child-first approach", suggesting a paternalistic approach to gender-diverse children's best interests, where children's views are not considered of central importance.

In contrast to their supposed vulnerability to gender ideology, it has also been suggested that gender-diverse children pose a risk to cisgender children; this unique social positioning serves to deny their autonomy and restrict their rights. It is argued that gender-diverse children might cause confusion and discomfort to cis children, by "invading" single sex spaces (Sørliie 2020). It is particularly argued that trans girls will threaten the safety of cis girls within school toilets (Pearce & Ors 2020), despite trans students reporting lower levels of safety in school toilets than cis students (Wernick & Ors 2017) and research finding no association between trans-inclusive policies and safety violations in public toilets (Hasenbush & Ors 2019). The rights and needs of gender-diverse children are thus pitted against those of cisgender children. Such rhetoric is evident within the Government's draft guidance, which states that "schools and colleges should only agree to a change of pronouns if they are confident that the benefit to the individual child outweighs the impact on the school community" (Department for Education 2023a: 13). The guidance does not make clear what this impact may be, but implies that a trans student changing their pronouns might threaten the school community as a whole, a discourse which has the great potential to increase discrimination towards gender-diverse children.

"Impacting the school community" may also be a proxy for threatening cisheteronormativity; indeed, schools have been identified as a battleground for arguments around sexuality and gender, and a space in which normative gender experiences are legitimized (Robinson 2008; Frohard-Dourlent 2018; Nash & Browne 2019). Research highlights that cisheteronormativity may function in both overt ways, through staff utilizing and legitimizing discriminatory language (Bower-Brown & Ors 2021; Horton 2023), and covert ways, through viewing same-sex relationships as a sensitive topic, whilst discussing heterosexual relationships openly (Gillett-Swan & van Leent 2019). Indeed, childhood innocence is a concept which is mobilized by conservative groups to "protect" children from being exposed to information about sexuality and gender (Robinson 2008). Researchers have highlighted that

representations of children are defined by innocence and an absence of sexuality, and Amery (2023) notes that this contributes to the “impossibility” of trans children from gender-critical perspectives, as trans identities are portrayed as inherently sexual. Therefore, gender-diverse children are perceived as both an impossibility and a threat to other children’s innocence from gender ideology, an argument which serves to further marginalize gender-diverse youth at school.

## [D] SOCIAL TRANSITION IS NOT A NEUTRAL ACT

One prominent phrase used by policy-makers and gender-critical commentators is “social transition is not a neutral act”, a phrase first used by Hilary Cass when reviewing the gender services provided to children in the UK (Cass Review 2022). Social transition, meaning the changing of pronouns, names and/or appearance, has even been somewhat bizarrely labelled by Moore as a “medical intervention” (2023: 13), despite involving no medical treatment or procedures. Social transition is often contrasted with the “watchful waiting” approach, which is promoted as rational, impartial and safe, or the “only neutral approach” (Transgender Trend 2023). In practice, this means ignoring children’s requests to socially transition until schools can be sure that it is a “properly thought through decision” (Department for Education 2023a: 9). However, as many scholars have noted, watchful waiting is not a neutral act (Ammaturo & Moscati 2021; Paechter 2021) as refusing to allow a child to explore their gender through the changing of names, pronouns, or appearance can have significantly negative implications for gender-diverse children’s mental health (Ashley 2019; Horton 2022). Moreover, social transition, which involves no medical procedures or intervention, is a form of gender exploration (Ashley 2019) that schools have no right to prohibit.

Indeed, the prohibiting of a social transition represents a significant threat to children’s rights. Researchers have highlighted that denying access to puberty blockers threatens *Gillick* competence, meaning the threshold of competence for a child to be able to consent to medical procedures, as well as threatening the bodily autonomy of all children (Moreton 2021; Moscati 2022).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, I would suggest that the prohibition of identity exploration at school threatens the agency of all

---

<sup>5</sup> Policies around access to puberty blockers in the UK have changed considerably. In *Bell & Ors v The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust* (2020), puberty blockers were restricted and this was overturned in *Bell & Ors v The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust* (2021). However, in March 2024, NHS England banned puberty blockers for children, outside of clinical trials (NHS England 2024).

children to explore names, appearance and identities. Research with cis youth has shown that using and trying out alternative names (ie nicknames) at school is common, with many students viewing their nicknames positively (Starks & Ors 2012), and clothing has been identified as an important form of identity exploration and expression in adolescents (Piacentini & Mailer 2004). Additionally, Renold (2010) highlights that gender fluidity may be more readily tolerated when it is assumed that children are going through a phase, with a cisheteronormative future. Identity exploration is therefore a key part of childhood and adolescence (Erikson 1994), and prohibiting social transition in trans youth, whilst recognizing that cis youth can and do explore their names, gender and appearance, represents a threat to the rights of gender-diverse children.

