

# TALKING WITH YOUTH WHO DISCONTINUE THEIR TRANSITION

## THEIR FEELINGS AND PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE JOURNEY OF TRANSITION AND DETRANSITION

### Context

The phenomenon of “detransitioning” is often associated with the idea of regret, which is then used to promote preventive approaches (Alessandrin, 2019). « Yet, studies show that less than 2% of people who have had a gender affirming surgery express regret (Pfäfflin, 1993; Smith, 2005; Bustos et al., 2021; Narayan et al., 2021), therefore most individuals who surgically transition do not express regret (but little is known for other types of transition).”

Discontinuing a transition does not always mean that the transition shouldn't have occurred. Some people who stop their transition say it was a necessary step in their development and identity consolidation (Pfäfflin, 1993; Turban et al., 2018). Expósito-Campos (2021) says that if challenges can come with detransitioning “this does not mean that detransitioning is a clinical “failure” or that clinicians should stop their patients from detransitioning. Life after detransition can be livable, meaningful, and fulfilling.” p.276

### Who participated in the study?

- 20 YOUTH
- AT LEAST 5 PARTICIPANTS ARE POC (PEOPLE OF COLOR)
- FROM NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE AND INDONESIA
- ONLY 1 PARTICIPANT IS AMAB
- VERY DIVERSE GENDER IDENTITIES (E.G., NON-BINARY, FLUID, BUTCH, GENDER NEUTRAL, GENDER NON-CONFORMING, AGENDER)



We aim to understand discourses on the phenomenon of “detransition” otherwise known as “desistance” or “discontinuation

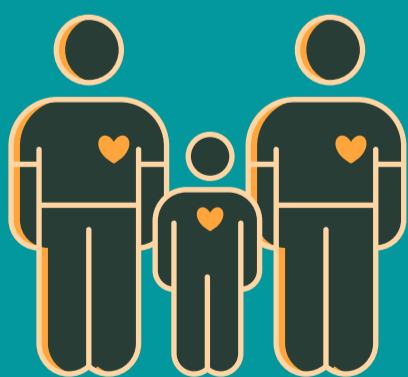


### Methodology

We conducted in-depth interviews with youth (15-25 years old) who have a history of detransition to explore their experience and reflections during their transition, detransition and their whole journey. Interviews took place in October and November 2020. Youth were recruited through a research poster shared on social medias.

### FEELINGS EMERGING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF TRANSITION

- 14 expressed positive feelings in the present about their transition journey. Some qualify their transition as successful and have no regrets, some are still happy about the changes despite having discontinued their transition and most referred to their transition as a valuable experience and a learning process.
- 12 expressed negative feelings when recalling their transition such as explicit regrets about having done a transition or the desire not to have done some interventions related to their transition.
- Some youth expressed feelings of sadness, grief, depression and missing their body pre-transition and some expressed anger. Some reported discomfort with the changes caused by their transition (e.g., vaginal atrophy) and some went on to develop a new form of gender dysphoria.
- 7 expressed mixed feelings about their transition journey and showed ambivalence toward their journey through the different nuanced feelings (both negative and positive) expressed simultaneously in the discourse.



### Feelings emerging from the experience of detransition

- 9 expressed feeling good about their decision to stop transition. Some felt positive about their decision to stop their transition process, and some expressed knowing they could still change their mind made their decision to stop easier.
- 16 expressed challenging feelings emerging or ongoing during their detransition. Almost half of the participants say struggles from the past have come back to the surface or remained after their transition was discontinued (i.e., depression, gender dysphoria, body dysmorphia, eating disorders).

## WHEN REFLECTING ON THEIR WHOLE JOURNEY

- 18 shared themes of self-acceptance, liberation and blooming after their transitioning & detransitioning journey. Those participants commonly expressed feeling good about their journey. They report feeling better since detransitioning and liberated from the weight of gender expectations and the judgment of others. Most youths shared feeling more comfortable with their assigned gender and/or body.
- 6 have accepted the journey and came to terms with the changes they experienced. They do not wish to fuel regrets, or they would not want to go back in time to do things differently.

