

Paul Dirks

Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights Respecting Bill C-6

The Myth of the Immutability of Sexual Orientation and Gender
Identity

Paul Dirks
10-30-2020

Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights Respecting Bill C-6: An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy)

The problems with Bill C-6 are numerous and wide-ranging, but at its heart is a rejection of evidence-based public policy.

THE MYTH OF IMMUTABILITY

Bill C-6, the ban on “conversion therapy”, is expressly based on the supposed immutability of sexual orientation and gender identity. The preamble asserts that it is a “myth” that “a person’s sexual orientation and gender identity can . . . be changed.” The facts say otherwise. To the contrary, the peer-reviewed medical literature indicates significant and widespread change in any and all measurements of “orientation,” and the strong likelihood of the desistence of gender dysphoria in adolescence. Leading researcher Lisa Diamond states (*Sexual Fluidity*, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11930-016-0092-z>):

The existing body of international research assessing sexual attractions, behaviors, and identities among representative samples of adolescents and adults shows that sexual orientation is not a static and categorical trait. Rather, same-sex sexuality shows substantial fluidity in both men and women, and this fluidity takes a number of forms.

In regard to gender identity, Thomas Steensma sums up the literature’s findings (*Desisting and Persisting*, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21216800/>) that gender dysphoria goes away in adolescence: “Although the persistence rates differed between the various studies (2% to 27%), the results unequivocally showed that the gender dysphoria remitted after puberty in the vast majority of children.”

Numerous peer-reviewed and academic studies indicate that significant numbers of boys, girls, men, and women do, in fact, experience significant changes in their sexual attractions:

- **Stewart 2019, *Developmental Patterns of Sexual Identity***
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197119301745>
In a population-based longitudinal annual study of adolescents over three years, “Results revealed 26% of girls and 11% of boys reported fluidity in identity and 31% of girls and 10% of boys reported fluidity in attractions. At each time point, up to 20% of girls and 6% of boys reported a sexual minority identity label with concurrent same-sex attraction.”
- **Berona 2018, *Trajectories of Sexual Orientation from Adolescence to Young Adulthood***
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30060858>
In a longitudinal cohort of girls, the authors found that 63.2% reported at least one change in sexual orientation over eight years, from ages 14 to 22. The girls categorized by the researchers as lesbians averaged three orientation changes in that time.

- **Diamond 2017 *Stability of Sexual Attractions Across Different Timescales***
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-016-0860-x>
 Retrospectively, “the majority of the nonheterosexual respondents had undergone multiple changes in sexual identity: 82% of the lesbian/bisexual women and 78% of the gay/bisexual men reported having switched their sexual identity label at least once *after* having first adopted a nonheterosexual identity, and 45% of women and 34% of men reported two or more identity changes.” Significant day-to-day fluidity, especially among women, was also reported.
- **Katz-Wise 2015, *Sexual Fluidity in Young Adult Women and Men***
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-01123-003>
 “Sexual fluidity in attractions was reported for 64% of women and 52% of men, with 49% of women and 36% of men reporting subsequent sexual fluidity in sexual identity. Furthermore, 23% of women and 22% of men experienced more than one change in attractions.”
- **Everett 2015, *Sexual Orientation Identity Change***
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022146514568349>
 In a population-based longitudinal study in young adults, “twelve percent of the total sample reported a different sexual orientation identity between Waves 3 and 4,” a span of seven years.
- **Dickson 2013, *Stability and Change in Same-Sex Attraction, Experience, and Identity***
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23430085>
 In a New Zealand cohort of young adults, “among the men, any change in sexual attraction was reported by 4.2, 3.3, and 2.9 % in the age periods 21–26, 26–32, and 32–38 years, respectively; the comparable proportions for the women were 16.1, 16.3, and 11.8 %.”
- **Ott 2011, *Stability and Change in Self-Reported Sexual Orientation Identity in Young People***
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3081371/>
 In a longitudinal cohort study, the authors found significant sexual orientation fluidity in both males and females in both adolescence and young adulthood.
- **Savin-Williams & Ream 2007, *Prevalence and Stability of Sexual Orientation Components***
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17195103>
 In a large, population-based longitudinal study of adolescents, the authors found that 87.7% of bisexual males, 88.7% of bisexual females, 71.6% of homosexual males, and 76.8% of homosexual females moved from same-sex sexual behavior to completely heterosexual behavior within 6 years. Changes in same-sex identity were roughly similar.
 For confirmation of this data see Fish 2017: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-017-0993-6>.