It is also important to note that suggestions that social transition is a harmful intervention are not supported by social scientific evidence. Research suggests that binary-trans young children who have socially transitioned with parental support report depression and self-esteem levels that align with population norms, although they report slightly higher rates of anxiety (Olson & Ors 2016; Durwood & Ors 2017). Qualitative research with parents also highlights that parents perceive their child to be happier and less distressed following a social transition (Horton 2022). One recent UK study found that social transitioning was not associated with mental health status (Morandini & Ors 2023), highlighting that research findings in this field are mixed, and these authors note that more longitudinal research is needed to understand further the link between social transitioning and mental health over time. One study that compared the mental health outcomes of trans people who transitioned as a child, as an adolescent, and as an adult found no association between social transition during childhood and adverse mental health outcomes during adulthood (Turban & Ors 2021). Social transition during adolescence was associated with suicidality in adulthood, but this association was not significant when the researchers adjusted for school harassment (Turban & Ors 2021). This association was not found amongst those who transitioned during childhood, suggesting that children who transition earlier might be more resilient in the face of discrimination. Therefore, although findings may be mixed, there is certainly no evidence that supports the view that banning social transitioning will protect gender-diverse children.

## [E] SAFEGUARDING AT SCHOOL

Many gender-critical organizations describe their campaigns to prohibit children from social transitioning as a means to “uphold child safeguarding in schools” (Safe Schools Alliance UK nd). Safeguarding refers to the practice of trying to promote the welfare of children and to protect them from experiencing harm, and one key aspect of safeguarding is deciding whether and how to share information that a child has shared with others. Information-sharing is often brought up as a key concern for gender-critical feminists—for instance, a recent chapter on gender-critical approaches to school policy argued that schools not sharing information about a child’s gender exploration with potentially unsupportive parents is a “clear safeguarding red flag”, one which amounts to teachers being advised to “collude with children in keeping significant secrets from their parents” (Benjamin 2023: 209).

Indeed, the Government’s draft guidance states that, when schools consider a child’s request to socially transition, they should “engage parents as a matter of priority ... other than in the exceptionally rare circumstances when involving the parents would constitute a significant harm to the child” (Department for Education 2023a: 6). This position contradicts previous Government guidance around safeguarding, which stated that staff should aim to create a “safe space” for LGBT children, as it recognized that LGBT children without a trusted adult may be at higher risk (Department for Education 2023b: 51). Additionally, this previous guidance noted that safeguarding should be managed with a child-centred approach, and that school staff should consider what is in the best interests of the child (Department for Education 2023b). The Government’s new draft guidance contains no mention of the “best interests of the child” as a guiding principle (White 2024), and, as discussed above, describes its guidance as a “parent-first approach”. This arguably positions parents’ rights to know about their child’s gender above children’s rights to have a safe space at school.

When we consider the best interests of the child, it is clear that the Government’s guidance, rather than protecting children, is a safeguarding concern in and of itself. Lacking control over disclosure of their identity is distressing for gender-diverse youth (Bower-Brown & Ors 2021), and parental rejection and indifference have been found to predict depressive

and anxiety symptoms amongst trans youth (Pariseau & Ors 2019).<sup>6</sup> Research has identified that gender-diverse youth with lower levels of parental support report higher levels of mental health problems (Wilson & Ors 2016; Weinhardt & Ors 2019; Grossman & Ors 2021), and research with LGB populations highlights that experiencing a negative reaction to coming out has a significant impact on wellbeing and self-esteem (Ryan & Ors 2015). Notably, 43 per cent of trans and non-binary young people surveyed by Galop (2022) reported experiencing abuse from a family member and LGBTQ+ homelessness charity *akt* (2021) found that 55 per cent of trans young people reported that they were afraid that expressing their identity to family members would lead to them being evicted. These findings highlight that the Government's suggestion that parents causing harm to gender-diverse children is "exceptionally rare" is incorrect. Indeed, schools disclosing information in a non-sensitive, non-consensual way to parents presents a significant risk to the mental health and safety of gender-diverse children. It is clear that concerns about safeguarding are being misappropriated, and as such it is important to outline the research that has explored what safeguarding gender-diverse children at school entails.

