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Original Article

Beyond representation: negotiating realism and the positive impact of media narratives with trans audiences

Isabel Villegas-Simón [1,*], Juan José Sánchez-Soriano [2], Rafael Ventura [3]

[1]Department of Communication, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain
[2]Departament of Journalism and Corporative Communication, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain
[3]Department of Philology and Communication, Universitat de Lleida, Lleida, Spain
*Corresponding author: Isabel Villegas-Simón. Email: isabelmaria.villegas@upf.edu

Abstract

The growing presence of trans people in popular culture, including television series, is a well-established fact. However, its broader social impact and particularly consideration of what constitutes a positive representation of the trans community has received little attention from academic literature. This research addresses this gap by focusing on the experiences and interpretations of trans individuals regarding the way they are portrayed in TV series. It does so by conducting a qualitative study of 19 trans Spaniards who participated in two focus groups and nine semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the participants view their increased representation as a form of retribution for past under-representation. They also associate positive representation with realism, with two of their primary areas of concern being the need to depict authentic situations and individuals, and lack of involvement of trans people in the creative process. Ultimately, this research highlights the role of television series as amplifiers of trans experiences, voices and stories.

Keywords: trans audiences, realism, queer studies, reception studies, focus groups

Introduction

LGBTIQ+ characters are increasingly present in popular audiovisual narratives, as confirmed by several recent reports. For instance, in its quantitative analysis of LGBTIQ+ characters appearing in mainstream Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) series, GLAAD (2012, 2024) reported a dramatic increase from 19 regular characters in the 2011–12 season to 208 in 2023–24. The Spanish Observatory of Diversity in Audiovisual Media (ODA) has observed a similar increase in numbers of trans characters in its national broadcasting landscape (Cebrián Salé et al., 2023). These figures might suggest we are at a "transgender tipping point" (Straube, 2020), heralding an era when trans visibility, public acceptance and rights have reached new heights. However, this rise in sexual diversity on TV has sparked new concerns surrounding the ways in which trans people are actually portrayed and the motivations for doing so.

Indeed, there has been much criticism of phenomena such as pinkwashing and queerbaiting (Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020), where apparent support and empathy for the LGBTIQ+ community are little more than token gestures driven by potential economic or reputational gain. Moreover, as Feder and Juhasz (2016) have pointed out, the quantitative increase in LGBTIQ+ characters in the media has not necessarily entailed any kind of improvement in the lives of the queer community. In fact, greater media exposure of trans people has often led to more public scrutiny and even violence against them in several European countries, including Spain (Sánchez-Holgado et al., 2023).

The trans community was traditionally portrayed in the media in the form of harmfully negative stereotypes (Glover, 2016), frequently linked to themes such as secrecy, tragedy, rejection, prostitution, violence and ridicule (Solomon & Kurtz-Costes, 2018). In recent years, there has been a shift toward more positive and kinder depictions of trans people (Masanet et al., 2022), but criticism nevertheless persists. Most studies claim that contemporary representations of trans people are still largely transnormative (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017), perpetuate the misguided narrative of being "born in the wrong body" (Cava & Jacobsen, 2014), and are biased and lacking in diversity, with over-representation of trans women as opposed to trans men, and only a limited presence of non-binary and other sex-gender identities (McLaren et al., 2021). Critics have also noted the persistence of tropes such as "Bury Your Gays" (Birchmore & Kettrey, 2021) and "Dead Lesbian Syndrome" (Guerrero-Pico et al., 2017; Ventura et al., 2019), voicing their objection to the typically tragic fates that LGBTQ+ characters suffer in television series and the apparent inability of writers to imagine happy endings for them, which is claimed to have a negative influence on audiences.

All of the above raises questions as to what else needs to accompany the increased visibility of such characters in the media to foster a genuine improvement in the well-being of the real-life trans community. The present research seeks to address this issue by exploring how trans individuals relate to their representation in television series, which is achieved by conducting a qualitative reception study involving two focus groups and nine interviews with trans people. In this study, we follow Stryker (1998) by using "trans" as an umbrella term for all individuals whose gender identity differs from the one assigned to them at birth (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016), regardless of their gender expression or sexual orientation, and recognizing intersections with other factors such as economic class and ethnicity (Singh, 2013).

