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## Discourses on trans children: adult-centric narratives and youth fluid identities

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### Abstract

In recent years the phenomenon of trans\* children and adolescents has become visible in Spain, largely thanks to the activism of their parents (Platero, 2014). This visibility and activism have translated not only into the production of regional protocols and regulatory devices but also into a harsh debate in the public arena about their rights and their ability to decide over their own bodies (Missé, 2018). Within this context, we analyse the public debate on trans children. On the one hand, we study the discourses of the main parents' organisations (both those supporting trans children and those who campaign against them). On the other hand, we analyse the discourses of trans youth themselves, reaching out to their inputs on social media, looking for their discourses on their childhood and their relationships with adults. We identify an adultcentric discourse by which children and adolescents must be protected and supported so that they can develop their real nature, despite the prejudices that affect their free development. In opposition, we find youth resistance discourses that are rooted in commodification subjectivities aimed at 'being one's self', an ambivalent and nuanced discourse that allows displaying a dynamic sense of identity that adapts to their needs.

### Introduction

Since the 2000s, the phenomenon of trans children and adolescents has become visible in Spain, largely thanks to the activism of their parents (Platero, 2014). This activism on the part of families has been very relevant for trans rights in general, and not only for their children, gaining more social acceptance. As a result, these families have participated in the production of regional LGBTBI+ legislation, protocols in education and other regulatory devices, along with adult trans organisations. But their visibility has also caused a harsh debate in the public arena about children's rights and their ability to decide over their bodies and about access to hormonal treatment (Missé, 2018). In this regard, the far right has launched campaigns against trans children, such as the 2017 HazteOír orange bus with the slogan '*Los niños tienen pene, que no te engañen*' (Boys have a penis, don't get fooled) driving by Spanish schools, as well as campaigns in other countries. In many Spanish regions, the far-right party VOX is leading the ban of LGBTBI+ books for children and promoting the abolition of anti-discrimination legislation for LGBTBI+ people. Along the same lines, since 2018 the anti-trans feminists have also denounced the wrong and unhealthy effects of transitioning for trans children, calling also for the abolition of some anti-discrimination policies (Mujeres por la abolición, 2020).

We use 'children' as a general term to describe those under the age of 18, although we also use terms such as adolescents, youngsters and youth to describe different developmental stages. Also, throughout the

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text, trans is used as an abbreviation for transgender, for people 'who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain the gender' (Stryker, 2008: 36).

Before the 2000s, trans activism in Spain was led by trans adults, who often had to struggle to gain social support in comparison to other demands led by the LGBTBI+ organisations, such as same-sex marriage. In 2007, the Spanish socialist government passed the 3/2007 law that allowed Spanish adults to change their name and sex in all documents if they could prove they had a gender dysphoria diagnosis and two years of medical treatment. Trans children and youth are not protected by this law, and their families have campaigned and tried to influence the political agenda in order to protect their rights in education, health and other social realms. In fact, nowadays, every region has some sort of school anti-bullying as well as trans-specific protocol in force, and most regions have some kind of LGBTBI+ anti-discrimination policy that often calls for the protection of children (Platero, 2020). As of January 2022, a new national LGBTBI+ anti-discrimination law draft has been being discussed in Parliament, which includes rights for trans children and their families, although the future of this law is uncertain due to conservative opposition and the lobbying of socialist anti-trans feminist groups (Alabao, 2021).

In a short period of time, trans children and adolescents have gained visibility in the Spanish media, impacting on how society perceives their realities in a more positive way (Dierckx and Platero, 2017). In this regard, the documentary 'El sexo sentido' (One's chosen sex) by Concha Inza Romea was aired on Spanish public TV in 2014, and it was key for many families that identified their children with the stories shown (Missé, 2018). In the last ten years, books on trans children as well as children's books with trans characters have been published in Spanish, trans children and youth have appeared in TV shows and newspaper articles and trans youngsters have been really active on social media (Parra, 2021; Tortajada et al., 2021). Trans children's visibility comes along with the larger trend of adult trans visibility in general, which also correlates with more legal protection not only in Spain but also in many Western countries. This 'trans era' is creating both acceptance in large realms of society and also resistance from conservative groups that instrumentalise their opposition to women's, LGBTBI+ and migrant children's rights, among others, as a core element of their ideology (Cornejo-Valle and Pichardo, 2018).

