



“They’re Unable to See my Decision to Detransition for What it is”: How Detrans Youth Perceive and Receive Discourses on Detransition

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Abstract

Introduction In recent years, numerous stories of detransition have emerged in the media and public discourse. Often regret-centered, these narratives tend to present detransition as a mistake that should be prevented by restricting access to gender transition, resulting in an increasingly antitrans sociopolitical climate. This article examines the perception that detrans youth have of these discourses and social representations on detransition and the impact they have on their detransition experience.

Methods Twenty-five semidirected interviews were conducted internationally from 2020 to 2022 with youth aged 16-to-25 years who have interrupted a transition (social and/or medical). Reflexive thematic analysis was conducted.

Results Participants note they feel misrepresented and that detransition is limited in terms of representation and minimized as an experience. They also mention that detransition is often framed as a mistake, a negative outcome or the result of external pressures (to transition or detransition). These representations, coming from both gender-affirming and gender-critical groups, impact detrans youth who feel unheard, weaponized, left to navigate ambivalence alone and alienated from trans/queer communities.

Conclusion and Policy Implications The article discusses how current discourses on detransition constitute epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2007) that may affect detrans youth’s capacity to make sense of their experience and thus their resilience and overall experience of detransition. It calls for caution in the way detrans experiences are presented and discussed, especially in current debates on trans and detrans rights. It also calls for a more nuanced understanding of detrans experiences and for LGBTQ+ communities to be more accepting of detrans narratives.

Keywords Detransition · Narratives · Instrumentalization · Media · Detrans youth · Epistemic injustice

Introduction

Over the past few years, many stories of detransition have emerged in the mainstream media. Detransition, sometimes referred to as “discontinuation of a transition,” happens when a person who has begun a gender transition, whether social or medical, stops and/or reverses one or several steps they have already taken, whether permanently or temporarily (Expósito-Campos et al., 2023). While a detransition can

take many forms (e.g., reversal of previous surgeries, discontinuation of medication, change in gender expression), the term is generally used not only to describe a transition that is interrupted but also changes in the way people understand and label themselves in terms of gender (Expósito-Campos, 2021). That said, because experiences are diverse and the phenomenon still poorly understood, no clear definition is yet available (Expósito-Campos, 2021). The term to refer to people who detransition is also debated. In this article, we refer to people who detransition as “detrans people” or “detrans youth,” umbrella terms that, while imperfect, can include a diversity of pathways (Hildebrand-Chupp, 2020).

Research shows that detransition experiences are complex and heterogeneous (Expósito-Campos, 2021; Littman, 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023a, b; Turban et al., 2021; Vandebussche, 2022). That said, the media generally show a rather homogeneous portrait of detransition

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(MacKinnon et al., 2022a; Millette et al., [Under review](#); Slothouber, 2020). While these representations may be relatable to some detrans youth, they may miss other important experiences and contribute to misconceptions about the phenomenon (Millette et al., [Under review](#); Slothouber, 2020). These discourses may also reflect some political standpoints such as gender-critical movements that emphasize sex as biological and gender as an ideology, sometimes referred to as trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) movements (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2024; Billard, 2023; Breslow, 2022).

However, many detrans people do not subscribe to this rhetoric and despite having detransitioned, may still believe in the validity of trans identities (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023a) and continue to express their support for trans people (MacKinnon et al., 2022b). The limited literature on the topic shows that detrans people may experience frustration in the face of the stereotypical portrait of detransition circulating in the media, which is not always relatable (MacKinnon et al., 2022a). Furthermore, research shows that detrans people tend to experience stigma, isolation and social rejection following a detransition, especially from the trans community (Expósito-Campos, 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2022b; Vandenbussche, 2022). One study has labeled this new form of stigma "detransphobia" (MacKinnon et al., 2022b). This stigma, as well as the lack of accurate information on detransition, may lead detrans people to disengage from healthcare services despite their continued physical and psychological needs (Gelly et al., 2024; MacKinnon, Kia, et al., 2022a, 2022b; Vandenbussche, 2022).

This article examines how 25 detrans youth perceive the discourses and social representations on detransition, as well as the impacts they feel these narratives have on them. Drawing on the idea of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), that is, an imbalance of power in the construction and dissemination of knowledge and worldviews (i.e., information and representations), the article shows how current discourses on detransition have a negative impact on detrans youth.