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Previous studies have observed that media portrayals of transgender individuals are a powerful means to raise awareness and shape perceptions of such people, thereby fostering their social inclusion (Chiland, 2003; McInroy & Shelley, 2015), especially among viewers who have had little or no meaningful contact with such people in real life. For example, the success of Spanish series such as *Veneno* (Calvo & Ambrossi, 2020) and *Dafne and the Rest* (Zamora, 2021), both starring trans women, sparked tense social debate around trans rights and conditions (González-de-Garay et al., 2022; Higueras-Ruiz, 2023).

Anchored in the tradition of cultural and media reception studies, the findings of this research also provide insights into how media portrayals can also serve as a mirror that trans people themselves can use to contrast their own experiences and desires (Ringo, 2002) and to negotiate (Shelley, 2008) and ultimately consolidate their identities (Burgess, 2009). This is a valuable contribution to recent research in this area (Cavalcante, 2017; Mocarski et al., 2019; Van Haelter et al., 2022; Villegas Simón et al., 2024).

Theoretical framework

There has been considerable academic study of how minority communities, including LGBTIQ+, have traditionally been depicted in such a biased, stereotypical, and even harmful way in the media (Cebrián Salé et al., 2023; McInroy & Shelley, 2015; Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020; Ventura, 2018). However, far fewer studies have focused on the emotional and contextual factors that might help to understand how LGBTIQ+ individuals react to these representations.

Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding paradigm (Hall, 1980) is a useful starting point in this endeavor. This pioneering author argued that the ideological messages in media products are decoded by audiences in three main ways: (a) in line with the dominant ideology; (b) in opposition to the dominant ideology (as an act of resistance); and (c) in negotiation with the dominant ideology. This model has had a significant influence on subsequent audience studies, and has been particularly useful for understanding the appeal of certain cultural products in societies where power is unequally distributed (Fiske, 1987).

However, it has not been exempt from criticism. For example, Shouse (2005) argues that the power of representation extends beyond its ideological effects to also include its ability to create affective resonances. One of the main arguments here is that emotions, affect and even pleasure also play a role in media reception. Feminist audience studies especially began to complicate the framework by introducing these aspects. For example, Hobson (1980) found that pleasure and enjoyment are motivations for British housewives to listen to the radio and watch television, Radway (1991) noted that women read romantic novels as a way to take their minds off their domestic chores, and Ang (1985) observed that women view the soap opera *Dallas* as a source of pleasure.

Other studies have argued that media reception is not solely an individual process but also a collective one. For instance, Cvetkovich (2003) claims that media representations function as repositories of emotions that shape the collective past of lesbian communities. For her, queer traumas are not just personal events, but are generated and perpetuated through oral histories, myths, and cultural products, contributing to what she calls an "archive of feelings" that preserves the community's emotional and affective history. Building on this idea, Cavalcante (2018) argues that this "archive" also affects the way that media are decoded, generating certain expectations and practices. In short, both of the aforementioned authors claim that the context in which individuals are situated should not be ignored when interpreting reception processes. As Gibbs (2002) argues, media representations are not always the cause of the effects they produce, but also function as vectors of a broader process.

From the theory of effects, some studies have shown that parasocial relationships with LGBTIQ+ media characters reduce prejudices towards the queer community (Bond, 2021), and that exposure to these characters has positive effects on real-life queer individuals and their acceptance in their social and family environments (Gillig & Murphy, 2016; Mares et al., 2023). For example, Soto-Sanfiel et al. (2014) analyzed how both heterosexual and homosexual audiences respond to lesbian fictional characters with regard to variables such as identification and enjoyment. Similarly, specific studies of trans people, such as those by Chiland (2003) and McInroy & Shelley (2015), show how the media can be a source of knowledge about LGBTIQ+ realities.

As for studies that have explored the media practices of the LGBTIQ+ community, Alexander Dhoest (2016) examined how migrants and sexual minorities in Belgium react to the representation of sexual diversity in Western media, noting how heavily such responses depend on the social, cultural, and media context in which the audience is situated. Along similar lines, Cavalcante (2018) examines reactions to LGBTIQ+ representations among queer audiences in the US. He uses the term "resilient reception" to describe how they develop strategies such as resting, rebuilding, and reclaiming to help deal with the negative emotional and affective impacts of undesirable media portrayals.

