

# ‘If you don’t “pass” as cis, you don’t exist’. The trans audience’s reproofs of ‘Cis Gaze’ and transnormativity in TV series

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## Abstract

There are currently more trans characters than ever in television series, while at the same time scrutiny of trans people is intensifying in social and public debate, and the correspondence between this increased presence in the media and improvements in the trans community’s rights is in dispute. This research aims to find out how trans audiences relate to their portrayal in TV series, to learn about their perceptions and opinions, and to understand how these depictions affect their everyday lives. A qualitative analysis was conducted of 19 trans people in two focus groups and nine semi-structured interviews. The findings show that the participants perceive a clear distance between their realities and the most popular narratives about trans lives. They identify cispassing as a transversal element that drives the production, creation, and distribution of media narratives, leading to a transnormative representation. Consequently, the trans audience demands the inclusion of trans people in the (audiovisual) cultural circuit in order to combat the ‘cis gaze’ and to create more diverse narratives.

## Keywords

Transnormativity, trans, cispassing, audience studies, TV series

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## Introduction

In recent years, the amount of scientific production on the LGBTIQ+ community has increased, and the subject has also drawn the attention of media studies. However, empirical studies focused on trans audiences have received little attention (Dhoest, 2016). Moreover, these studies have traditionally focused on the analysis of media messages, but scarcely on other parts of the (audiovisual) cultural circuit (Hall and Du Gay, 1996), such as production and reception.

'Trans' can be viewed as an 'umbrella term' (Stryker, 1998) that includes all people whose 'gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when they were born' (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016). This is regardless of their gender expression or sexual orientation and is usually connected to other intersectionalities such as economic class or ethnicity (Singh, 2013). Trans people are a kind of minority audience that is usually represented in a negative and hurtful manner (Humphrey, 2016). Their reception practices and the way they relate to the media carry certain peculiarities that have barely received academic attention.

Television series create social imaginaries, since, as agents of socialization, they shape social standards about what should be considered acceptable in a given time and place (Andreassen, 2017). The representation of trans characters is mainly based on a transnormative pattern, understood as a social construct that decides which trans people are acceptable and which are not, and therefore who should be excluded from the logic of the capitalist, heteronormative system (Johnson, 2016; Mocarski et al., 2013). These media imaginaries impact both society's conception of how trans people should be and behave, and also the trans community's own identity, self-image and self-esteem.

Recently, the visibility of trans characters in fiction has increased. A major driver of this is SVODs, which have found commercial value in diversity (Oliveira Silva and Lima Satler, 2019), and allow for the inclusion of a greater number and variety of LGBTIQ+ characters (Marcos-Ramos and González-de-Garay, 2021). However, this increase has also led to greater social scrutiny of that representation, since a quantitative increase does not directly imply positive changes in the circumstances of these people (Feder and Juhasz, 2016), especially if the stereotypes are neither plural nor contribute to the construction of a positive trans identity (Guidotto, 2006).

Spanish TV has traditionally featured very few trans characters, and the few that have appeared have usually been portrayed in allusion to negative stereotypes, with a high presence of mockery, fear, alienation, and anger (Cobo-Durán and Otero-Escudero, 2021). However, the success of TV series such as *Veneno* (Calvo and Ambrossi, 2020), a biopic of a Spanish trans singer, actress and sex worker called Cristina Ortiz, and *Todo lo Otro* (Zamora, 2021), the first TV series created and produced by a trans woman, are leading to change in the representation of trans people (Cobo-Durán and Otero-Escudero, 2021; Higuera-Ruiz, 2023).

Despite these advances, González-de-Garay et al. (2022) highlight that in Spanish TV series trans women are usually portrayed in the narrative background, and as being less

educated, more hypersexualized, of lower socio-economic status and more inclined towards unhealthy habits. Trans men and other queer identities are also underrepresented. In response, Spanish LGBTQBIQ+ associations claim that the media should provide more disclosure to trans identities and offer more multidimensional representation (ODA, 2022).

