

Beware Mermaids backtracking over 'born in the wrong body'

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Dr Carys Moseley comments on how campaign group Mermaids' recent backtracking on the 'born in the wrong body' narrative is not all it seems.

Transgender charity and campaign group Mermaids has recently been backtracking on its claim that some children are 'born in the wrong body'. At first sight this seems rather extraordinary. What could this mean?

On Twitter last month, Mermaids said this¹:

"No child is born in the wrong body. Children should be encouraged to wear what they want, play with what they want. Without putting stereotypical adult gender conforms on them if a girl plays with cars and boy's with dolls leave them alone... If only people would."

Leaving aside the awkward phraseology, this tweet requires an explanation. Mermaids was quick to provide one² in a full-length article. Linking to the tweet this is what it said:

"We recently posted³ that 'no child is born in the wrong body', which is our broad position as a charity. Why? Because we believe that transgender people shouldn't be expected or encouraged to reject their entire amazing, intelligent, beautiful, creative bodies, simply because of gender incongruity. Still, we also know some people – including some of our amazing patrons – do use that phrase to express who they are. It is your right to use whatever words you choose to describe yourself. As a charity representing lots of different people, however, we have to make sure our language is as inclusive as possible, especially for people who might be struggling with their gender."

This paragraph needs to be decoded. For Mermaids to say that transgender people shouldn't have to reject their bodies sounds great. Indeed, it sounds too good to be true. What it really means is that Mermaids believes in gender self-identification – in other words, living as a member of the opposite sex without undergoing medical checks and treatment.

Angry social media reaction

Many people on social media were very angry about this disingenuous backtracking. Some people shared screenshots of old Mermaids web pages providing evidence for its approach. On 24 September, the same day as the aforementioned tweet, Mermaids removed an old article entitled 'Signs Your child is Trans⁴'. There was a long list of alleged signs, including lack of concentration, poor educational performance, truanting (even when well), stress-related illnesses, self-harm, timidity or aggression and 'possibly dyslexic'. In other words, just about any and every problem that a child could have was a sign that they had a gender identity disorder. This is nonsense on stilts!

Another Twitter user shared a Mermaids video from a Daily Mail article featuring a boy who had allegedly said⁵ at the age of three that he was 'born in the wrong body'. That article was published in December last year. Finally, the author of an article for Quillette opposing the concept⁶ recalled how transgender campaigners had complained very loudly at the time.

Mermaids training in C of E primary school

Last year we gave extensive coverage of a secret recording of a Mermaids training session, held in a Church of England primary school. In the session, the Mermaids staff member explicitly discussed the idea⁷ that someone can be 'born in the wrong body'. The blame was put on the binary classification of people as male or female. The Mermaids staff member said this was due to 'western culture'.

Why is Mermaids backtracking now?

It is obvious from the web article that Mermaids is trying to present social transitioning, i.e. not undergoing physical treatments, as the alternative to doing so. In simple terms, this boils down to making the use of preferred pronouns and possibly cross-dressing the basic criteria for transgender identification. The question is why has this happened recently? The obvious immediate reason is that the Department for Education in England recently announced that no child should be told he or she is transgender or 'born in the wrong body'. This is not even if

that child does not conform to gender stereotypes. Mermaids has had access to schools until now. It may be desperately trying to hang on to this access.

Another reason for this seeming about-turn would be fear of litigation by people who previously attended its support groups. This fear would be due to the current judicial review⁸ of the prescription of puberty blockers taking place in the High Court. The judges' refusal to allow Mermaids to intervene as a third party⁹ in the court case against the GIDS was a major blow. Mermaids has been closely linked to the GIDS from its inception. It may fear being marginalised in future. All of this cannot be good in terms of donations or charitable status either.

Early Mermaids link to Dutch clinician

The Mermaids website in 1999 linked to papers by Dutch doctor Louis Gooren, who advocated cross-sex hormones at the Council of Europe in 1993. Louis Gooren had previously used the term 'born in the wrong body' in a way that implied he believed it. In 1991 he wrote this in a chapter in a book¹⁰ commemorating John Money:

"Those of us who regularly work with transsexuals, however, cannot avoid being deeply impressed by the genuine suffering that comes from having been 'born in the wrong body.' To transsexuals gender identity is not something merely metaphysical or only of academic interest. It is a very deep-rooted sense of body alienation that dominates their awareness. It is certainly not limited to sexueroeticism, although that aspect is not excluded." [page 16, Louis Gooren, The Physical Side of Gender Identity, in John Money: A Tribute, edited by Eli Coleman. Psychology Press, 1991]

Gooren then wrote a paper on puberty blockers¹¹ published in 1996, recommending their use as a precursor to 'the right type of treatment', i.e. hormones and later surgery. It is perhaps worth noting here that Susie Green the CEO of Mermaids is on record¹² as opposing psychological assessment for gender reassignment surgery. Twitter users were quick to share this screenshot.

Backtracking from Mermaids?

Back in July, I referred to the fact that the NHS Wales pages on gender dysphoria were heavily influenced by Mermaids¹³. This was in the context of analysing the change to the main NHS pages on gender dysphoria. I found that the main NHS pages smacked of backtracking by clinicians. The continued influence of Mermaids over NHS Wales was a sign that a true change of approach had not happened.