The effects of media representation on queer individuals have also been discussed in terms of identity and recognition. Cavalcante's (2017) exploration of the relationship that trans individuals establish with their portrayal in U.S. media is especially useful here. The author proposes two interesting concepts. The first, "transgender breakout text," refers to media that bring about a change both in the historical representation of that social group and in the lives of individuals who belong to it. Cavalcante exemplifies this through films such as *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *Transamerica* (2005), which had profound effects on North American trans audiences. His other term, "mediatized linked fate," builds on Hjarvard's work (2013) to describe the belief that one's own destiny, or that of one's social group, is linked to fictional characters, media celebrities and the like. Both concepts offer a useful theoretical lens through which to examine the relationship between media and social minority audiences. Indeed, our own research applies both concepts to analyze how trans audiences negotiate their media representation at a time when it is clearly becoming more commonplace (Cebrián Salé et al., 2023; GLAAD, 2012, 2024), albeit not necessarily any more positive, nor accompanied by any improvement in the lives of trans individuals (Feder & Juhasz, 2016; Sánchez-Holgado et al., 2023; Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020).

Previous studies report that trans individuals are largely critical of the traditionally hostile, limited, and misconceived manner in which their stories are told (Humphrey, 2016; McInroy & Shelley, 2015; Mocarski et al., 2019), and also

that they are particularly able to identify transnormative representations in mainstream fiction (Mocarski et al., 2019; Van Haelter et al., 2022; Author). This so-called "cis gaze" permeates the entire cultural circuit from production to representation and the target audience, which is usually predominantly cisgender, resulting in typically homogeneous portrayals that are somewhat disconnected from the true experiences and realities of trans individuals.

Building on how Bobo (1988) observed that Black women expressed a strong desire for more products reflecting their own experiences, histories, and everyday lives, Cavalcante (2017) describes trans audiences as "cultural interpreters" for wider society, viewing them as "experts" who use their embodied knowledge and sensitivity to evaluate the authenticity and accuracy of trans media narratives. This research follows on from these earlier studies by placing trans individuals and their experiences at the center of media reception practices, in the hope of improving our understanding of the social impact of trans narratives.

Trans audiences in dialogue: a participatory analysis

This study addresses calls (Cavalcante, 2017) for more research on how LGBTIQ+ audiences interpret media texts. It specifically engages with trans audiences, who tend to receive less attention than other members of the LGBTIQ+ community, such as gay men or lesbian women (Dhoest, 2016), exploring the meanings that they attribute to audiovisual representations of trans characters.

Focus groups were deemed a suitable methodology because of their usefulness for capturing group interpretations through active, moderated discussion (Cyr, 2019). Two such groups (average duration 90 minutes) were complemented by nine in-depth interviews (40 minutes average), which allowed for more detailed, complex individual expression (Morris, 2015). Such qualitative method triangulation has been recognized as an effective strategy to obtain more comprehensive understandings of complex phenomena (Edley & Litosseliti, 2010; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008).

All sessions were held in Spain between July 2021 and January 2022. The participants were all Spanish, and were recruited by contacting LGBTIQ+ associations and by posting announcements on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Because this was the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the discussions and interviews were conducted online because in-person sessions would have jeopardized the participants' health. Zoom was the chosen platform because it meant the sessions could be recorded and subsequently transcribed without the need for cameras, recorders, and so on, as is usually required during in-person sessions.

We utilized the snowball sampling technique, whereby initial recipients were encouraged to forward the announcement to others, who in turn would pass it on to others, thus progressively increasing the potential number of recipients (Geddes et al., 2018). To safeguard confidentiality, the participants' identities and opinions were solely referenced in terms of their sociodemographic data (gender identity and age), as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona). All participation was voluntary, with no financial compensation.

There were 19 participants in total, 10 in the focus groups and nine who gave in-depth interviews. They described themselves as trans men (eight), non-binary (six), trans women (four), and demigirl (one). Their ages ranged from 18 to 33, the average being 25. Because the sample was so young, it was not possible to differentiate the results by age.

Before the activities began, the participants were presented with a stimulus that consisted of a series of clips from Spanish serialized fiction featuring trans characters, which they had not necessarily seen before, such as *Locked Up* (Écija et al., 2015-2019), *Money Heist* (Pina, 2017-2021), and *Veneno* (Calvo & Ambrossi, 2020). This prompted an initial series of questions that elicited opinions about the portrayals of trans people in these particular series and the extent to which they aligned with the participants' their own personal experiences. However, as the discussion progressed, other trans characters and shows, including several from other countries, were introduced to the conversation.