As Tea Meadow puts it, this trans adult visibility is accompanied by a new vocabulary for understanding gender nonconformity childhood, changing the way parents and professionals think about sex and gender (2018: 3). In fact, despite these relevant cultural changes, adults have a lot to say about children and youth trans experiences. Their adultcentric bias, or adultism (Flasher, 1978), is key in how trans children's lives are conceived and in how protocols and policies are designed and implemented. As a result, these trans children experience strong monitoring of their gendered experiences, requiring them to embody stable, durable and coherent gender expressions for the requirements of a gender transition.

We understand adultcentrism, synonymous with adultism, as a bias that undermines the capacities, value and voices of young people (Campbell, 2021), positioning adults at the centre and disqualifying children and youth voices and perspectives (Florio et al., 2020). As historian Philippe Ariès (1962 [1960]) pointed out, childhood as a qualitatively different stage from adulthood emerged in the second half of the twentieth century in Western culture, constructing children as vulnerable, innocent and in need of special protection (Freeman, 1992). The notion of child protection grants adults the right to act in whichever way they deem best on behalf of children and to decide what is best for children on the grounds of 'their best

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interests' (Marre and San Román, 2012). Thus, protection is often used to undermine children's agency in the belief that adults are the ones who know what is right for them (Holloway and Valentine, 2000).

One key element of adultcentrism is particularly important when we analyse trans children and adolescents: the mere notion of childhood. Children are understood as incomplete and not fully developed yet and therefore not fully capable of knowing their gender (Castañeda, 2014), especially when they break adults' expectations regarding their gender identity. As Claudia Castañeda highlights, the transition of trans children has become a threat to normative gender development, posing the question 'how can we know the gender of any child-body?' (2014: 60). If children have been conceived as malleable and plastic (Gill-Peterson, 2018), the medicalisation of trans children with hormone suppression therapy putting puberty on hold is based on the notion of reversibility since children need to reach a more mature state as adults in order to be fully able to know their own gender (Castañeda, 2014). Furthermore, this early hormonal treatment has the outcome of erasing the marks of the gender assigned at birth, thus becoming a generation that can avoid later body modifications. Consequently, they are embodying a different subjectivity to that of older trans people, whose lives are strongly marked by the imposition of body modification and the need for passing in their chosen gender.

In this article, we analyse the discourses that occupy the public debate on trans children and those of youngsters who self-identify as trans. On the one hand, we study the discourses and representations of the main parents' organisations (both those supporting trans children and those that campaign against them), and the anti-trans feminist discourses against trans children. On the other hand, we analyse the discourses of trans youth themselves, reaching out to their videos on social media, looking for their discourses on their childhood and their relationship with adults.

Our goal is to map the discourses from adult organisations and the youngsters themselves in order to bring a more nuanced perspective on how trans children are constructed in Spain. The article is organised in several sections, starting with the methodology of the study, which builds on Carol Bacchi's 'What is the Problem Represented to Be' (WPR) approach (2009). This WPR perspective is particularly useful in showing how social actors shape the debate, often with important silences and overlaps, unveiling the underlying premises, assumptions and discourses that make certain representations of the problem dominant while other representations remain unthinkable. The next section discusses the representations constructed by the social actors involved in shaping trans children's rights and the sources we choose to analyse. We discuss the main discursive representations that are present in the trans children's debates, which have important social and embodied consequences for trans children and their families. Lastly, we conclude with some remarks that can be useful for a wide range of stakeholders.

## **Approaching the understandings of trans childhoods**

Our analysis seeks to provide information on how social actors make sense of the experiences of trans children in Spain. Social actors construct and interpret events as well as experiences in ways that facilitate the mobilisation of those people who potentially support them while seeking to demobilise their opponents (Rein and Schön, 1993: 198). In doing so, social actors offer a diagnosis of a problematic situation as well as a solution, a call for action. In this process of constructing trans children as a social problem, fragments or incidental parts of information become structured and meaningful problems, shaping our comprehension of reality (Verloo, 2004).