Discourses on Detransition

Discourses are structured linguistic practices that both reflect and shape opinions, values and inter-group relations, often creating new realities within power dynamics (Marlow, 2017). Public discourses circulate through different interacting channels, such as traditional media, social networks and sociopolitical debates (Marlow, 2017), with academic work also contributing (Kyvik, 2005). Detransition has recently entered public debate with varied perspectives. While discourses presenting detransition as a negative outcome and calling for more medical gatekeeping are the most frequent

and discussed in this review, it should be noted that other, more marginal discourses downplaying the phenomenon can be equally deleterious.

Scientific Debates on Detransition

Research on detransition is still in its infancy and shows a heterogenous phenomenon that is difficult to measure, as studies employ different methodologies and definitions. A recent study found that 16.8% of young people who accessed gender-affirming medical care (GAMC) in the US and Canada had at some point stopped or reversed treatments. Among them, 16.5% still identified as trans men or women, 63.6% as nonbinary, 2.5% as cisgender, 4.1% as detransitioning and 13.2% as other or questioning (MacKinnon et al., 2024). A five-year follow-up study on adolescents who had socially transitioned showed that 94% still identified as trans-binary, 3.5% identified as nonbinary and 2.5% as cisgender (Olson et al., 2022). In the UK, a study on 1089 youth referred to gender clinics has observed that 2.9% ceased to identify as trans before starting any medical treatment and 5.3% had stopped their treatment at the time of discharge (Butler et al., 2022). Detransition is sometimes presented as a growing phenomenon (Littman, 2021) linked to an exponential rise of referrals to gender identity services (Cass, 2024). However, others argue that if rising referrals are observed which may be accompanied with more detransition cases, the rise is not exponential and seems to have plateaued since 2017 (McNamara et al., 2024).

Regret is often conflated with detransition. Some studies have shown that post-transition regrets are complex and vary in intensity and duration, and they do not always lead to detransition (Expósito-Campos et al., 2023; Narayan et al., 2021). A 2023 longitudinal study examining the outcomes of 220 youth initially recruited from 2013 to 2017 found that nine of them (4%) expressed regrets regarding at least one received treatment, but among these nine persons, four continued their treatments; four stopped; and one plans to stop (Olson et al., 2024). If regrets are real and frequent among people who detransition (Littman, 2021; MacKinnon, Kia, et al., 2022a, 2022b; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023a; Vandenbussche, 2022), other feelings, whether positive, negative and/or more ambivalent, are often experienced (MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023a). Therefore, if studies show low levels of regrets or dissatisfaction after medical transitions (Bustos et al., 2021; Olson et al., 2024), it is not clear if detransition rates are as low, especially when considering that detrans people tend to leave the medical system (Gelly et al., 2024; MacKinnon, Kia, et al., 2022a, 2022b), potentially affecting follow-up.

Reasons for detransition are also diverse: some experience identity shifts or dissatisfaction or think that

dysphoria was not the real cause of their distress (Littman, 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023a; Savard et al., 2022; Vandebussche, 2022), while others interrupt, sometimes temporarily, their transition for external reasons like social or parental pressure, access barriers or health issues (Littman, 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023a; Savard et al., 2022; Turban et al., 2021; Vandebussche, 2022). Detrans people may identify themselves in diverse ways, including detrans, cis, trans or nonbinary (Expósito-Campos, 2021; Littman, 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023b), or even reject gender altogether (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023b).

However, one hypothesis has gained traction in public discourse but continues to be debated among scientists. The rapid-onset gender dysphoria (ROGD) hypothesis, introduced by Littman (2018) and based on a survey of parents of trans and nonbinary youth (N=256), suggests that youth, often those assigned as female at birth, may suddenly experience gender dysphoria during puberty as a maladaptive coping mechanism influenced by social contagion among peers and online. Littman proposes that ROGD might be temporary and that providing GAMC in this case may harm youth by delaying desistance (Littman, 2018). The ROGD hypothesis has many critics (Ashley, 2020; CAAPS, 2021; Restar, 2020; WPATH & USPATH, 2024), and is still highly debated in the light of recent studies (Bauer et al., 2022; Kulatunga-Moruzi, 2023; Littman, 2022; Littman et al., 2024; Turban et al., 2022, 2023).

In summary, research on detransition is still limited, and no clear conclusions can yet be made. The core of the scientific debate revolves as much around etiology as the prevalence and diversity of experience, highlighting the need to conduct further research on the topic in order to gain a clearer portrait of the phenomenon.

Media Discourses on Detransition

Although research on detransition is limited, media coverage has surged in recent years. A research team found 192 press articles published from 2017 to 2020 in French and English discussing detransition, often framed negatively against transitions (Millette et al., *Under review*). The study found that 47.9% of articles presented detransition as “proof” that transitioning was a mistake; 25% linked it to misdiagnosis and 14.6% to mental health issues; and only 4.7% saw it as a step in a fluid identity trajectory (Millette et al., *Under review*). Media narratives often emphasize regrets (Millette et al., *Under review*; Slothouber, 2020), describing detrans

people’s bodies as “ruined” or “mutilated” (MacKinnon et al., 2022b).