The main themes that emerged were: (a) the participants' desire to see themselves represented; (b) the importance of realism; and (c) broader issues such as casting and the presence of trans individuals in media production teams. Grouped into these three themes, the principal findings are presented below.

The desire for representation

Corroborating previous studies on the development of trans identity, we generally observe that throughout the conversations, most of the participants constantly connect their relationship with trans representation to their own trans identities (Burgess, 2009; Shelley, 2008) and social interactions (Chiland, 2003; McInroy & Shelley, 2015). They clearly identify the visibility of trans characters in televised fiction as a crucial factor in the social and personal validation of their own identities.

The participants agree that when they see a trans character mirroring similar struggles and triumphs to their own, they feel a deep connection and are able to put themselves in the character's shoes. This empathy helps them to understand and embrace their own identities (Ringo, 2002). For example, one 20-year-old trans man summarized this as, "the excitement of finally finding the character that represents you and you feel comfortable and finally see yourself on television and you can feel identified."

This quotation not only highlights the intense desire to be represented in the media, but also a strong sense of reparation for past neglect. The absence and misrepresentation of trans people in media (Glover, 2016; McLaren et al., 2021; Solomon & Kurtz-Costes, 2018) has historically led to feelings of marginalization and isolation. Therefore, now that such characters are finally appearing in television series, trans people are experiencing a sense of validation and belonging that they had previously been denied. Perhaps reflecting the young age of the participants in our study, these positive representations are also claimed to provide role models and the hope of a more inclusive future.

The participants also connect the visibility of trans characters in television series to their own social relationships. Many consider that seeing trans characters in a variety of complex situations not only equips them with tools and arguments to challenge stereotypes but also helps educate the general public about trans realities, thus fostering normalization, reducing stigma and promoting empathy. For example, trans

characters are viewed as a useful stimulus for more open and understanding conversations with friends and relatives, as mentioned in the following comment from a 19-year-old trans woman:

> Seeing trans people who haven't come out yet and come out in the same series, showing how a trans person self-discovers, so that if a trans person is watching the series who doesn't know they are trans yet, they can identify, find themselves, and accept themselves. And if there are people who are not trans watching the series, they can see the process and see how important it is to be accepted. They can see that characters who may have been sad, lacking energy, not seeing the light, and seemed totally lost, when accepted by their environment and when they accept themselves as trans, they become wonderful, super fun, and super amazing human beings. It makes non-transgender people feel a tremendous desire to accept their trans friends to make them happy.

However, despite these positive responses to the presence of trans people in fiction, our findings reveal that attitudes are far more nuanced than the mere desire for greater exposure, awareness and inclusion in the media landscape (Cebrián-Solé et al., 2023; GLAAD, 2012, 2024). It is a much more complex issue than that, for as several studies have argued, greater visibility of minority groups, including trans people, does not necessarily equate to an improvement in their social or economic well-being (Feder & Juhasz, 2016).

In this vein, it is interesting to assess the participants' varying motivations for choosing to watch a series featuring trans characters. Some of them confirm that they actively seek out series that offer accurate and respectful representations of the trans community, while others say they simply stumble upon them by accident. Naturally, the overall narrative and production quality are key factors when most participants decide what series to watch, or to continue watching, but the authenticity and depth of the trans characters also play a fundamental part in an evidently complex negotiation process. This need for realism is addressed in the following section.

Negotiating realism in representations

Despite the widespread agreement among the participants that the representation of trans characters in fiction is mostly positive, the biggest doubts tend to revolve around the issue of realism, particularly with regard to: (a) the representation of factual and historical events; and (b) comparisons with their personal experiences and/or those of other trans acquaintances. Rather than unproblematic, benevolent, cheerful, favorable, or accommodating portrayals, the participants prefer those that accurately reflect real-life trans experiences.