We follow Carol Bacchi's (2009, 2012) WPR approach, which is often used in policy analysis and as a methodological tool to study how social problems are constructed. Bacchi's work poses Foucauldian-inspired questions, relevant for our analysis on trans children, that tackle how a social problem and its solutions are produced by different social actors. Furthermore, following Bacchi's WPR, our goal is to analyse what is the problem represented to be when discussing trans childhood? What assumptions underlie each representation of the problem? How have the different representations of the problem (trans children) come about? What is left as unproblematic when social actors discuss trans childhood? What effects are produced by the different representations of trans childhood? These questions organise our analysis, guiding first our work towards the identification of social actors involved in the debate and the choice of materials.

In order to obtain a broad perspective on how trans children's rights are represented by the adult world, we approach, on the one hand, the discourses of associations of families with trans children and, on the other hand, those of entities that have clearly positioned themselves against their rights and even their existence. Accordingly, we have selected two Spanish associations of families of trans children that have been noted for their activism (Chrysallis and Euforia) and two organisations that, from different positions, have been noted for their opposition to trans children: 'HazteOír' (a radical Catholic organisation) and 'Contra el borrado de las mujeres' (a collective platform that brings together a certain sector of anti-trans Spanish feminism). We accessed their discourses through their own websites<sup>1</sup> and their presence on social media.

Finding similar materials to access the discourses of trans children and adolescents proved more difficult. We were reluctant to analyse what they had said in television reports, as we considered that in the production and editing process, the content was shaped and selected by adults. Due to mobility restrictions arising from Covid-19, which added to the difficulty of negotiating the consent of their guardians, we had to rule out interviewing them. Consequently, we focused on their public statements on their social networks while talking about their childhood, even if this meant limited access in terms of age (only those over 18 years old are allowed to produce and upload content). Three sources comprised the data corpus. First was the manifesto by the Trans Youth in Barcelona ('Joves Trans de Barcelona', TYB from now and on), protesting against the Catalan public television documentary 'Transit, transgender minors'. Since their presence on the internet and social media is very limited (just one video on their YouTube channel and barely two other videos and 13 publications on Instagram in the last four years), we took the video manifesto as an illustration of their discourses. Second was the YouTube channel of Yaris, the first girl under 18 who got hormone treatment in the Madrid public health system. Over the past four years, Yaris has uploaded 59 videos explaining different aspects of her experience as a transgender person. After viewing them, we selected nine videos for analysis based on the relationship of their content to the research questions. Lastly, a selection of videos from the TikTok channel that two transgender boys, Hugo and Lukas, started right after turning 18 was also included in the corpus. Differently from Yaris, most of their content takes the form of answering questions from other youngsters or children.

## Discursive representations of trans childhood

The mapping of discursive representations of transgender children has been outlined in two sections based on the type of data collected: adult representations and youth representations of trans children. The following table shows a summary of these results, organised by social actors, key discursive representations, the diagnosis, the prognosis and the impact and effects of such representations.

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<sup>1</sup> Chrysallis: <https://chrysallis.org/>; Euforia: <http://euforia.org.es>; Hazte Oír: <https://citizengo.org/hazteoir>; Contra el borrado de las mujeres: <https://contraelborradodelasmujeres.org>

Table 1. Social actors, representations, diagnosis, prognosis and impact of the discourses on trans children in Spain (2000–2021)				
Social Actors	Key Discursive Representations	Diagnosis	Prognosis	Impact and Effects
Trans Families' Associations (Euforia and Chrysallis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Trans as a natural expression of the child</li> <li>&gt; Freedom to 'be yourself'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Social prejudices</li> <li>&gt; Social lack of knowledge about trans issues</li> <li>&gt; Lack of awareness about trans children's needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Families must support trans children and protect them from social prejudice</li> <li>&gt; Promote legislation that protects children's rights to define their gender</li> <li>&gt; Families and professionals need training</li> <li>&gt; Freedom for children to be able to transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Reification of the 'trans child'</li> <li>&gt; Protection of the well-being of trans children and youth</li> </ul>
Trans-Exclusionary Organisations (Contra el borrado de las mujeres and HazteOír)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Protection of childhood</li> <li>&gt; Families' right to decide for their children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Gender Ideology</li> <li>&gt; Unscientific understanding of gender</li> <li>&gt; Children and youth make wrong decisions based on gender ideology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Families must liberate trans children from gender ideology</li> <li>&gt; Block legislation that makes children and families vulnerable to gender ideology</li> <li>&gt; Freedom from LGTBI+ anti-discrimination policies and campaigns</li> <li>&gt; Protection of children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Delegitimation of the 'trans child'</li> <li>&gt; Vulnerability of trans children and youth.</li> </ul>
Trans Youth (Trans Youth of Barcelona, Yaris, Hugo & Lukas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Self affirmation ('being yourself')</li> <li>&gt; The right to access body changes</li> <li>&gt; Social coming out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; People's lack of knowledge on trans issues</li> <li>&gt; Trans normativity is excluding those who resist gender binary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Trans organisations must support families with trans children</li> <li>&gt; Freedom to experiment with gender</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Trans children and youth as active knowers</li> <li>&gt; Flexibility on one's own gender identity</li> </ul>