The literature on gender dysphoria and gender identity is not nearly as mature as that on sexual orientation. No quantitative long-term studies exist on rates of change in gender identity or detransition among adults. In fact, research on this topic [has been blocked](#) due to political pressures in the UK. However, there is considerable data which demonstrates childhood gender dysphoria goes away in adolescence far more often than it persists.

- **Singh 2012, *A Follow-Up Study of Boys with Gender Identity Disorder***
<https://images.nymag.com/images/2/daily/2016/01/SINGH-DISSERTATION.pdf>
 This Canadian dissertation, cited in the broader literature, found that of 139 males, 87.8% desisted from gender dysphoria over an average of a 13 year period.
- **Drummond 2008, *A Follow-Up Study of Girls with Gender Identity Disorder***
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5657572_A_Follow-Up_Study_of_Girls_With_Gender_Identity_Disorder
 This Canadian study of 25 females found 88% desistence over an average of a 12 year period.
- **Wallien & Cohen-Kettenis 2008, *Psychosexual Outcome of Gender-Dysphoric Children***
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23449293_Psychosexual_Outcome_of_Gender-Dysphoric_Children
 This Dutch study found 73% desistence in a mixed-sex group of 77 over an average of a 10 year period.
- **Zucker & Bradley 1995, *Gender Identity Disorder and Psychosexual Problems in Children and Adolescents***
https://www.amazon.com/Identity-Disorder-Psychosexual-Adolescents-Hardcover/dp/B00ZT0C7WU/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=zucker+bradley&qid=1584793813&sr=8-1
 The Canadian study findings reported in this book were 80% desistence of a group of 77 males over an average of an 8 year period.
- **Green 1987, *The “Sissy Boy Syndrome” and the Development of Homosexuality***
https://www.amazon.com/Sissy-Boy-Syndrome-Development-Homosexuality/dp/0300036965/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=green+sissy+boys&qid=1584793922&rni=2941120011&s=books&sr=1-1
 In the only prospective longitudinal study ever done on persistence of gender dysphoria, Green found 98% desistence in a group of 44 males from the United States.

For all studies on persistence/desistence of gender dysphoria in children, the average desistence is 84.2% according to Steensma ([Desisting and Persisting](#)). It could not be clearer in the literature that not only can gender dysphoria or gender identity change in adolescence, it changes and remits more often than not.

Bill C-6 is built upon fundamentally flawed, inaccurate, and unscientific premises. There is a current academic consensus that sexual orientation is fluid, and that changes occur in the various measurements of sexual attractions, behaviours, and identities with significant frequency. Fluidity in sexual attractions is particularly high among youth, and remission of gender dysphoria in youth is the unequivocal finding of the literature. Furthermore, although detransition in adulthood has not been formally studied, it certainly exists, and is [increasingly prevalent](#).

The [problems](#) with Bill C-6 are [numerous](#) and [wide-ranging](#), but at its heart is a rejection of evidence-based public policy. In his [mandate letter](#) to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Prime Minister Trudeau stated that “we are committed to evidence-based decision making that takes into

consideration the impacts of policies on all Canadians and fully defends the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.” Bill C-6 fails each of these tests. It is not evidence-based, it is myopic in its focus on identity politics, and it surely contradicts the *Charter* through governmental interference in the sexual practices, beliefs, and identities of Canadian citizens. The immutability of sexual orientation and gender identity is a myth. If those who draft our legislation cannot get the basic facts right, what hope is there that they will get the policy right?

Paul Dirks

Provided [testimony](#) to Senate on Bill C-16

Published at [The Public Discourse](#)

Trains on gender and sexuality in faith and non-faith settings