Media discourses also present detransition as a growing trend attributed to ROGD and the loosening of GAMC access standards (Slothouber, 2020). These narratives suggest that those who are “not truly trans” and are socially influenced should face more gatekeeping to prevent detransitions (Slothouber, 2020). Similarly, detrans people report often being portrayed as having transitioned due to trends or trauma (MacKinnon et al., 2022a). While research tends to show the existence of a heterogeneous group, the media has largely focused on presenting one type of detransition experience.

Detransition on Social Media

Research on discourse about detransition in social media is limited. Analyzing 2,396 tweets on detransition from 2017 to 2020, Millette et al. (2024) found that detransition is often framed within a gender-critical ideology, portrayed as a mistake, a return to the sex/gender assigned at birth or as stemming from internal issues, and this framing is used to justify stricter gatekeeping.

Regarding detrans people’s experience on social media, many report facing detransphobic micro-aggressions online, such as being labeled “trans-trenders” (MacKinnon et al., 2022b), a term rooted in trans-normativity (Johnson, 2016) that marginalizes those who deviate from a binary, medicalized model of transition. Detransition is also framed as “proof” that transness is a delusion or linked to mental illness, aligning with gender-critical ideologies (MacKinnon et al., 2022a). Detrans people explain how partisans of this view, often labeled TERFs, prey on vulnerable youth who experience detransition-related stressors to serve their political agenda, leading to increased rejection of detrans individuals from LGBTQ+ communities (MacKinnon et al., 2022b). In summary, discourse on detransition as portrayed in social media shows a similar pattern as in the traditional media and usually fails to present a diversity of experiences.

Trans Health Policies and Rights

Current discourse on detransition significantly impacts gender-diverse youth and access to gender-affirming care. Indremo et al. (2022) show that media coverage can negatively affect youth seeking GAMC – especially those assigned as female at birth whose voices are usually centered in the media – and increase distress among trans-health professionals. Negative media coverage of detransition can also affect parental support and perpetuate transphobia and negative social attitudes towards trans and nonbinary youth

(Pang et al., 2022) and, more broadly, how people think about gender identity and trans realities (Capuzza, 2016). These narratives also directly impact policies. In 2020 in the UK, the highly publicized case of Keira Bell, a detrans woman who sued the gender clinic where she medically transitioned, led to a judgement reducing access to GAMC for trans youth, which was later overturned on appeal. Puberty blockers has been indefinitely banned for minors in the UK from december 2024 (Laviertes, 2024) following the publication of the Cass report (Cass, 2024; Siddique, 2021). Moreover, the ROGD theory, despite its lack of scientific support, is frequently used to justify policies restricting access to GAMC (Sissons, 2022). Recently, an investigative report broadcast on Canadian national television focusing on detrans stories and evoking ROGD argued that youth access GAMC too quickly (Turbide & Allard Gagnon, 2024). A few days later, the *Comité des sages*, responsible for ruling on trans rights in Quebec, referred to the report (Duval, 2024), and less than two weeks later, the leader of the Quebec Conservative Party declared that he wanted to ban mastectomies on minors based on the report (Laberge, 2024). These few examples illustrate the impact of detransition narratives on policies and trans and nonbinary youth's rights.

Despite empirical evidence remaining scarce and many questions left unanswered, a diversity of experiences is nevertheless highlighted among detrans youth (Expósito-Campos, 2021; Expósito-Campos et al., 2023; Gelly et al., 2024; Littman, 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; MacKinnon, Kia, et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Olson et al., 2022; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023a, b; Savard et al., 2022; Turban et al., 2021; Vandebussche, 2022). In traditional and social media, the discourse on detransition is more limited and tends to show a heterogenous narrative centered on regrets and the idea of mistakes or misdiagnoses that should be prevented with more gatekeeping (Millette et al., Under review; Slothouber, 2020). Influenced by the other types of narratives, discourses regarding policies seem to revolve around a need for more restrictions to accessing GAMC. Despite growing discourse on detransition, there is very limited literature directly investigating representations in the media of the perspectives of people who detransition.

Methods

This paper presents the perspectives of detrans youth. The data were collected as part of a three-pronged study on detransition discourses developed in partnership with Gender Creative Kids and examining the perspectives of detrans youth, media and professionals working with trans and nonbinary youth. We conducted 28 semistructured interviews with youth aged 15 to 25 who began and then interrupted a transition (medical, social and/or legal).