## Adult representations of the problem

Adults are responsible for the construction of trans children as a social problem, which enables social and political actions to be proposed that can respond to their needs. The two social actors who are the focus of our attention (families supporting trans children and trans-exclusionary organisations) have opposite standpoints. Concerning the first, both Euforia and Chrysallis consider that they are facing a problem that is not understood, either by many families or by society as a whole. Also, both organisations remark that society lacks knowledge on trans issues and, in particular, on trans children's needs. They highlight that often families lack tools to cope with the challenges of having a trans child. Excerpts such as 'we needed

answers that we could not find' (Chrysallis) exemplify this position. In their representations, trans children and youth are expressing their 'true nature', a nature that families and society are unable to understand. Here, we find the opposition between the 'true nature of the child' against the prejudices that traverse families and social understandings. Instead of supporting the naturalness of 'being trans', society pathologises trans children, without recognising their gender self-determination.

The solution to these concerns is that families and professionals require training, which allows them to support their children in the face of obstacles presented by social prejudices and professional malpractice. Trans families' associations consider themselves as the social agents that mediate between the social prejudices and the gender expression that emerges from the child's nature. Accordingly, families take an active role in becoming informed activists, with the aim of transforming a society that harms the free expression of their children. Their actions involve building safe spaces for families and children that ensure the rights of trans people, offering training for professionals and participating in all sorts of political and community spaces in which they can influence stakeholders and practitioners.

Surprisingly, there are some commonalities between the narratives of trans families and the trans-exclusionary organisations ('Contra el borrado de las mujeres' and 'HazteOír'). These anti-trans organisations also frame the issue as a social problem and claim that they are protecting children's rights. In this case, it is the emerging new understandings about gender (which they label as 'gender ideology' or 'queer ideology') that are damaging the natural expression of children. Thus, the 'naturalness' of childhood is a core topic in the discourses of both trans families and trans-exclusionary organisations, as they both claim that the social context is harming children's right to grow up free from wrong social impositions. These social actors consider that children and adolescents are victims of unscientific social beliefs, which limit the agency of families and of the children themselves. According to this position, the way forward is to inform families and society as a whole to prevent the harmful effects of gender (or trans) ideology.

Even though the narratives of trans families and trans-exclusionary associations are on opposite sides, they have a similar structure: (a) there are social factors impacting the natural development of the child and (b) as adults, we have to protect children and adolescents from such negative effects by providing information and by promoting laws that protect children. Therefore, adultcentric notions of child protection shape both narratives. Adults have to protect the natural development of the child by either (a) combating prejudices and traditional social beliefs (trans families) or (b) preventing the spread of new and false understandings of gender (trans-exclusionary organisations).

Despite the similarities in the structure and content of adult narratives, we would like to highlight the different effects they have on the well-being of trans children. It can be argued that while families' activism promotes policies that help protect trans children, there is also a reification of the trans category, which may wrongly lead to categorising all non-normative gender expressions as 'trans'. On the other hand, the delegitimisation and slandering of trans children's claims on their identity by trans-exclusionary organisations may entrap children in vulnerable situations, denying their gender experiences and censoring the way they confront the gender system.