Most scholarship on the representation and reception of the trans community in the media is focused on the Anglosphere (McInroy and Shelley, 2015; Mocarski et al., 2019), while there has been very little academic study of the topic in the Spanish context (Cobo-Durán and Otero-Escudero, 2021). This is a gap that this research aims to fill. This article presents a qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews and focus groups to gather opinions from these audiences both individually and collectively and thereby amass as much information as possible on the different nuances.

## Transnormativity and Media

Transnormativity is defined by Johnson (2016) as “a hegemonic ideology that structures transgender experience, identifications, and narratives into a hierarchy of legitimacy that is dependent upon a binary medical model and its accompanying standards” (p. 5). In other words, transnormativity functions as a regulatory ideology that structures the identifications, characteristics, and behaviours of trans people into something legitimate and prescriptive, as opposed to others who are marginalized, subordinate, stigmatized, and invisible. Consequently, it determines a cultural and social understanding of what it means to be a trans person.

Transnormativity privileges gender binarism and trans people with a full gender affirmation (Johnson, 2016; Mocarski et al., 2013). Hence, the concept of gender dysphoria (Cava and Jacobsen, 2014) and narratives about ‘being born in the wrong body’ are emphasized while people with identities that reject gender binarism, who do not wish to undergo surgical interventions to transition, or who do not have the resources to access them are undermined (Garrison, 2018; Miller, 2019).

Transnormativity is embedded in all spheres of social life and perpetuates the limits of gender possibilities (Butler, 1990). It involves a normalizing response that reinforces the social, political, and culturally hegemonic vectors that define gender whilst continuing to reproduce conceptions, stereotypes, and problems associated with sex and gender, such as misogyny (McLaren et al., 2018). After all, ‘transnormative trans people’, those who best conform to one of the two hegemonic genders, are the most socially and economically rewarded within the social system due to having an appropriate normative gender expression (Stone, 2006).

This myopic view of the sex-gender relationship negates the enormous potential for transgression and disruption that trans identities entail. Stryker (2017) claims that transnormative identities help to understand how gender functions as part of an ideological apparatus of domination and social control. However, under the pressure of transnormativity, many trans people feel compelled to fit into certain social norms with

regard to gender around language, gestures, dress codes, or certain behaviours (Connell, 2010).

Historically, trans media representation has been produced within the normative cisgender framework. Indeed, several studies indicate that despite the progress towards more 'positive' images of trans people (GLAAD, 2021; Masanet et al., 2022), they continue to be represented within the transnormativity framework (Capuzza and Spencer Leland, 2017). As Siebler (2012) warns, most media representations portray a trans person as someone who transitions from one recognizable gendered body to another and promote the discourse that surgery and taking hormones are prerequisites for "being a happy trans person".

This narrative fosters viewer empathy and meets the demands of the neoliberal television system (Brady et al., 2017). Audiovisual productions currently seem more committed to social reality, but at the same time, are immersed in capitalist industrial logic and are fearful of a possible loss of profits among conservative sectors of society. This has led to phenomena such as queerbaiting and pinkwashing, which imply an apparent closeness and empathy towards the LGBTIQ+ community merely for financial gain (Sánchez-Soriano and García-Jiménez, 2020).

Within this context, Perkins (2016) notes that trans normativity leads to narratives in which trans people are depicted as being on an emotional journey from suffering gender dysphoria to the emancipation that comes with a full gender affirmation. This narrative reduces the threat of differentiation from the neoliberal narrative of the "true self" which, once achieved, reinforces the gender binary system. This simplification of the trans experience undoubtedly has consequences. On the one hand, the issues related to the physical aspects of medical transition get the most attention while issues such as racialized sexuality, resilience, and agency of non-binary trans people are usually forgotten (Vidal-Ortiz, 2009). On the other hand, Mocarski et al. (2019) observed that transnormative representations in the US limit trans people's processes of identification to those that are publicly accepted, and stigmatize trans people who do not meet binary and transitional standards. This translates into increased transphobia in the general public, especially when they encounter trans people in real life who do not match the transnormative representations that they are used to.