Interviews were in French and English, with 20 participants in fall 2020 and eight in winter 2022. Three interviews from the second wave were removed due to participants being part of a scam, reducing the total to 25 participants (see Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2024 for details on indicators and removal process). Research participants were recruited using purposive and snowball strategies (Braun & Clarke, 2023) to ensure diversity in backgrounds and experiences. An invitation to participate was shared on TikTok, Instagram, X (previously Twitter) and Facebook groups. We contacted private groups of detrans as well as trans and nonbinary people to share the post, and some participants reshared on Reddit and X.

The interviews lasted from 68 to 135 min and were conducted online and recorded by a nonbinary research professional. Participants signed a consent form and received a \$30 gift card as compensation. Interviews were semistructured and followed an approach that considers how individuals construct their life course through choices made within social and historical circumstances (Elder, 1998). Open-ended questions were asked about early gender realization and exploration as well as the transition and detransition process and interactions with families, friends, community and, more broadly, society. The interviews also covered participants' understanding of their experience, self-projection and current perceptions on gender transitions, detransitions and gender in general. More specifically, this question about detransition representations was asked: "We hear more and more about detransition in the mainstream media. What is your perception of the media and social representation of detransition?" Participants also spontaneously broached the subject.

Interviews were transcribed and coded using MAXQDA software and analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019). Participants were given pseudonyms, and some information was suppressed to ensure confidentiality. The team drew from an anti-oppressive, fluid and gender-affirming perspective to understanding gender (Baril & Silverman, 2019; Medico & Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2017), viewing it as fluid, evolving and not always binary. The question guiding the initial analysis was "How do youths who detransition or discontinue a transition talk about and interpret their experience?" For this article, we extracted and grouped codes on perceived discourses on detransition and its effects (see coding tree in Table 1). Guided by the question "How do youths who detransition perceive public discourses on detransition?", the interviewer and research assistant, supported by the principal investigator, familiarized themselves with the data following an inductive and iterative process to develop and refine initial themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

The team's positionality is diverse and includes cis, nonbinary and detrans people who occupy various roles (researcher, research professionals, research assistants and

Table 1 Code tree and additional illustrative quotes

Parent Theme	Theme	Additional Illustrative Quotes
Detrans youth feel absent from society, research and the media	Lack of representations	Um, I think I would like it if there was a little bit more representation like, in mainstream media. [...] Um, and I think it's important to like, hear from detransition people and like, listening to them when they say, "This is how it went for me." [...] I think I like to help out when it comes to, like, understanding and bringing awareness to the topic of detransition. (Lea, detrans woman, Canada, 19)
	Lack of information and research on detrans	There really is no research on what causes people to transition in the first place, and even detransition. Um, there's definitely a lot of holes in the data, so I just am completely thrilled to provide any experience I can. (Shane, agender, US, 21)
	Minimization/invalidation of detrans experiences	Like the headlines, or like articles that I read that talk about detransitioning, it's used as, like, "Oh, look. Very few people detransition, so, um, it's not an actual problem, or it's not that big of an issue, and you should..." People should stop using that argument to invalidate the trans community. [...] And it's seen as something like, oh that's an outlier, or that's like something that we shouldn't take into account (Chris, female, US, 17)
Detrans youth feel misrepresented	Representations do not encompass youth realities	I think that there needs to be a balanced view about, in the media, that shows how some people who detransition do so and then go on to retransition, how others do so because they adopt a nonbinary identity, how others do so because they realize it's not for them, but who are grateful to have learned something about themselves [...] and to understand their identities better. [...] I think that detransitioners' experiences need to be portrayed fully. It's not just that one side of them. (Theo, trans female, US, 19)
	Youth feel that their journey is presented as ungeniue	[They say], "Oh, you guys, like, were never trans to begin with." And [it is] really frustrating because obviously, I have gone through, like, the same experiences. Just came out with a different end result. Um. So, that has been, like, a very frustrating thing. (Shane, agender, US, 21)
	Detransition experiences are presented as a warning about the danger of medical transition in youth	There's some representations that are definitely geared more towards, like, convincing older populations that, like, that being transgender is this awful thing and that you shouldn't, like, allow people to do this, um. (Addie, gender nonconforming woman, US, 23)
	Youth are portrayed as victims of external pressure	I am wary people will use it to [...] disparage the trans community [...], like, I worry about, like, people hijacking it for like various political narratives. [...] I mean, you can definitely use the narratives, like, spun the right way of people detransitioning to kill the narratives of people transitioning. [...] It's not hard to just take any of these stories, put it on, like [...] Like it wouldn't be hard for, like, someplace like Fox News to just spin a false, uh, reactionary narrative to this happenstance. And, um, it's just, uh, like I have already seen it happen, like, a few times. [...] I think that was actually my biggest fear, like, coming off of hormone replacement, like, therapy myself. (Nolan, nonbinary, US, 25)
		Because I was so used to, like, my narrative of, like, this is detransition, whatever, just being, like, "Oh, like you're just a trans person, who's like detransitioning because of transphobia," or, "Oh, you were just a confused lesbian." (Sun, no gender identity, US, 20)