## **Youth representations of the problem**

Youth material differs from adults' perspectives in that youth do not spot their own experience as somewhat problematic in themselves. Accordingly, they do not explicitly refer to their own protection as something that must be addressed by public policies. For them, discrimination and social misunderstandings are the problem to be addressed. They express a lack of understanding and rejection of the trans experience from both the adult world and their peers ('My childhood has been fucking shit', Yaris

sums up). This rejection is mostly attributed to the lack of information that negatively shapes their social interactions. When discussing sexuality issues, for example, Yaris complains about how sometimes she has been rejected (or exoticised) just because of being trans. During childhood, acceptance by their parents seems to mark a turning point (Frost et al., 2016; Moody and Grant Smith, 2013; Platero, 2014). According to their narratives, the outcome within the family is both a fearful and liberating moment. In this regard, they see the associations of families with trans children as an ally, not so much to support themselves but rather for their parents to become informed and seek orientation. Lukas and Hugo, for example, advise their trans followers that the best way to tell their parents is to speak with 'total normality' so they can empathise with their feelings. Afterward, they assert: 'if they don't understand it, you can go to an expert who can explain it to them.' Similarly, Yaris says that there are families that don't react well, and she recalls that a friend of hers got thrown out of her house and only was accepted once her parents received the appropriate information. She concludes that 'you have to give them their time to go little by little, until they reach your level.'

Youth narratives are heavily based on their own experience and their reaffirmation as a matter of 'being oneself', and both Yaris' YouTube videos and Hugo and Lukas' TikTok channel are used to express and communicate these experiences to other trans children and youth. For Yaris, the transition has to do with 'really saying who I am.' In a similar vein, Hugo and Lukas state that 'being a boy is identifying yourself as such and accommodating yourself to the preferences with which you feel comfortable.' Modifying their bodies through hormonal and/or surgical treatments is a recurrent topic in their videos. Yaris has an ambivalent position towards the use of hormone treatment. In some videos, she proudly shows her followers how her body is changing through hormonal treatment. In others, she makes heavily criticisms the multiple side effects of these types of medication. Hugo and Lukas sustain a biomedical discourse when they explain to their followers their mastectomy and hormonal treatments. Nevertheless, this discourse is nuanced, as medical treatments are seen as commodities. These are understood as means to achieve individual standards for feeling good. Thus, when they are asked 'do you have to use testosterone for your whole life or only for a few years?', they respond: 'it depends on each one. It can be used to the point that you are happy with the results.' Again, personal experience, 'being oneself' and one's own freedom are situated as the dominant narrative.

This ambivalent 'being oneself' narrative, on the one hand, points to a construction of identity positions that could be identified as essentialist in terms of a 'real' nature that has to be met through a transition process. In one of her videos, Yaris explains that during her adolescence she said to her mother: 'I've never felt like a man, I've always wanted to have long hair ... I had a fondness for having dolls ....' Similarly, when asked 'when did you realise that you weren't a woman?', Hugo responds, 'I am 18 years old, and I have never been a woman.' This is a discourse that somehow reproduces the long-standing narrative of being born in the wrong body (Lev, 2004). But, on the other hand, the 'being oneself' discourse opens up the possibility of gender fluidity and experimentation. Yaris denounces the social pressure of cisnormativity as well as transnormativity on several occasions. This experimentation has led her to critically reject gender norms: 'I do not feel exclusively feminine, nor masculine, nor exclusively girl or boy. And I realised that my gender is beyond binarism and cisnormativity. I don't have to put a label on myself. If I want to wear a skirt, I wear it, or a wig. This is simply what I like.'

Gender binarism is questioned, appealing to each one's personal decisions regarding their body transformation and social appearance, which assumes that youngsters might identify as 'non-binaries, three-gender, bi-gender, fluid gender and many more', as Hugo and Lukas tell their audience. As Yaris states, 'we have to leave behind the appearance and feel comfortable with ourselves, without taking into account that society wants to perceive us as girls and to be as cis as possible. The important thing is that we love ourselves as we are. Do not try to follow the canons of society.'

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Particularly critical of identity logic are the Barcelona Trans Youth collective. For them, the discourses of the associations of families with trans children and the media impose a transnormativity that excludes a wide range of subjectivities:

There are trans people who do not want to or cannot hormone themselves. There are trans people who are not straight. There are trans people who are not men or women. There are trans people who do not always identify themselves in the same way. There are trans people who do not have the capacity and/or do not want to put up with being told from outside whether we are trans or not, and so on and so forth.

Their manifesto makes a strong critique of the homogenisation implied in the social category of 'trans people', which only makes 'acceptable' those who conform to the dominant class, race, gender and sexuality normativity. As an effect of these discourses, we identify the importance of highlighting diversity and flexibility in experiencing gender identity in children and youth.