## Trans audiences

The relationship between the LGBTIQ+ community and media texts has mainly been approached from the analysis of their representation (Sánchez-Soriano and García-Jiménez, 2020). However, a part of the academic literature has focused on how LGBTIQ+ audiences interpret and interact with their representation. Dhoest (2016) speaks of a negotiation process between representation, stereotypes, and stigmatization that LGBTIQ+ audiences engage in based on their own experiences when dealing with negative media portrayals. Gross (2001) identifies practices of appropriation and subversion as forms of resistance to harmful representations. Cavalcante (2018) defines

resilient reception as the set of strategies that LGBTIQ+ audiences employ to handle negative emotions and feelings resulting from hurtful media portrayals. Among them, the author includes rest, rebuilding, and reclamation practices. In this sense, fandom practices from online queer activism have also been studied as a means for LGBTIQ+ audiences to actively campaign against unwanted representations, by boycotting those media products and their producers (Guerrero-Pico et al., 2018; Ventura et al., 2019).

A key concept to explain how LGBTIQ+ audiences are affected by the media is the ‘mediated linked fate’ (Cavalcante, 2018), which describes the perception that one’s own fate and that of those belonging to one’s identity group are linked to a textual or media figure, from fictional characters to celebrities. Cvetkovich (2003) argues that media representations work as emotional repositories that form part of a social group’s collective mindset. For instance, queer trauma is not just the result of individual experiences among the queer community but is also generated through socially and historically shared oral narratives, myths, and media products.

Previous studies have shown how representations of trans people impact their experiences (Chiland, 2003; McInroy and Shelley, 2015), especially in the development of their gender identities. Gray (2009) uses the expression ‘queer identity work’ to describe how media representations can serve to facilitate and initiate the deliberative construction of trans subjectivities. However, they can also cause a complicated and unresolved identity process (Cavalcante, 2017). Consequently, media portrayals of trans people can serve as a mirror in which to contrast their experiences (Ringo, 2002), negotiate their identities (Shelley, 2008) and consolidate them and make them visible, especially when they are young (Mocarski et al., 2019).

Generally, trans people consider their media representation to be transphobic, misgendering, sensationalist, limited, and reductionist (Humphrey, 2016; McInroy and Shelley, 2015; Mocarski et al., 2019). Constant examples of such matters as the allusion to ‘sex change’ or the person’s necronym often only contribute to sensationalist narratives around trans reality (Humphrey, 2016). Moreover, the increasing visibility of trans women and fully gender-affirmed people, who also are often uppermiddle class and white, reinforce a transnormative ideology and neoliberal values (Perkins, 2016). These kinds of ‘misconceptions’ are explained by the lack of knowledge among industry professionals and the limited presence of trans people within the industry.

Trans people associate these distorted representations with the attitudes that they receive from their everyday environment. The 2010 report by Trans Media Watch in the UK highlights how trans people feel that negative media coverage has contributed to the fear and insecurity they experience, as well as rejection and misunderstanding among friends and family. Transphobia in the media also causes negative consequences such as depression and shame among trans people (Ringo, 2002). Previous research shows that trans audiences are critical of and active in the identification of stereotypes and the impact of media texts that represent them. In this sense, Cavalcante (2017) argues that trans people can become ‘cultural interpreters’ of their own narratives, as they possess intimate

and embodied knowledge that allows them to evaluate content in an authentic and effective way.

Most of these studies are focused on US television culture, which is generally viewed as the international benchmark, also in terms of diversity of gender and sexual identity (Gonzalez de Garay et al., 2022). Additionally, Billard and Nesfield (2020) explore the ambivalence between the ‘Westernization’ of gender identity representations, which is fostered globally by transnational media companies based in the US, and the development of cross-national modes of identification. In Spain, the scarce research on this issue agrees that the representation of the trans community in its media reproduces similar stereotypes and prejudices to those observed in the United States (Cobo-Durán and Otero-Escudero, 2021). Within this framework, this research focuses on that particular country, Spain, to explore how trans people respond to representations of themselves in the media, as well as the impact thereof, meaning the way trans people evaluate and relate to these representations, and following other studies that engage in the specificity of local realities (Billard and Nesfield, 2020; Van Haelter et al., 2022).