Fiction based on actual events is often viewed in a positive light, as reflected in the following quote from a 30-year-old non-binary person: "The best representation would be one that depicts a real trans character who has existed, rather than an idealized trans character that comes from the mind of a cisgender person." Many of the participants mention *Veneno* (Calvo & Ambrossi, 2020) as a particularly fine example of good, enjoyable, high-quality trans representation. This series recreates the life of Cristina Ortíz, popularly known as Veneno, who was one of the first trans women to appear on Spanish television in the 1980s and 1990s (Ventura et al., 2024). This association between media representation and historical memory resonates with the ideas of Cvetkovich (2003) and Cavalcante (2017) regarding the creation of collective repositories of emotions and feelings. It also aligns with Stryker's (2017) call from "transgender politics" for a trans history that reinterprets the past from a queer perspective rather than a cis-hetero one. This, she claims, would rightfully acknowledge the role of the trans experience in history and current society, thus fostering equal rights and reparations for the misrepresentation and under-representation of trans people in the past.

However, a poignant issue in this regard is precisely how the media should portray the rejection, violence, loneliness and ridicule to which trans people have been subjected over the years (Glover, 2016; Solomon & Kurtz-Costes, 2018). Most participants view this matter from an educational standpoint, claiming these experiences need to be depicted, albeit without resorting to unjustified dramatization.

The participants also discussed their views on transnormative representations, which are often based on cispassing. Although depictions of trans characters in a positive, joyful and even successful light are generally a good thing (Masanet et al, 2022), the participants expressed their concern that overly transnormative and cispassing characters tend to promote the false belief that this is the only path toward social acceptance (Johnson, 2016). As explained by a 23-year-old trans man: "I honestly feel more identified with characters who conform less to the cisnorm . Because even though I pass more now than before, I've lived longer on the other side. And so, with that experience, I identify much more (…) It makes me happy when I see an effort to represent something different from the prototype of how I'm supposed to be."

This quote shows how the participants prefer portrayals that reflect their personal experiences, even at the most difficult moments of their lives, and how they resent the industry's adaptation of the reality in order to cater for a primarily cis-heteronormative audience. As a 22-year-old non-binary participant says:

> (…) people seek what is most normative as possible, they seek what is simplest, because they don't understand. Reaching a more general audience can sometimes be difficult because of that, simply due to a lack of understanding, and when they find something more 'normal,' well, it's easier for them to accept it.

Finally, we observe a preference for narratives that construct trans characters without attaching so much importance to the fact that they are trans. As a 33-year-old trans man comments:

> *Euphoria*, for example, presents Jules, without saying that she's trans. We know she's trans because she injects herself, takes estrogen and all that, and that's it, they've introduced the trans character, but they don't attach any more importance to it than that. There's no need for drama, apart from the drama of the series itself.

This aligns with the findings of Masanet et al. (2022), whereby a more positive and nuanced portrayal of trans people requires exploration of their full complexity as individuals beyond their gender identity alone. By moving beyond the "trans fact" (the tendency to make the character's trans

identity their sole or primary defining characteristic within the plot), more authentic and well-rounded representations can be created.

Beyond representation: the importance of trans actors and creators

Out of the foregoing discussions, the participants also raised concerns around the actors who appear in serialized fiction. There was major consensus that casting cis actors in trans roles ultimately results in distorted portrayals that damage general perceptions of trans people, and also perpetuates the harmful misconception that trans people are just pretending to be somebody else (Solomon & Kurtz-Costes, 2018). The majority agree that nobody can represent trans people better than actual trans actors, as they have lived similar experiences, which helps add nuance and authenticity to their performances. As a 23-year-old trans man says, "Since you usually assume they will choose a cis person, because that's what they usually do, when the opposite happens, it makes you very happy. And at least you have a little more faith that this representation won't be as bad." This finding aligns with Mocarski et al. (2019), who also highlight the pivotal role that trans actors play in shaping the preferences of trans audiences.

The participants are also clearly aware of the production process happening behind the scenes of these shows. They would like to see more involvement of trans people in their creation, which they are convinced would help ensure more accurate representations. The series *Veneno* (Calvo & Ambrossi, 2020), which not only featured trans actors but also trans scriptwriters, is cited as a good example in this regard.

As a means of addressing the "cis gaze" in the media, the participants sense that the creators of televised fiction need better training in trans affairs, for ignorance often hinders the construction of realistic representations of such a complex subject. Scriptwriting is cited as an area where such training is particularly necessary, as the following quote reflects:

> (…) it's something the screenwriter should learn about beforehand. I'm not questioning the training of screenwriters here, but it's true that if you're going to tackle a particular subject, it's advisable to be better educated. Because if you don't want to be informed, you're lazy or you find it difficult, there are other people who do know about the subject and would be willing to collaborate. (trans woman, 28-years-old)

However, several participants acknowledged the difficulty obtaining this background training, and agreed that although in most cases misrepresentation is not due to ill intent, it does end up harming the trans community by generating distorted and negative representations.