An important effect of these discourses is that they construct trans childhood and youth as active knowers of their experiences in contrast to adults who problematise trans childhood. This is also noticeable in the video manifesto of Barcelona Trans Youth collective that criticises the documentary 'Transit, transgender minors', produced by Catalan public television. They ironically ask: 'should we be happy that during the few minutes that trans issues are talked about, there are cisgenderers (non-trans people, who identify with the gender that was assigned to them at birth) occupying the space talking about how hard it was to accept having a trans child?' They continue with their response: 'We are not! And even less so when this excludes trans people. When this makes us literally out of the media and denies us the possibility of being able to explain our reality by having it explained by someone else who does not experience it first-hand.' Children's and youngsters' experiences come to the forefront as valuable discourses that must be heard and legitimised instead of cisgender adults' points of view constructing narratives about them.

## **Underlying discourses: totalising and fluid perspectives**

We have identified two distinguishable discourses attributable to the selection of the empirical material: textual material produced by adults and by young people, namely the totalising discourse and the fluid perspectives. However, the discourses identified cut across the two sets of empirical material.

Both the adult discourses, in their two opposing strands, and the discourses of the youngsters are grounded in narratives that suggest the same course of action should be applied uniformly, regardless of the diversity of situations that families, children and young people may experience and excluding other interpretations. These traits have led us to label these discourses as 'totalising', as they appear almost as a metanarrative or 'universalising truth' (Foucault, 1970).

One kind of totalising discourse focuses on protecting the nature of the (trans) child. Both associations of parents advocating for their trans children and those denying their very existence identify the need to protect children from their environment as the real issue surrounding the phenomenon of trans children, even when the starting point is radically different. Those who advocate for their trans children support their representation of the problem in a cultural context that censors and excludes those who do not naturally fit into a gender system that uses genitalia as an unequivocal marker. Those that advocate for the denial of trans children existence support their representation of the problem rooted in an analysis that depicts an ideological context that confuses children's views and promotes harmful practices for children.

The gender-critical feminist association analysed uses [allegedly] scientific sources to support their representation of the problem. For example, the article carried out by Francisco Carrión, *'Psychologists speak: "The Trans law does not protect childhood. It is subjectivity versus science"'*, quotes a legal and forensic psychologist, Laura Redondo Gutiérrez. Redondo Gutierrez strongly opposed the elimination of the compulsory requirement for a medical report in order to apply for a change of the name and the gender marker in all documents with the following argument: 'We must start from the superior well-being of the minor, which is an inalienable legal principle, as recognised by the convention on the rights of children. And to do it with guarantees, it is necessary to contemplate the expert technical criteria that have been vetoed by law.' (Carrión, 2021). It is worth highlighting that both professionals and family associations often use the word 'minors' ['menores' in Spanish], whereas youth themselves do not use this term. In fact, the very use of minors has been criticised (see e.g. García Méndez, 1997; Marre and San Román, 2012), as it is used to refer to those in need of protection, under problematic circumstances or at risk. Thus, 'minors' not only accentuates the distance between adulthood and childhood (i.e. those who have rights and agency and those who need to be objects of protection). The term builds a gap between those children who are not at risk and those who are vulnerable and must be protected.

Despite the evidently contrasting positions, both narratives converge in two discursive fields. Firstly, both discourses place child's freedom at the centre of the narrative. Secondly, they suggest that families have a central role in the resolution of the problem. These two discourses have a similar narrative structure, with opposite content and consequences: children and adolescents must be protected and supported so that they can develop in accordance with the call of their nature, despite the prejudices and beliefs that affect their free development. These prejudices and beliefs have serious physical and psychological consequences for children. This approach to childhood and youth in terms of protection is characteristic of adultist positions. Although the children's 'freedom' is the rhetorical foundation of the narrative, this freedom assumes that the child will make the 'right decisions', the most appropriate from an adult perspective, under the wise guidance of their parents. This is why we have characterised this type of totalising discourse as totalising adultist discourse.