## [F] WHAT DOES SAFEGUARDING TRANS CHILDREN ACTUALLY MEAN?

There is a growing body of research examining the experiences of gender-diverse youth at school, and much of this research focuses on experiences of bullying. In general, research highlights that LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to be bullied than non-LGBTQ+ youth (Myers & Ors 2020), and gender-diverse youth are more likely to be bullied than cisgender LGB youth (Bradlow & Ors 2017). A survey in Scotland found that 57 per cent of trans youth experience bullying at school, but only 26 per cent feel confident reporting it (LGBT Youth Scotland 2022). Relatedly, gender-diverse students report experiencing bullying from teachers (Bower-Brown & Ors 2021), and schools have been found to tolerate, and thus legitimize, transphobic bullying (Bower-Brown & Ors 2021; Horton 2023). Qualitative research has highlighted that navigating the school environment might be particularly challenging for non-binary and gender-

---

<sup>6</sup> One study from the United States found that initial parental reactions to youth's gender identities were very mixed—for transfeminine youth, 38 per cent of initial reactions from mothers and 36 per cent of initial reactions from fathers were negative or very negative (Grossman & Ors 2021). For transmasculine youth, these numbers were higher, with 51 per cent of initial reactions of mothers and 38 per cent of initial reactions from fathers being negative/very negative. This suggests that initial disclosures to parents can be challenging, although parental responses were found to improve over time (Grossman & Ors 2021).

questioning youth, whose experience of gender fluidity directly opposes the binary gender structure at school (Bower-Brown & Ors 2021).

One study explored trans children's experiences at primary school, highlighting that a lack of an effective trans-inclusive policy, in combination with a lack of understanding of legal protections for trans children, can enable discrimination at school and lead to educational injustice (Horton 2023). Indeed, gender-diverse youth who lack choice in their bathroom/changing room use are more likely to experience sexual assault (Murchison & Ors 2019), highlighting that restrictive policies threaten the safety of gender-diverse youth.

Relatedly, gender-diverse youth report high levels of mental health issues, with trans and non-binary youth being three to four times more likely to report self-harm than cisgender LGBTQ+ youth (Jadva & Ors 2021). Importantly, the literature consistently demonstrates that around 40 to 60 per cent of gender-diverse young people report suicidal ideation/suicide attempts (Bradlow & Ors 2017; Eisenberg & Ors 2017; Thorne & Ors 2019), highlighting the critical importance of understanding the best way to support gender-diverse youth. Proponents of a gender-critical approach have asked whether poor mental health can be considered a cause or symptom of gender distress (Moore 2023). However, a large body of research has identified that mental health outcomes are associated with experiences of bullying and discrimination, with adolescents who report higher levels of discrimination reporting higher rates of mental health issues (Wilson & Ors 2016; Veale & Ors 2017; Jadva & Ors 2021). Importantly, LGBTQ+ youth who are also facing economic precarity report poorer health outcomes (Frost & Ors 2019), highlighting the importance of taking an intersectional perspective to understanding stigma. Based on empirical evidence, reducing discrimination against gender-diverse youth is a key mechanism for improving their mental health, and safeguarding them from self-harm and suicide.

Research has also explored protective factors amongst gender-diverse youth. Chosen name use in multiple contexts has been found to be associated with lower rates of depression and suicide in gender-diverse youth aged 15 to 21, with young people whose chosen name was used in all key contexts (home, school, work and with friends) reporting the lowest rates of depression and suicide (Russell & Ors 2018). Young people's positive perception of their school connectedness and safety is also associated with lower rates of self-harm and suicide (Jadva & Ors 2021), suggesting that supportive school environments and policies safeguard young people from harm. Gender-diverse youth report experiencing more

support from their friends than their family (Weinhardt & Ors 2019), and good quality friendships are associated with wellbeing and meaning in life (Weinhardt & Ors 2019; Alanko & Lund 2020). Relatedly, engaging in activism, educating others and building an LGBTQ+ community at school have been identified as effective strategies for managing discrimination (Bower-Brown & Ors 2021; Frost & Ors 2019). In the current political context, where gender-critical discourse is further threatening gender-diverse children's safety at school, it is therefore crucial to support young people to engage in activism and build safe spaces themselves.