Table 1 (continued)

Parent Theme	Theme	Additional Illustrative Quotes
Current discourse on detransition negatively impacts detrans and gender-diverse youth	Feeling invisible, lonely and unrecognized	Um, so, like, for all that I've, um, encountered very few resources ... for, like, detransitioners generally, I've encountered ... I'm, I mean I'm racking my brain, but all I can come up with is like, zero. Just literally zero. Nothing, um, attempt to get people who have never gone down any kind of transition path, to understand the possibility of post-transition bodies. That are not just ... Post-transition bodies or post-transition lives that are not just like, "Well, I guess trans people exist. And maybe I should incorporate that into my world view." (Kit, nonbinary, US, 24)
	Feeling like pawns	Well, unfortunately, the ones that get the most attention are usually just heinously transphobic because those are the voices that get elevated by these online communities that feed on that kind of transphobia. [...] And that's kind of the environment I found myself in for the entire summer, uh, on Twitter and YouTube. And I just, it's really overwhelming because the way, like, if you, if you're just someone who's detransitioning and trying to carve out, like, their own little private space on Twitter and maybe to talk to other people with similar experiences, things you say there, like, will get taken out of context by these radical feminist reporters and like slapped in their articles without your permission. And, like, I had issues with that where this one journalist was, like, talking about my suicide attempt, like, without my permission. [...] And I had to, like, fight with her [...] Because she clearly was just using me for her own agenda. (Sun, no gender identity, 20, US)
	Being left to navigating ambivalence	We are portrayed as proof that trans people doesn't exist, and that's not it. There's trans people that really exist. I think it should be viewed as a bit more normal instead of, like, "Oh, they're, they're not actually trans; they didn't went through with this," and, "See? This is why trans people aren't natural because this, like, this is proof that transgenderism is a cult because, um, these people they escape, and they get back to what or who they were." And I don't like that representation of us. (Olivia, woman, Indonesia, 19)
	Experiencing alienation and silencing	It seems like a lot of people report basically feeling that they have no community, or that the community's available to them are really, um, painful to access in one way or another. [...] Um, and it can be like a weird social dynamic, if someone feels that kind of like, hanging out with people who are cool with you having done trans stuff at some point, is premised on still identifying as trans in some way [...] and it can just, it can be easy to end up feeling like very subtle social pressures to just like, "Act and identify," in ways that are similar to the people who you hang out with. Um, it's just, it's just an ideological minefield, which makes it a personal minefield, as though it weren't already enough of a personal minefield. [...] Um, there's essentially zero cultural narratives around this that are not, um, like, highly politicized personal anecdotes. [...] Um, I ... Okay. I think something that I was trying to get at, but didn't really articulate fully, is I think that people who detransition and do not become transphobic about it [...] feel under pressure to constantly affirm that they have not become transphobic about it. (Kit, nonbinary, US, 24)
		Um, but, like, I think sometimes when people who haven't detransitioned talk about detransitioned people, they use words like "ruined" or "mutilated" or stuff like that. Um, which a lot of people are uncomfortable with, and it makes them feel worse. (Lea, detrans woman, Canada, 19)
		But, like, people were obviously really mad at me because they thought I was a TERF and they were like, "Why are you following all these other TERFs?" And I'm like, these are, I'm not following them because their TERFs; I'm following them because they're detransitioners who happened to be TERFs. Right. Which I now still feel kind of iffy about. Um, but yeah, I just felt like I couldn't talk about this in a way that wasn't invalidating to other people and that was angry about that. (Sun, no gender identity, 20, US)