The second form of totalising discourse is characteristic of young people and is centred around their freedom and agency to make their own decisions. Its motto is 'being oneself', which enables young people to be what they really are and make a claim for not having to deal with different forms of discrimination. In certain videos by youngsters, to be oneself refers to a longstanding feminine or masculine nature, one that they have acknowledged since early childhood. Thus, it is important to access hormonal or surgical treatments in order to modify their bodies, the sooner the better, to the corresponding gender identity. However, in other posts, fluidity and experimentation are the basis of selfhood. In these cases, normativity, in the sense of having a unique way of being trans, is contested. The 'be at ease with yourself' is used as the utmost criteria for one's well-being. Medical and social resources are commodities for fulfilling personal affections and desires. And personal experience works as the yardstick that sustains individual freedom. As Yaris states, 'the best for me is what I think is best for me.'

In contrast with the associations' websites, this totalising discourse does not reproduce adultcentrism dynamics. On the contrary, for these youngsters, the 'adult world' does not play a central role in their experiences regarding transformations of gender identity. The 'adultist' discourses, for example, those related to how to accomplish the 'child's best interests', are absent from the analysed material. As their knowledge and agency are the key elements for freely living their identity, the role of parents and other adults is somewhat an accessory to their personal process. Adults need to be informed and trained in order to provide correct support for the child's self-determination, but children and young people play the leading role in their transition process. We have characterised this type of discourse as totalising freedom discourse.

In contrast with previous totalising discourses, which assume that gender identity must be the expression of each child's nature and therefore a coherent match between body and gender is needed, we identify a fluidity perspective, which is rooted in personal experimentation through different gender identities and expressions. This discourse, even entangled with the totalising narrative of freedom, is nurtured by critical discourses on gender binarism. It is present in Yaris' videos and Hugo and Lukas' Tik Tok material, as well as in the Trans Youth in Barcelona's manifesto and in some narratives of families' associations, as is the case of Euforia.

The fluidity discourse contests the normativity associated with gender binarism as well as transnormativity in different ways. Firstly, in terms of the ideal masculine or feminine of normative binarism, the trans experience is not explained through the outcome that must be achieved. Hugo and Lukas, for example, ironically say that they could define a man as a person having a beard or a penis, but they would be lying. In doing so, they explicitly avoid defining what a man actually is and, consequently, which is the future gender identity to be achieved. For them, gender identity is constructed following each person's preferences. Also critical with binarism, but from a different framework, the TYB manifesto points to normativity in dominant trans discourses. They characterise transnormativity as both dualistic (does not contemplate anything beyond being a man or a woman) and cissexist (assumes that trans people want to look like cisgender to simply fit into the gender system). They denounce the hierarchisation effect of transnormativity in terms of who can be identified as more or less 'trans' depending on the person's conformity to binary gender identity and other—class, race, ability and sexuality—social norms.

Secondly, and following the previous critique, the fluidity discourse also points to multiplicity and diversity of gender identities and expressions. For example, the most recent guides for educational and family contexts produced by the association Euforia (2019, 2020) include in the definition of 'non-binary' those whose identity does not statically adjust to what is culturally understood as a man or woman. In these materials, they also didactically explain that the mere observance of a child's behaviour, for example, playing with toys that are associated with a certain gender, does not directly mean that the child is or will be a trans person. In the Spanish context, these narratives confront current discourses that essentialise gender identity in childhood. Likewise, the TYB manifesto highlights the broad diversity within the trans youth experience, pointing to the heterogeneity in terms of gender identification, desired body modifications, sexuality preferences and so on. For them, even the same person may not always identify themselves in the same way. The very act of not defining oneself is a political movement towards questioning dominant gender norms.

And, thirdly, the fluidity discourse questions a linear account of transitioning from one gender to the opposite. In her videos, Yaris explains different periods related to transitioning. Taking or leaving hormonal treatment or changing the look of her hair and clothes are experiences by which she gets to know herself and relate differently with people. This experimentation does not seem to follow a preset plan of transitioning. For example, she expresses her happiness with being a woman with a penis as well as her motivation for a mastectomy. Nevertheless, the questioning of the linear character of transition relies on the hedonistic freedom totalising discourse identified above. It relates to conceptualising the body as a space for consuming different biomedical and cosmetic technologies to achieve specific objectives. Fluidity in the transition process is enabled by social and economic conditions, which is scarcely acknowledged in Yaris' videos.