## [G] CONCLUSION

This article has explored the way in which the concept of “safeguarding” is being utilized in discussions around gender diversity at school. I have considered the current UK media and political discourse, and have highlighted the way in which the current moral panic around gender ideology is impacting political discourse. I have argued that concerns about safeguarding are being misappropriated and utilized to justify harmful school policies. The UK Government's recent draft guidance (Department for Education 2023a) contradicts previously published guidance on safeguarding and takes a dramatically different approach to previous enquiries into trans equality; it remains to be seen whether this draft guidance will lead to similar statutory guidance being published. It is clear that children's rights are not at the forefront of restrictive policies: prohibiting young people from choosing their name and pronouns threatens the rights of gender-diverse children and is restrictive to children's rights in general. The suggestion that schools should immediately inform parents about a child's gender exploration is particularly harmful, and poses a risk to the health and wellbeing of gender-diverse children. Safeguarding is a concept that is being utilized to justify these harmful policies, but when reviewing the social scientific research on gender-diverse youth, it is clear that, if we are serious about safeguarding gender-diverse children from harm, we should focus on reducing discrimination at school, rather than legitimizing transphobia and restricting children's autonomy further.

### ***About the author***

**Dr Susie Bower-Brown** is a Lecturer in Social Psychology at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, University College London. Susie is a qualitative, critical social psychologist whose research focuses on LGBTQ+ identities and diverse families. Susie has published research on the social experiences of trans and non-binary individuals at different stages of the life course

(including adolescence and parenthood) and has researched novel routes to parenthood, including assisted reproductive technologies and elective co-parenting.

Email: [s.bower-brown@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:s.bower-brown@ucl.ac.uk).

## References

- Alanko, K & H Lund. "Transgender Youth and Social Support: A Survey Study on the Effects of Good Relationships on Well-being and Mental Health." *Young* 28(2) (2020): 199–216.
- Amery, F. "Protecting Children in 'Gender Critical' Rhetoric and Strategy: Regulating Childhood for Cisgender Outcomes." *DiGeSt – Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 10(2) (2023): 98–114.
- Ammaturo, F R & M F Moscati. "Children's Rights and Gender Identity: A New Frontier of Children's Protagonism?" *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 39(2) (2021): 146–162.
- Ansara, Y G & P Hegarty. "Cisgenderism in Psychology: Pathologising and Misgendering Children from 1999 to 2008." *Psychology and Sexuality* 3(2) (2012): 137–160.
- Appell, A R. "The Pre-political Child of Child-centred Jurisprudence." *Houston Law Review* 46(3) (2009): 703–758.
- Ashley, F. "Thinking an Ethics of Gender Exploration: Against Delaying Transition for Transgender and Gender Creative Youth." *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 24(2): (2019) 223–236.
- Baker, P. "Comparison of the Coverage of Stories about Trans People in 2012 and 2018-19". *Mermaids* 18 November 2019.
- Balieiro, F de F. "Don't Mess with my Kids': Building the Moral Panic of the Child under Threat." *Cadernos Pagu* (53) 2018.
- Barker, M. J. "A Trans Review of 2017: The Year of Transgender Moral Panic." *The Conversation* 27 December 2017.
- Benjamin, S. "Schools, Feminism and Gender-Identity Theory." *Sex and Gender: A Contemporary Reader*, 194–213. London: Routledge, 2023.
- Bindel, J. "The Atrocity of Transing Children: Kemi Badenoch's BIG Moment in the Gender War." *Substack* 13 December 2023.

- Bower-Brown, S, S Zadeh & V Jadvā. “Binary-trans, Non-binary and Gender-questioning Adolescents’ Experiences in UK Schools.” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 20(1) (2021): 1–19.
- Bradlow, J & Ors. *School Report: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Young People in Britain’s Schools in 2017*. London: Stonewall, 2017.
- Cass Review, The. *Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People: Interim Report*. London: The Cass Review, 2022.
- Cohen, S. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* 3rd edn. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Davies-Arai, S. “The Government Needs to Put Safeguarding First: It Should not Allow Social Transitioning in Schools.” *The Critic* 26 September 2023.
- Department for Education. *Gender Questioning Children: Non-statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges in England*. London: Department for Education, 2023a.
- Department for Education. “Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges.” London: Department for Education, 2023b.
- Department for Education, K Badenoch & G Keegan. “Parent First Approach at the Core of New Guidance on Gender Questioning Children.” London: Department for Education 2023.
- Durwood, L, K A McLaughlin & K R Olson. “Mental Health and Self-worth in Socially Transitioned Transgender Youth.” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 56(2) (2017): 116–123.
- Eisenberg, M E & Ors. “Risk and Protective Factors in the Lives of Transgender/Gender Nonconforming Adolescents.” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 61(4) (2017): 521–526.
- Equality and Human Rights Commission. “Response to the Department for Education’s Consultation on Gender Questioning Children.” 12 March 2024.
- Erikson, E. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. London: WW Norton & Sons, 1994.
- Faye, S. *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*. London: Penguin Random House, 2021.