Table 2 Participants

Participant Pseudo	Assigned Gender	Identity Now	Location	Age	Transition Steps
Andréanne (she/her)	F	Fluid, woman and queer, feminine bisexual man	Canada	25	Social
Yaël (he/they)	F	Fag, agender, fluid, nonbinary	Europe	23	Social, medical
Lou (she/they)	F	Nonbinary	Europe	25	Social
Iris (she/her)	F	Does not think about gender identity	Canada	24	Social, medical
Jada (she/her)	F	Female, lesbian, but does not really give a thought	US	22	Social, medical
Chris (she/her)	F	Female	US	17	Social
Sam (she/her)	F	Detransitioned woman/lesbian, not gender fluid	US	25	Social, medical
Shane (she/her)	F	No gender identity, just female sex	US	21	Social, medical
Sasha (she/her)	F	Detrans woman/female	US	21	Social, medical
Lea (she/her)	F	Detrans woman	Canada	19	Social, medical
Sun (he/she, whatever feels authentic)	F	No gender identity	US	20	Social, medical
Eleanor (she/her)	F	Masculine lesbian woman, detrans woman, cis woman	US	24	Social, medical
Jona (she/her)	F	Does not think about gender identity	Europe	23	Social, medical
Billie (she/her)	F	A girl, a masculine girl, not a “woman”	Europe	16	Social
Olivia (she/her)	F	A woman	Indonesia	19	Social
Dylan (he/him)	F	A woman, lesbian	US	22	Social
Addie (she/her)	F	Gender-nonconforming woman	US	23	Social, medical
Emma (she/her)	F	Lesbian/butch/GNC woman/ agender	US	18	Social
Nolan (they/them)	M	Nonbinary but prefers to not define themselves	US	25	Social, medical
Aren (she/her)	F	No gender	Europe	24	Social, medical
Henry (he/him)	M	Man	Canada	22	Social
Kit (ey/eim)	F	Nonbinary or no gender	US	24	Social, medical
Hudson (he/him)	M	Man	US	23	Social, medical
Theo (she/he/they-no preference)	M	Trans female but presents as a male until can resume transition	US	19	Social, medical
Ethan (he/him)	M	Male, nonbinary, agender	Canada	24	Social, medical

youth consultant). In terms of cultural identities, members identify as either white or indigenous. To ensure rigor of data analysis, team members regularly questioned and discussed how their social and cultural positioning – notably, being gender-affirming – could impact the data collection and analysis. By engaging in this type of reflection, the team was able to discuss possible biases and address them by discussing their interpretation and revising the analysis accordingly (Bauer et al., 2019). The team also worked with a detrans youth consultant and held a public consultation with a group composed of detrans youth who had not previously participated in the research to ensure data were accurately analyzed and reported. Finally, a peer-review process allowed us to further develop some data analysis and bring more nuance. As is common in thematic analysis, analysis continued through the initial drafting of the manuscript (Braun & Clarke, 2023), allowing us to identify three final main themes related to the perceptions and impact of the current detrans discourse (feeling absent from society, research and the media; feeling misrepresented; negative

impacts on detrans and gender-diverse youth). These main themes are presented in the next section.

Results

Participants were 16-to-25 years old and from various locations: the US (14), Canada (5), the UK, France (2), Belgium, Finland and Indonesia.¹ Five were assigned male at birth (AMAB), and 20 were assigned female (AFAB). Eight transitioned socially, 17 socially and medically. They expressed a wide variety of identities (see Table 2). Based on observations and self-reports, at least seven participants were people of color.

¹ Detrans people are a minority within a minority. Some participants could be easily recognized. To protect confidentiality, we purposefully attributed vague locations to participants in the tables and quotations.

Our results show that youth perceive the discourse on detransition as generally either lacking or misrepresenting their reality, which has consequences on them such as feeling invisible, isolated and unheard, instrumentalized, having to navigate ambivalence and being silenced and alienated from trans communities.

Detrans Youth Feel Absent from Society, Research and the Media

A Lack of Detransition Narratives

Youth feel that discourse on detransition is often lacking in society, research and medical institutions. Most note a lack of accurate representations of detransition, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Notably, six participants said they had never heard of nor met people who had detransitioned before starting their own detransition:

I've never met anyone else who stopped. Never heard of anyone else who stopped, like your email or your, your flyer was the first time I'd heard about it, and I was, like, "Oh, I didn't know that was the thing for other people." [laughs] So I guess I just never met anyone else who stopped. Everybody else I know has kept going. (Dylan, lesbian woman, US, 22)

This lack of representation was particularly salient among AMAB. Ethan, a 24-year-old Canadian, explained that the limited discourse on detransition is predominantly associated with AFAB, making it challenging to find representations of AMAB detrans people. Better representation was reported as being important for participants' self-understanding, recognition and normalization.