## Methodology

We employed a qualitative methodology, based on in-depth interviews and focus groups. The sample was limited to people who self-identified within the trans umbrella (Stryker, 1998), which included trans men, trans women, and non-binary people, among others. MocarSKI et al. (2019) defend the need for research to be based on a critical cultural analysis of trans communities themselves, because non-trans people may not fully understand their realities. Therefore, the reason for choosing this sample is to access trans people’s perspectives. The researchers recognize themselves as cisgender, Caucasian, and middle class, although two of them self-identify as LGBTIQ+.

Data were collected from a total of 19 participants, who were distributed across 2 focus groups and 9 in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview technique informs about people’s experiences and opinions in a more complex manner (Morris, 2015). In turn, the value of focus groups lies in that they produce the kind of information that arises spontaneously through interaction (Queirós et al., 2017). So, a combination of both techniques ensures that the widest possible range of information can be obtained. In our case, the amount of information obtained through 2 focus groups and 9 in-depth interviews was considered sufficient. However, we are aware that it is not possible to generalize it to other research using the same methodology. We ran the focus groups first and conducted the interviews afterward, in order to follow up on the specifically interesting elements that arose from the former.

This research was approved by the research ethics committee of Universitat Pompeu Fabra and all participants signed an informed consent form. The final sample was made up of 9 people who identify as trans men, 3 as trans women, 8 as non-binary, and 1 as demi-gender. The self-identifications of non-binary and demi-gender were proposed by the participants themselves. The notion of non-binary refers to people who do not

perceive themselves completely within the male–female gender binary system. In turn, the term demi-gender describes people who feel partially identified as male, female or fluid. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 33, while 18 were Spaniards and one had dual Colombian–Spanish nationality. Regarding their level of education, 10 participants had university degrees, 5 had high school certificates, 3 had arts certificates and one had only completed primary education.

The participants were recruited via advertisements on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, and by contacting associations that defend LGTBIQ+ rights. The snowballing technique was used to recruit further participants (Vincent and Thompson, 2022).

Prior to the conversations, an audiovisual stimulus of approximately 10 min duration was used to encourage discussion. This consisted of viewing a series of clips from Spanish fiction of recent years that feature transgender characters, although the participants were free to talk about any series or character they liked. The series included in the clip were *Bienvenidos al Lolita* (Atresplayer: 2014), *Cable Girls* (Netflix: 2017–2020), *Cuéntame* (RTVE: 2001–Present), *La que se Avecina* (Tele5: 2007–Present), *Merlí* (TV3: 2015–2018), *Money Heist* (Netflix: 2017–2021) and *Veneno* (Atresplayer: 2020). The clip was based on thematically important sequences involving trans characters.

The questions were divided into three blocks. The first block focused on the type of representations that appeared in the series (e.g., “Which trans character in Spanish series do you think offers the best representation of trans people? Why?”). The second block covered identification and personal experiences (e.g., “Have any of the characters in the clips influenced your life experience, or have you felt identified? How?”). And the third block was on representation in other media and countries (e.g., “Do you think that television series from other countries offer a better representation of trans people? Why?”).

Both the interviews and focus groups were conducted online via the Zoom platform between July 2021 and January 2022. The interviews lasted 30–45 min and the focus groups lasted an average of 90 min, complying with the recommended average times (Nyumba et al., 2018). They were subsequently transcribed and ATLAS.ti software was used for coding into various categories in order to identify the various themes that arose from the results. Thematic analysis from grounded theory (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Charmaz, 2006) was employed since it enabled us to take a dual inductive and deductive approach. Therefore, some of these themes were extracted from the literature review, while others emerged during the coding and categorization procedure. Finally, it is noted that the participants' responses allude mainly to Spanish fictional trans characters. However, they also mentioned examples of US popular shows, clearly due to the high penetration of such fiction in Spain. We have mentioned when participants refer to US or Spanish fiction in the results.