- Frohard-Dourlent, H. “The Student Drives the Car, Right?': Trans Students and Narratives of Decision-making in Schools.” *Sex Education* 18(4) (2018): 328–344.
- Frost, D M & Ors. “Minority Stress, Activism, and Health in the Context of Economic Precarity: Results from a National Participatory Action Survey of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Gender Non-Conforming Youth.” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 63(3–4) (2019): 511–526.
- Galop. *LGBT+ Experiences of Abuse from Family Members the LGBT+ Anti-Abuse Charity*. London: Galop, 2022.
- Gillett-Swan, J & L van Leent. “Exploring the Intersections of the Convention on the Rights of the Child General Principles and Diverse Sexes, Genders and Sexualities in Education.” *Social Sciences* 8(9) (2019): 260.
- Gilligan, C. “Highly Vulnerable? Political Violence and the Social Construction of Traumatized Children.” *Journal of Peace Research* 46(1) (2009): 119–134.
- Gill-Peterson, J. “How to Bring Your Kids Up Trans.” In *Histories of the Transgender Child*, 195–207. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.
- Grossman, A H & Ors. “Parental Responses to Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth: Associations with Parent Support, Parental Abuse, and Youths' Psychological Adjustment.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 68(8) (2021): 1260–1277.
- Hasenbush, A, A R Flores & J L Herman. “Gender Identity Nondiscrimination Laws in Public Accommodations: A Review of Evidence Regarding Safety and Privacy in Public Restrooms, Locker Rooms, and Changing Rooms.” *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 16(1) (2019): 70–83.
- Horton, C. “I Was Losing that Sense of Her Being Happy'—Trans Children and Delaying Social Transition.” *LGBTQ+ Family: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 18(2) (2022): 187–203.
- Horton, C. “Institutional Cisnormativity and Educational Injustice: Trans Children's Experiences in Primary and Early Secondary Education in the UK.” *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 93(1) (2023): 73–90.

- Jadva, V & Ors. “Predictors of Self-harm and Suicide in LGBT Youth: The Role of Gender, Socio-economic Status, Bullying and School Experience.” *Journal of Public Health* 45(1) (2021): 102–108.
- LGBT Youth Scotland. *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People in 2022*. Glasgow: LGBT Youth Scotland, 2022.
- Long, R. *Provisions to Support Transgender Children in Schools*. London: House of Commons Library, Research Briefing, Volume 6, 2024.
- Moore, L. *Asleep at the Wheel: An Examination of Gender and Safeguarding in Schools*. London: Policy Exchange, 2023.
- Morandini, J S & Ors. “Is Social Gender Transition Associated with Mental Health Status in Children and Adolescents with Gender Dysphoria?” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 52(3) (2023): 1045–1060.
- Moreton, K L. “A Backwards-Step for Gillick: Trans Children’s Inability to Consent to Treatment for Gender Dysphoria – Quincy Bell & Mrs A v the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and Ors [2020] EWHC 3274 (Admin).” *Medical Law Review* 29(4) (2021): 699–715.
- Moscatti, M F. “Trans\* Identity Does not Limit Children’s Capacity: Gillick Competence Applies to Decisions Concerning Access to Puberty Blockers Too!” *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 44(1) (2022): 130–132.
- Murchison, G R & Ors. “School Restroom and Locker Room Restrictions and Sexual Assault Risk among Transgender Youth.” *Pediatrics* 143(6) (2019): 1–10.
- Myers, W & Ors. “The Victimization of LGBTQ Students at School: A Meta-Analysis.” *Journal of School Violence* 19(4) (2020): 421–432.
- Nash, C J & K Browne. “Resisting the Mainstreaming of LGBT Equalities in Canadian and British Schools: Sex Education and Trans School Friends.” *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 0(0) (2019): 1–20.
- NHS England. *Clinical Policy: Puberty Suppressing Hormones (PSH) for Children and Young People who Have Gender Incongruence/Gender Dysphoria [1927]*. London: NHS England, 2024.
- Olson, K R & Ors. “Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in their Identities.” *Pediatrics* 137(3) (2016): e20153223–e20153223.