A Lack of Information and Research

Participants also note a lack of information and research on detransition. This motivated some of them to join the study. For example, when asked about why she participated in the study, Jona, a detrans woman from Europe aged 23, replied, "I really want the information to be, um, available. And I, I think studies are really important." Another participant illustrates this lack of research:

You know, when I was first realizing all of this, like, I searched things, like, I tried to find things, and you know, what I found was just so minimal, and it was very upsetting to me, and I'm, like, "How can there be so little, how could there be nothing? How can there be things that were only published this year in, like, 2018?" And, like, that's all I'm finding, like, maybe one other in 2016, but it's all very recent and very far and few between. (Sasha, detrans woman, US, 21)

Several youths struggled to find information when they started their detransition and would like to see more available for others who are going through the same experience or who do not know about this reality.

A Minimization of Detrans Experiences

Some participants also noted that experiences of detransition are downplayed as extremely rare, nonexistent or too insignificant to merit attention, especially among medical professionals. They feel that detrans experiences remain hardly visible within medical institutions:

For the most part, we don't go ... We don't write letters to all of our doctors, you know? A lot of doctors can say, "I've never had a client detransition," when it's literally just not true [...] There have been specific doctors who have said that publicly; I personally know a woman who went to them and detransitioned, you know? Because we don't send out mail afterwards [laughs]. (Sam, detrans woman, US, 25)

As illustrated by Sam, the fact that many detrans people leave the medical system without informing their doctors may impact the visibility of detrans trajectories.

Detrans Youth Feel Misrepresented

Participants also feel misrepresented, especially in the media but also more broadly in society. According to them, media portray detransition without nuance as something to be avoided, and as resulting of a mistake or phase in which youth were not genuinely themselves.

Representations do not Encompass Youth's Realities

Across the board, youth found a lack of nuanced representations of their experiences, including positive ones, and overall wanted more balanced representations that embrace complexity. They felt discourses were often simplified and polarized, particularly regarding gender plurality and fluidity:

In every media piece that I've seen featuring trans people, it's always, like, they just know, like, "I am this gender from the get-go," and there's no portrayal of exploration and changing your mind and the discomfort and all that is just; it's always been portrayed as something straightforward, like, "I'm this, and this is what I'm gonna do about it." You know? And it's so much more complex than people make it out to be. (Emma, agender butch, US, 18)

This lack of diversity is somehow linked to inaccurate discourses about their reality. While a few participants identified with existing discourses, most of them felt inadequately represented, especially nonbinary detrans youth:

I have the impression that [in] society, there's no place for people like me [...] who have nuances, gray areas, unclear things, because I have the impression that even the nonbinary theme or identity is rendered; it's like a new box, and I don't fit into it anymore. I feel like that, but people, the young nonbinary people I know, I identify with them a lot, but the image or the stereotype or the perception, no, that's what's difficult. I have the impression that there's no real representativeness, representation really as realistic, there...^{*2} (Andréanne, fluid, queer woman, feminine bisexual man, Canada, 25)

Youth Feel that their Journey is Presented as Ungenuine

Several participants expressed that detransition is seen as being experienced by people who were not “really” trans in the first place: “That's just one thing I've been told, like I was giving the trans community a bad name for stopping my transition because it makes the community seem like it's full of, like, fakers, and it's just a phase or whatever” (Dylan, woman lesbian, US, 22). While some youth believe they made a mistake in undertaking a gender transition, the idea that detrans people are not really transgender – are only pretending to be – does not align with the majority of experiences. This type of discourse is said to overlook and invalidate the processes of transition and detransition reported by detrans people, which nevertheless share many similarities with the journeys of trans people: “I have gone through the same experiences. Just came out with a different result. So, that has been, like, a very frustrating thing” (Shane, agender, US, 21).

Another discourse said to be prevalent within trans or gender-affirming communities, as well as those believing in gender fluidity, frames detransition as a temporary stage in a longer gender journey or even as a new transition. While some participants relate to this view, others feel that it fails to recognize detransition as a valid aspect of the journey, especially as some of them reject gender. Aren explains how she feels misrepresented by various discourses, some of which seem designed to protect trans narratives:

I think there are kind of two different, um, sides of detransitioners. Um, there are the ones that, like me, um, kind of reject gender, and then there are the ones

who find a new gender identity and, um, of course there's different representation. [...] There's a lot of misrepresentation and a lot of things that just give wrong information, such as the idea that most detransitioners detransition because of, um, discrimination or because of, um, they found a different gender identity or they were never trans and were actually misdiagnosed and, and this is just not my reality really.[...] I feel like detransition is something that really, like, contrasts the narrative of transgender people, and this is normal. There are always different perspectives, but I feel like a lot of people who are part of the queer movement or transgender movement, um, try to form detransition in their own words so that their, their own experience is not invalidated. (Aren, Europe, 24).

