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 media.

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

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; Tufan et al., 2018). Expósito-Campos (2021) says that if challenges can come with detransitioning, “the case 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

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

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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, GENDER NEUTRAL, GENDER NON-CONFORMING, AGENDER)

Feeling 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 even if the changes don’t quite match their expectations. They believe the transition was 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 the interventions related to their transition.

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Feeling emerging from the experience of transition

- 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).


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"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)

Preliminary conclusions

- A very nuanced parallel emerges from the preliminary data. The interviewed youths 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 in 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 nuanced emotions and experiences which are constantly evolving as they think about 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, neutal, non-binary 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.

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