## Results Tragic life, gender dysphoria and transnormative expectations

Some participants recognized that positive representations have been appearing on TV in recent years. However, when asked about their general opinion of contemporary Spanish TV series they highlighted the existence of abundant stereotypes in the representation of trans people. The participants described it as a rather inaccurate depiction of reality. They also criticize the invisibility of non-binary people and trans men, claiming this does not reflect the real proportion of trans people in the population. This lack of diversity has also been remarked upon in studies such as Van Haelter et al. (2022). On the other hand, as one of the respondents states: 'Marginalization, drug addiction, prostitution, and drama. Their life, for being trans, is shit, and you have to live with it, it's what you get for being trans. That's the normal representation in television series' (trans man, 22 years old, focus group). This quote summarizes the most frequently mentioned stereotypes both in the in-depth interviews and in the focus groups, which match the traditional representation of trans characters (Masanet et al., 2022).

They highlighted the association of trans people with a life that is inevitably tragic and full of misery. They feel that the storylines focus on the negative situations that affect trans people, while the positive ones are minimized. However, the most harmful factor of these tragic trans stories is that they are so rarely plural: 'The problem is not that there are tragic-drama scenes. The problem is that this is all that gets shown. Because if there were tragic-drama scenes, comedy scenes, normal scenes...But since it's only [tragicdrama] that gets shown, then the real-life consequence is that people think that your life can only be a tragic-drama, or that the only tragedies you can have are related to being trans' (trans man, 23 years old, focus group). Hence, the participants' main criticism was based on the potential consequences of these tragic drama-based stereotypes, both the damage they cause to the very identity of trans people and the way they are perceived by others.

Regarding these tragic narratives, the participants criticized the association with the realm of prostitution, a common trope in the imagination about the trans collective (McInroy and Craig, 2015), but which, again, has little to do with their real experiences: 'I think I only know three trans women who are prostitutes, the rest are lawyers, have a higher education, politicians, administrators' (trans man, 33 years old, focus group). This disconnection with reality is mentioned when the participants discuss narratives based on gender dysphoria, which are narrated from a dramatic perspective too. As one of the respondents says, 'it's what's usually shown in many series, practically always. You feel bad about your body and you want to change it' (non-binary person, 30 years old, interview).

Most of the media stories about trans people focus on the struggle during their transition period and present the sex reassignment operation and hormone therapy as essential to assimilate the largest possible number of transnormative characteristics (Perkins, 2016). In response, the participants criticize how trans people's physiques are depicted as their greatest concern and aspiration, and any failure to adjust to the gender



binary, including the transition process, can be a tragic event. At the same time, these stories about gender dysphoria and the achievement of full-gender affirmation also cause the characters to appear on numerous occasions in a fetishized and hypersexualized manner, which is interpreted by McLaren et al. (2018) as a consequence of transnormative discourse. This hypersexualization leads to a common pattern of physically exuberant trans women:

Women with a lot of makeup, very physically exaggerated, who suddenly grow huge breasts... When the truth is that there are really trans women of all kinds. I mean, there will be those who will wear more makeup, those who will wear less makeup, those who want surgery, those who don't want to operate ... and they're still women and there's nothing wrong with it. (non-binary person, 22-year-old, interview).

This quote shows how the participants are acting as 'cultural interpreters' (Cavalcante, 2017) or 'interpretive communities' (Boisvert, 2020) since they analyze this fiction based on their own personal experiences. Likewise, the respondents express resistance and critical reception, which implies that there are objections to hegemonic media representations and that affected audiences actively analyze their own representation (Hall, 1980). The participants maintain that these stereotypes are presented in Spanish television series as a form of criticism in support of the LGBTQ community. However, they actually interpret this as a sign of the lack of empathy with and awareness of these realities during the creative process, and the treatment of these issues.

## Cispassing as a transversal element

Beyond the stereotypes mentioned above, the participants perceive the existence of a transversal element that characterizes the contemporary representation of trans characters in Spanish fiction: Cispassing. These findings could partly be due to this particularly young sample of participants, which includes 8 people identifying as non-binary, who may have been socialized in a context where the gender binary is more questioned than it is among other trans people (particularly older ones or those from other cultures).