The vast majority of the participants also appreciate the value of trans actors and actresses as role models off-screen, where they help to fuel more positive perceptions and serve as an inspiration for others, one notable example being the trans actress Hunter Schafer who appears in the series *Euphoria* (Levinson et al., 2019). In fact, the "mediated linked fate" (Cavalcante, 2017) that trans audiences establish with fictional characters is arguably even stronger in relation to real-life trans performers, media celebrities and industry professionals, whose voices are perceived to be more direct and authentic. According to the participants, these public figures are valuable spokespeople for the trans community as a whole, and their narratives resonate with their audiences just as much as fictional characters do.

Much of this sentiment stems from the belief that the media fails to pay adequate attention to trans opinions (Humphrey, 2016), as the following quote from a 24-year-old trans woman corroborates:

> It's often not just that they give us a say, it's that they speak for all of us, and of course television is like a boob tube, everyone listens to television. So anything that comes out, any reality, or even unreality, people automatically believe it.

The participants also compare serialized fiction with narratives produced on social media, citing two main reasons why the latter have a more positive impact. First, as trans people are able to express their own views more directly on social media, they are perceived as more truthful. As a 32-year-old trans man notes, "Social media like YouTube and online platforms are where we're being given the biggest say, among other things because we're the ones who have the say and can explain ourselves." Secondly, seeing their own experiences reflected in those of other real people helps them to feel less alone and fosters a sense of community.

Conclusion

This research advances our understanding of the important role of trans representations in the media, and especially how they affect the development of trans identities and convey knowledge of trans realities to society at large (Cavalcante, 2017; Mares et al., 2023; Van Haelter et al., 2022). Our results align with studies that have questioned the supposed "transgender tipping point" (Straube, 2020), challenging the assumption that greater media visibility necessarily leads to significantly more social acceptance of trans people and advancement of their rights. The issue is clearly more complex and multidimensional than might appear on the surface.

In particular, our findings shed light on a fundamental aspect of the relationship between trans audiences and media representation: the negotiation of realism. The participants in this study express a preference for realistic portrayals, which they feel have more positive impacts. They generally discuss this realism in terms of two general parameters: the portrayal of realistic events and characters, and the presence of trans individuals in the production circuit.

Regarding the first parameter, the participants clearly prefer fiction that recreates historical or biographical events featuring real trans people, which connects with fiction's role as an archive of collective memory. Such depictions serve a pedagogical function by showcasing unknown experiences and realities, thereby fostering greater social awareness and knowledge, and ultimately the acceptance and inclusion of trans people, the validation of their identities, and the enhancement of their social interactions. Fiction has the potential to retell and reclaim trans history, providing references for present-day trans people and addressing society's historical debt to the trans community.

With respect to the second parameter, the participants firmly believe that the inclusion of trans individuals in the production and creation processes of trans narratives would

generate more realistic, and hence more appealing, fiction that is closer to their experiences. This reflects the need for trans people to be active agents in the way they are portrayed, rather than mere recipients whose sole agency is to negotiate with the creators of such content. To date, trans people have had very little involvement in the creative processes of popular fiction, and the lack of value attributed to their potential input has clearly contributed to the distorted and negative representation of trans individuals.

Hence, the participants advocate for a more diverse and active role of trans people in media industries. The creation of a "trans star system" that includes trans actors and creators who can contribute real trans stories seems fundamental for generating a more positive impact and providing genuine, active role models for the trans community. As Gibbs (2002) points out, popular narratives are both the origin and cause of the effects they produce, and function as vectors for broader and more diverse processes.

Finally, this study reveals a notable contradiction between the participants' belief in the positive impact of trans representation and the existing literature, which suggests that better and more "realistic" representation does not necessarily enhance social or political attitudes to trans individuals. Acknowledging this disparity highlights a critical area for further research, as noted by trans scholars and artists alike (Gossett et al., 2017). Moreover, future research could also focus on ages other than the average age of our participants, 25, to check whether our findings are consistent among younger or older audiences, as some of the results may have been influenced by this variable.

Data availability

The data underlying this article cannot be shared publicly due to the privacy of individuals that participated in the study. The data will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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