- Paechter, C. "The Rights and Interests of Trans and Intersex Children: Considerations, Conflicts and Implications in Relation to the UNCRC." *Journal of Gender Studies* 30(7) (2021): 844–854.
- Pariseau, E M & Ors. "The Relationship between Family Acceptance-Rejection and Transgender Youth Psychosocial Functioning." *Clinical Practice in Pediatric Psychology* 7(3) (2019): 267–277.
- Parry, J. "NHS England to Stop Prescribing Puberty Blockers." *BBC News* 12 March 2024.
- Pearce, R, S Erikainen & B Vincent. "TERF Wars: An Introduction." *Sociological Review* 68(4) (2020): 677–698.
- Piacentini, M & G Mailer. "Symbolic Consumption in Teenagers' Clothing Choices." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 3(3) (2004): 251–262.
- Renold, E. "Queering Masculinity: Re-theorising Contemporary Tomboyism in the Schizoid Space of Innocent/Heterosexualized Young Femininities." *Girlhood Studies* 1(2) (2010): 129-151.
- Robinson, K H. "In the Name of Childhood Innocence: A Discursive Exploration of the Moral Panic Associated with Childhood and Sexuality." *Cultural Studies Review* 14 (2008): 113–129.
- Russell, S T & Ors. "Chosen Name Use Is Linked to Reduced Depressive Symptoms, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicidal Behavior among Transgender Youth." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 63(4) (2018): 503–505.
- Ryan, W S, N Legate & N Weinstein. "Coming Out as Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual: The Lasting Impact of Initial Disclosure Experiences." *Self and Identity* 14(5) (2015): 549–569.
- Sadjadi, S. "The Vulnerable Child Protection Act and Transgender Children's Health." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7(3) (2020): 508–516.
- Safe Schools Alliance UK. (nd). "Who We Are."
- Shaw, D. "A Tale of Two Feminisms: Gender Critical Feminism, Trans Inclusive Feminism and the Case of Kathleen Stock." *Women's History Review* 32(5) (2023): 768–780.
- Sørliie, A. "Transgender Children's Right to Non-discrimination in Schools: The Case of Changing-room Facilities." *International Journal of Children's Rights* 28(2) (2020): 221–242.

- Starks, D, K T Leech & L Willoughby. “Nicknames in Australian Secondary Schools: Insights into Nicknames and Adolescent Views of Self.” *Names* 60(3) (2012): 135–149.
- Thorne, N & Ors. “A Comparison of Mental Health Symptomatology and Levels of Social Support in Young Treatment Seeking Transgender Individuals Who Identify as Binary and Non-binary.” *International Journal of Transgenderism* 20(2–3) (2019): 241–250.
- Transgender Trend. “Briefing: The Gender Affirmative Model v the Watchful Waiting Model in Schools.” April 2023.
- Turban, J L & Ors. “Timing of Social Transition for Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth, K-12 Harassment, and Adult Mental Health Outcomes.” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 69(6) (2021): 991–998.
- Veale, J F & Ors. “Enacted Stigma, Mental Health, and Protective Factors Among Transgender Youth in Canada.” *Transgender Health* 2(1) (2017): 207–216.
- Weinhardt, L S & Ors. “The Role of Family, Friend, and Significant Other Support in Well-being among Transgender and Non-binary Youth.” *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 15(4) (2019): 311–325.
- Wernick, L J, A Kulick & M Chin. “Gender Identity Disparities in Bathroom Safety and Wellbeing among High School Students.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 46(5) (2017): 917–930.
- Westbrook, L & K Schilt. “Doing Gender, Determining Gender: Transgender People, Gender Panics, and the Maintenance of the Sex/Gender/Sexuality System.” *Gender and Society* 28(1) (2014): 32–57.
- White, R M. “A Commentary on Department for Education Draft Guidance.” *Translucent* 8 January 2024.
- Wilson, E C & Ors. “The Impact of Discrimination on the Mental Health of Trans\*Female Youth and the Protective Effect of Parental Support.” *AIDS and Behavior* 20(10) (2016): 2203–2211.
- Women and Equalities Committee. *Transgender Equality*. London: House of Commons 2016.
- World Health Organization. “Gender and Health.” Geneva: WHO 2024.

## Cases

*Bell & Ors v The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust* [2020]  
EWHC 3274 (Admin)

*Bell & Ors v The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust* [2021]  
EWCA Civ 1363

## Legislation, Regulations and Rules

Equality Act 2010

Gender Recognition Act 2004

Local Government Act 1988