## Conclusions

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While constructing the meaning to the issue of 'trans children' in Spain between the mid-2000s until 2021, the social actors analysed have different diagnoses and prognoses regarding trans children, often linked to an adultist perspective on children. In this regard, we find a tension between those actors who construct trans children as having individual and particular experiences (mostly found in discourses by youth) and those actors who conceive of trans children as a collective issue (found in the adult discourses).

It is worth highlighting that while adult discourses on both sides—family and trans-exclusionary organisations—revolve around how to protect children and help them develop a healthy identity, trans youngsters feel that adults are lacking and do not quite understand the trans experience and how the gender system works. For adults, the core issue is to protect trans childhood, whether from ideologies that supposedly confuse them or from the transphobia of the environment. However, the youngsters analysed do not seek protection from the adult world, even if their families certainly play a central role in advocating for them, mainly to make schools and homes safe spaces. In youth narratives, parents often appear as those in need of training to be able to understand their kids' needs because they lack knowledge on trans issues. At the same time, youth position themselves as the ones who hold the knowledge about their own needs. The Trans Youth in Barcelona's manifesto is particularly explicit in this regard. They consider both parents and professionals to be cis people, who usurp the voice of trans children by imposing a normative way of being trans, 'putting the [gender] rule barrier a little further, accepting what is closer to the rule but without questioning it.' Their critique not only challenges adult and identitarian understandings of the gender system, but it also resonates with the paradoxical situation of childhood in the contemporary world pointed out by Jens Qvortrup (2005), according to which, greater 'protection' actually implies greater invisibility and silencing.

Despite their different representations of trans children, most actors concur regarding the solution, such as the relevance given to having access to 'proper information', as if information per se could change social practices and understanding. While adults are mobilised to either support children or try to ban the 'gender ideology' or the gender and sexual education activities at schools, youth organisations are scarcer. Youth can be found on social media instead of being involved in organisations. On the other hand, adult organisations are more visible, probably due to the stability and structure of such organisations.

In the adult discourses, the representation of trans children builds on a conception of identity that is stable and durable, in which identities are seen as a space to inhabit, which makes their lives possible. Their understandings of identities are mainly rooted either in binarism or transnormativity. Thus, their prognosis is focused on having access to the conditions of possibility for children to be who they are. On the other hand, we find an exception when social actors have a sense of identity that is more fluid, less linked to an adultist perspective; here, identity is not as coherent or stable over time but rather is understood as dynamic and changing. But it is precisely the individualist character behind the fluid discourses that make it more difficult for youth to organise around collective actions since the understanding of the problem is rooted in their individual needs, which are not always perceived as a collective course of action.

The analysis shows two antagonistic understandings of identity that connect with differentiated cultural strata, understandings that could be characterised by the tensions between the modern and postmodern subject (Zima, 2015). We find, on the one hand, an understanding where identity is a coherent expression of the development of the individual within society. This essentialist and modern understanding of the subject (Barry, 2020) considers the expression of 'trans' as the exteriorisation of a natural and stable gender essence that inhabits the subject. On the opposite side, we find a hedonistic, fragmented, changeable, plastic and unstable identity anchored in consumer practices (Bauman, 1998). Gender-critical positions focus part of their criticism on the consumerist nature of new forms of identity and subjectivity, while the position of trans families shows their surprise and bewilderment of these identity expressions.

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We must note at the same time that the commodification of the trans identity shows the acceptance and normalisation of this identity/gender expression, just as happens with the other forms of identity/gender expressions.

We find that the adult groups analysed are focused on designing a course of action that stresses public policies, plans and activities lead by NGOs and political organisations as well as other social interventions to create awareness in Spanish society, whereas the youth groups and individuals analysed do not focus on these interventions to the same extent. In fact, youth are often not in tune with the adultist approach to what is the solution represented to be and how to achieve it. Youth have a sense of agency that implies finding their own ways to deal with the challenges of being a trans person and coping with the adultist approach to the notion of trans childhood. In doing so, youth are challenging adultist approaches.

Lastly, in our analysis, adultism is key in the understanding of trans childhood and youth in Spain, which can be traced to adult notions of protecting childhood and their sense of identity as stable and durable. In opposition, we find youth resistance discourses which are rooted in commodification subjectivities. Aimed at 'being one's self', these youth discourses are more ambivalent and nuanced, allowing a dynamic sense of identity that adapts to their needs to be displayed.

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