## MAKING SENSE OF THEIR WHOLE JOURNEY



- As youth spoke about their experiences and tried to make sense of their journey, the research team noticed **three important themes**:
- **Temporality**: The way youth perceive their journey evolves through time and experiences.
- **Different perspectives on their past identity**: Some youth say they were never trans while others validate their past experience of transness, and some say they were non-binary or gender non-conforming all along.
- **Transition wasn't the right solution for their needs**: 17 of the interviewed participants evoke reasons and underlying issues that motivated them to pursue a transition which wasn't the right solution for them. 11 say they wished they had better support from professionals, so they could've had more clarity on these issues and explored alternative solutions.

"It's like, I've cared, like, I've cared a lot, much less about, like, gender stuff in a, in a general sense." (Sasha, detrans woman/female, 21)

A=>B=>C

### Preliminary conclusions

- A very nuanced portrait emerges from the preliminary data. The interviewed youth discuss a wide range of nuanced emotions and perspectives, from the more challenging to the most gratifying, and often a combination of both.
- Youth's perspectives evolve through time and tint the way they feel about the choices they made. There can be expression of regrets, gratitude and growth resulting from the transition, detransition or both depending on the moment or stage of their journey they are commenting on. Youth's feelings appear as a continuum of rich and nuanced experiences which are constantly evolving as they impact their current experience.
- The process of transitioning, even if it no longer satisfies the youth, may have contributed to deconstructing what gender is and helped the individual flourish during their gender journey. Detransition doesn't always appear as a gender shift, sometimes it brings change to the meaning youth give to their gender, and therefore their needs evolve.
- Discontinuing a transition does not mean "going back" to their pre-transition gender identity or to their gender assigned at birth (A=>B=>A). Indeed, youth express a large range of identities and some now describe themselves as fluid, neutral, nonbinary or don't even identify to a gender anymore (A=>B=>C).

## WAY FORWARD FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE



- We need to reflect on the ways we could promote gender affirming approaches to explore how we can further address issues experienced by the youth as well as rethink the notion of regret in youth who detransition.
- Stopping a transition can be challenging, which raises the question of how do we support detransitioned youth?
- Qualitative research is needed to understand the diversity and multiplicity of experiences underneath the "detransition" umbrella.

### References:

- Alessandrin, A. (2019). La notion de regret dans la clinique du changement de genre. *L'Évolution Psychiatrique*, 84 (2), 277 - 284. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evopsy.2019.03.003>
- Bustos, V. P., Bustos, S. S., Mascaro, A., Del Corral, G., Forte, A. J., Ciudad, P., Kim, E. A., Langstein, H. N., & Manrique, O. (2021). Regret after Gender affirmation Surgery : A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Prevalence. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. Global Open*, 9 (3), e3477. <https://doi.org/10.1097/GOX.0000000000003477>
- Narayan, S. K., Hontscharuk, R., D anker, S., Guerriero, J., Carter, A., Blasdel, G., Bluebond Langner, R., Ettner, R., Radix, A., Schechter, L., & Berli, J. U. (2021). Guiding the conversation Types of regret after gender affirming surgery and their associated etiologies. *Annals of Translational Medicine*, 9 (7), 605. <https://doi.org/10.21037/atm.20.6204>
- Pfäfflin, F. (1993). Regrets After Sex Reassignment Surgery. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 5. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v05n04\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v05n04_05)
- Smith, Y. L. S., Goozen, S. H. M. V., Kuiper, A. J., & Cohen Kettenis, P. T. (2005). Sex reassignment : Outcomes and predictors of treatment for adolescent and adult transsexuals. *Psychological Medicine*, 35 (1), 89-99. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291704002776>

The research team is composed of Annie Pullen Sansfaçon (PI-UdeM), Denise Medico, Olivier Turbide et Mélanie Millette (UQAM), Alexandre Baril (UOttawa), Françoise Susset (Centre MéraKi). It is managed by Morgane Gelly, and supported by: August Paradis (consultant), Rosalie Gravel (research assistant), Edith Paré-Roy (research assistant), Tommly Planchat (research assistant) et Marie-Christine Savard (trainee). Gender Creative Kids is our partner in this project.