One participant describes this as 'not being noticed for being a trans person, that's why it's called cispassing' (trans man, 33, focus group). Though often assumed to be the ultimate goal of trans people, cispassing is perceived negatively by the participants as something that crosses over with all the main stereotypes that they had previously detected. The participants suspect that the purpose of trans characters is to be accepted by the cisheterosexual audience, so they are created from a logic that is intelligible for this audience: 'They show a trans character that fits what cis-gender people imagine in their heads that a trans person is like' (trans man, 28 years old, interview). Consequently, the gender binary is established as the norm that makes trans characters understandable and recognizable (Siebler, 2012) to most of the (cis) audience. The idea of his cispassing

responds precisely to the logic of gender binarism that characterizes the cisheteronormative system (Johnson, 2016), and is therefore taken to the extreme to adjust the bodies of trans characters to these binary bodies, as some participants comment:

The characters' passing is absolute, all of them, that is, there are no characters with a dissident body, [...] it is much more difficult for people to accept you when you don't look like what you are supposed to look like (trans woman, 19 years old, focus group).

Several participants relate cispassing to gender dysphoria and therefore view it as the result of considering that gender dysphoria is an inalienable characteristic of all trans people. They also conclude that this idea responds to an erroneous cis vision of the trans reality, because 'not all trans people want to pass as an incredible cis' (non-binary person, 30 years old, interview). In turn, they believe that this reinforces the idea that trans people are disguised as the opposite gender or that they are people who live in the wrong bodies, associating the trans condition with a pathology:

There is always that suggestion ... of a trans person who is in the wrong body, the issue that 'I was not born in the body that I should have been born in', 'I have the wrong body', etc. It's true that trans people don't feel identified with a gender, but it doesn't mean that we dislike parts of our body (trans man, 32 years old, focus group).

However, they also detect an exception to cispassing, which happens when a trans character is satirized and ridiculed: 'in TV series, if you don't pass, you won't be on the show, unless it's to be ridiculed' (trans woman, 19 years old, focus group). They also explain that cispassing can be a double-edged sword, for it turns negative when it is interpreted by the audience as a deception for not making what they consider to be their real self, based on their genitalia, clear from the outset.

'For example, there's the one who passes but hides the fact that she is a trans person, and is then viewed as a liar, and so she's repudiated, because, of course, 'you are lying to me, because you aren't telling me that you have that genitalia' (trans man, 33 years old, focus group).

The participants also feel that the quest for normalization and acceptance from a cisheteronormative media perspective has transnormative consequences. They perceive that this causes the general audience to learn to accept a trans person who has cispassed but not one who has not. Consequently, those who best adapt to one of the two gender binaries are more respected and accepted, but 'anyone whose body does not fit with that, or who simply does not want to modify their body, gets left out or even delegitimized as a trans person' (trans man, 23 years old, interview). This perpetuates the idea in society that for a trans person to be accepted they need to cispass, which leads cis actors and actresses to be cast as trans characters: 'They prefer to take on a cis actor to play a trans character,

who will pass much better and be much more accepted [...] passing means they are viewed more positively' (trans man, 20 years old, focus group). There is general agreement among the participants in objecting to transgender characters being played by cis actors.

The negative consequences also extend to trans people themselves. Participants reflect on how trans people internalize these media messages and can mistakenly interpret that cisnormativity is the only way to be trans: 'First, it makes [trans] people who are watching internalize it, and second, it makes everyone think that a trans person has to be like that and that they should follow only one path as if it were mandatory' (trans man, 23 years old, focus group). Furthermore, they perceive the idea of cispassing as something that fails to satisfy their demands as an audience. They do not perceive them as characters to identify with:

'The price we have to pay for having this type of representation is that later when boys and girls see that on TV, they'll often think: That's not me, because I can't get in there, not even if I want to, not even with a shoehorn ... (non-binary person, 26 years old, focus group).

### 'Cis Gaze' throughout the entire audiovisual circuit

In a way, they perceive that the entire process of creating fictional products that contain trans characters is subject to a strict cisheteronormative dynamic. Most trans characters were conceived by cis people, were played by cis actors or actresses, and are designed to satisfy the gaze of a cis audience: 'It is for a cis and mostly hetero audience' (trans man, 32 years old, interview). In general, they feel that trans people are not part of or taken into account at any stage of this process and that the trans characters that appear on screen fail to meet their demand for representation. Instead, they are created from a cis perspective to exhibit trans people to the cisheterosexual audience. From this logic, they observe how, of all the trans realities that exist, the only ones that are selected are clichés that produce simplistic narratives and stereotyped characters. They hence demand greater participation of trans people in the pre-production and production stages of audiovisual products: 'Let them get help from queer people! It's very difficult when everything is done by someone cishetero' (trans woman, 19 years old).

