

New normal? You bet, says parent

Rick Doust's letter "Questioning the 'new normal'" makes a set of broad assumptions on what constitutes "normal" in Canada, and one notably misleading reference.

On gender identity, he asks if it "is now a construct?" It is not now a construct; rather, it always was. There is the personal, subjective experience of one's own gender, and there are the rules that society expects us to follow based on the gender we are perceived to be.

These rules may have history's weight behind them, but they are constructs nonetheless - which makes his jibe on "social engineers" particularly ironic. After all, his letter is itself an attempt at social engineering.

Rick asks us to check with the American Psychiatric Association on gender identity, so I did. The APA, in 2012, removed "gender identity disorder" from the DSM-V, and replaced it with "gender dysphoria."

To paraphrase: the change was done to reflect the experience of patients, specifically that they are not "disordered" but rather experiencing anxiety (or dysphoria) over the incongruence between their experienced gender and the gender that others perceive them to be.

They also explicitly state "gender non-conformity" is not a mental disorder. Is this what Rick meant us to read? I doubt it.

Rick asks Sally to check in with parents. I am a parent in Ontario; are you asking me? Because I agree with Sally completely.

Information about gender identity (indeed, the whole sex-ed curriculum, especially around the concept of consent) is very much needed by children for their own health and well-being, especially LGBTQ children whose parents may not be equipped, or even willing, to provide it.

And yes, sometimes it really is as simple as telling a child that what they know and feel to be true about themselves is "normal".

Is there any "normal left"? Rick asks, finally.

I would argue that the personal experience of one's gender being incongruent with social expectations of it has actually been "normal" throughout human history.

We all run up against society's gender expectations at some point - Rick included, I expect. What Rick is painting as a radical change in "values" (is it a "value" to stigmatize trans children? I say no) is actually a welcome, healing recognition of the real human condition.

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