Now the Gender Dysphoria and Gender Identity pages are gone from the NHS Wales website, including archived copies. The home page of the Welsh Gender Service has gone too. Does this signify a clean break with the problems involved? It seems not. For the new Welsh Gender Service now has its pages on the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board site¹⁴ instead. On those pages there is a link to the Wales Fertility Institute¹⁵ which claims that the effects of puberty blockers are reversible.

Beware 'Sexual and Gender Diversity'

Mermaids is not mentioned on the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board website, neither is Stonewall. A Welsh LGBT organisation called Umbrella Cymru is given prominence instead. Umbrella Cymru is even more brazen in its aims. It says that it aims to 'advance sexual and gender diversity'. This is interesting because the term 'sexual and gender diversity' has been promoted as an alternative to the term 'LGBT' by Dominic Davies, the CEO of Pink Therapy¹⁶. The question is, what does 'advance' mean here? LGBT organisations have succeeded by using the 'born that way' argument. Mermaids' use of 'born in the wrong body' is a case in point. If some people really are born transgendered, why is there a need to 'advance gender diversity'?

It turns out that Mermaids gave a presentation¹⁷ in Pink Therapy's Trans 2014 Emerging Trends conference¹⁸ in April 2014. This means that Mermaids has close links with the organisation that has mainstreamed the term 'sexual and gender diversity'. Its continued use by others means that there has been no real change of approach within the NHS in Wales.

Link to professional ban on 'conversion therapy'

Recently, former Tavistock staff member Marcus Evans clearly explained the damage that the 'conversion therapy' ban¹⁹ has already

done. Even if the judicial review leads to a ban on puberty blockers, much more needs to be done. The prescription of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones now goes hand in hand with a ban on what is deemed 'conversion therapy'. Children and young people must be offered adequate psychotherapy if experimental physical treatments are sidelined or prohibited.

Dominic Davies has been a major force in promoting gay-affirmative and later transgender-affirmative therapy in the mental health professional bodies. He was a key figure²⁰ in the production of both versions of the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK. He had close links to the Department of Health under David Cameron and Theresa May²¹ in this respect. In February 2016 he resigned from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy²² because he considered it wasn't doing enough on transgender issues among other things. He claimed that the BACP had told him that it did not want to create 'a list of orientations and conditions' that could no longer be treated to Memorandum. This was in

light of the BACP removing the accreditation of Lesley Pilkington²³. Later on, the BACP did in fact sign the new version of the Memorandum, which prohibited therapy which assumed one 'gender identity' was better than another.

Where to now for child-targeted trans activism?

The current court case, the Department for Education announcement and also the forthcoming independent review of gender services for children have all put the spotlight on Mermaids. The important thing is that the focus doesn't just stay there.

The judges in the judicial review are expected to reserve judgment until a later date. It would be completely unsurprising if either party filed an appeal. We can therefore expect this case to continue for some time. In the meantime, any apparent backtracking by transgender organisations and 'allies' needs to be investigated thoroughly and exposed for what it is.

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- ¹ https://twitter.com/Mermaids_Gender/status/1309192315467116547
 - ² <https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/news/do-you-still-use-the-phrase-born-in-the-wrong-body/>
 - ³ https://twitter.com/Mermaids_Gender/status/1309192315467116547
 - ⁴ <https://twitter.com/ripx4nutmeg/status/1296357164764798976>
 - ⁵ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7776055/One-Britains-youngest-transgender-children-begun-transitioning.html>
 - ⁶ <https://twitter.com/SwipeWright/status/1309401661878595584>
 - ⁷ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/school-transgender-training-exposed/>
 - ⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54450273>
 - ⁹ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/stonewall-and-mermaids-refused-permission-to-intervene-in-tavistock-case/>
 - ¹⁰ https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Be28xb4JPbWC&oi=fnd&pg=PA9&ots=io1WCaLwcn&sig=pOoOW-1mNWs5JwSfIDgaqt_Yfgs#v=onepage&q=%22born%20in%20the%20wrong%20body%22&f=false
 - ¹¹ <http://www.antijen.org/Articles/goren.html>
 - ¹² <https://twitter.com/genderisharmful/status/1309545776117358592>
 - ¹³ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/is-the-nhs-honest-about-improving-help-for-gender-confused-teens/>
 - ¹⁴ <https://cavuhb.nhs.wales/our-services/welsh-gender-service/>
 - ¹⁵ http://www.cardiffandvaleuhb.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/1143/Fertility_Preservation_Information_for_Gender_Diversity.V1.pdf
 - ¹⁶ <http://www.pinktherapy.com/>
 - ¹⁷ http://www.pinktherapy.com/portals/0/downloadables/Emerging_Trends_Programme.pdf
 - ¹⁸ http://www.pinktherapy.com/portals/0/downloadables/Emerging_Trends_Programme.pdf
 - ¹⁹ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/former-tavistock-director-criticises-handling-of-gender-confused-children/>
 - ²⁰ <https://pinktherapyblog.com/2014/04/03/curing-the-gays/>
 - ²¹ <https://pinktherapyblog.com/2016/05/03/were-all-in-it-together-arent-we/>
 - ²² <https://pinktherapyblog.com/2016/02/17/why-i-am-resigning-from-the-british-association-for-counselling-and-psychotherapy/>
 - ²³ <https://christianconcern.com/news/bacp-appeal-panel-rules-on-lesley-pilkington-christian-therapy-case/>