In conclusion, if stereotypes express social values that mark the boundaries between what is socially acceptable (Dyer, 1993), the participants reported that these representations create imaginaries about how trans people should be and behave. Trans imaginaries are depicted from the 'cis gaze', throughout the process from creation to the reception of media narratives. As the analysis shows, the participants sense this 'cis gaze' in their media reception practices and claim that their real experiences are not taken into account by the audiovisual media industry. They also object to the simplification of trans representation and feel that the exaggeration of physical aspects and focus on dimensions such as genitalization have negative consequences for them. Indeed, Miller (2019) warns how ignoring the representation and realities of people who are non-binary, racialized, or have diverse bodies leads to their social stigmatization and reinforces the idea in social

imaginaries that these identities are not valid for the hegemonic system and invalidate the way they live.

## Conclusions

The media reception practices of trans audiences are characterized by their critical capacity to identify the stereotypes and prejudices in the audiovisual narratives that represent them. As a social minority that is still socially stigmatized and whose fundamental rights are not recognized worldwide, the TV series that represent them are relevant because they construct a powerful imaginary of what it is to be a trans person. Given this scenario, transgender people are aware of the impact that media imaginaries have on their social environment, their identity development, and their self-perception and self-esteem. Indeed, similar research affirms that the media affect trans people's self-identification, provoking negative self-perceptions of their own identity (Billard, 2016).

Most of the media stereotypes and prejudices discussed by the participants are framed within transnormativity. Cispassing stands out as a transversal element that determines practically all popular discourses. On the one hand, cispassing drives the decision behind the creation of most trans characters, who are those who fit gender binarism best. On the other hand, cispassing also determines the types of storyline involving trans people. Most of them address the tragic lives that trans people lead until they achieve their supposed dream to adhere to the physical, cultural, and social aspects that are hegemonically associated with their gender. Besides, they detach themselves from everything that identifies them with their gender as assigned at birth. Therefore, trans audiences consider that, in this scenario, the only way to exist in the media is to appear or desire to be cispassing, but this has little to do with their own embodied experiences and knowledge and is a strong element of negotiation and resistance during their media and cultural practices.

Consequently, a cis gaze can be identified in the processes of creation, production, and distribution of television series addressing trans issues. After all, the audiovisual industry operates under commercial imperatives and the incessant quest for economic profit through the creation of products that are widely accepted by the majority audience (Brady et al., 2017), which is largely cisgender. This explains why their commitment to the representation of diversity has more to do with commercial value than any real commitment to producing diverse narratives and characters. Trans audiences actively contest and negotiate this 'cis gaze' and demand the participation of trans people in production and creative teams as a central measure to combat it.

The limitations of this research include the observation that it is impossible to reflect the full diversity (geographic, class, ethnic, etc.) of a given population. Nevertheless, by conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups, we have tried to cover a large part of a relatively small community, trans people, which can be a difficult one to sample accurately. At the same time, although we consider this study to be valuable because it is focused on a region outside of the Anglosphere, we recognize that results need to be

understood within a specific national context, Spain. Hence, we encourage future studies to examine these issues in other under-explored regions (Billard and Nesfield, 2020). Moreover, future investigations should explore how transnormativity involves more aspects of trans lives beyond the ways in which they embody their subjectivity, which is the central argument of this research.

Finally, the results encourage future research to continue exploring this ‘cis gaze’ and transnormativity in the circuits of cultural production (Du Gay et al., 1996), taking into account the industrial logic and the consequences of these representations for trans and cis audiences, especially the impact on improving their rights and living conditions. Against this, new narratives are considered necessary that address other aspects of trans reality, such as the differences between trans men, trans women, and non-binary people in terms of their relationship with their gendered body parts, the various types of gender-affirming medical care they desire, and what they feel about their appearance before, during and after transition (Miller, 2019). More diverse narratives would help to dismantle the oppression and violence generated by the binary logic of gender.

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