Hence, whether or not youth see their gender as fixed, these discourses fail to adequately represent their unique reality or their genuine identity. For participants, it is therefore clear that a diversity of representations, pathways and gender expressions can coexist within detransition experiences and are all equally genuine.

Detransition Experiences are Presented as a Warning About the Danger of Medical Transition in Youth

Some participants noted the emergence of more positive representations as detrans youth share more of their stories. However, they also felt that overall discourses on detransition still tend to portray it negatively, framing it as a mistake to be avoided at all costs. Participants criticized the regret-focused narratives of detransition that suggest transitioning was a “dramatic mistake” and discourage others from pursuing it: “It's an argument that serves to put pressure on people, especially young people, by saying, ‘You see the risk is that you'll regret it later so you shouldn't do it, your transition’”^{*2} (Yaël, agender/nonbinary, Europe, 23). Some participants felt that this negative portrait was an exaggeration overlooking more positive experiences:

I think people like me, who accessed whatever transition-related care they wanted, and then they stopped because they got what they wanted, are doing fine, almost definitionally. [laughs] [...] Instead of being faced with benign but still painful misunderstandings about what's going on in their life, they're faced with being told that they did something terrible by transitioning. I think that [in] a lot of these communities, people are functionally being told that they have ruined their bodies, that they have wasted years of their life, that they did something really stupid, and now they're paying the price. People in their life see them badly for having transitioned and even worse for having detransitioned. (Kit, nonbinary, US, 24)

² Quotes with an asterisk are freely translated from French.

Youth who have experienced regrets, melancholy or sadness also felt misrepresented as those negative feelings were not always prominent or persistent. As such, discourses on detransition are overall perceived as negative, toxic and villainizing, perpetrating not only hatred against trans individuals but also self-hate among detrans individuals. Participants expressed that such hateful discourses, often found online or in media, can instill fear, especially among young people, about transitioning or detransitioning. Regardless of their experience, some participants perceived detrans narratives as threatening and politically charged.

Youth are Portrayed as Victims of External Pressure

Participants reported being often portrayed as overly influenced by external pressure, both in their transition and detransition. They felt they were often considered unable to make decisions for themselves. This attitude seems to have its roots in the idea that youth are pushed toward transitioning by some external pressures or forces. This discourse was said to be particularly popular among gender-critical groups, which argue that peers and social pressure initially compelled young people to transition, leading to subsequent regret:

[T]he most ridiculous narrative and misogynistic one too, is that assigned female people who transition are brainwashed into it. I mean, it overlaps with a lot of really disgusting ableism. Um, and they claim that there are, like, mysterious Internet grooming gangs or something going after them. [...] I mean, that's ridiculous. [...] I don't doubt that the picture that Reddit, or whatever, offers of transition isn't complete, as in it's not a good source to consult if you want to transition, but there are no grooming gangs that pressure people into transitioning. That may very well be pure projection. (Theo, trans female, US, 19)

From this point of view, detrans youth are seen as victims of external social pressure or internalized social beliefs. While some mentioned the influence of external pressure or discourse in their transition journey, this was not felt by all participants.

Another narrative seen as challenging youth's decisional capacity, held this time by gender-affirming or queer individuals or communities, distances itself from notions of regret or error, instead explaining detransition as inevitably linked to external pressures such as transphobia and lack of support or affirmation:

A lot of the perception seems to be, like, you detransition because of societal pressure, or 'cause, like, you're not supported well enough, or your transition

isn't going the way you want, and you detransition out of, like, despair, basically. Whereas, like, that's probably the minority of the cases I've seen when I talked to detransitioners. (Eleanor, detrans woman/masculine lesbian, US, 24)

Therefore, participants felt that the idea of external pressure was often put forward as influencing the decision to transition or detransition. That said, these narratives share the common effect of neglecting to acknowledge youth's agency regarding gender self-determination and decision-making.

Current Discourse on Detransition Negatively Impacts Detrans and Gender-Diverse Youth

Detrans Youth Feel Invisible, Lonely and Unintelligible

For detrans youth, being represented and seeing other people who share a similar experience is important and can feel reassuring: "It makes me feel like I'm not going through this alone" (Jada, lesbian woman, US, 22). As a result of detransition misrepresentation and a lack of detrans models and accurate stories, our participants came to feel invisible and lonely and sometimes struggled to find the words to express and acknowledge their experiences:

I didn't even figure out there was a word to describe having identified as trans once but not anymore until probably like, [the] beginning of this year, which isn't too far off from when I detransitioned, like, September 2019 to January 2020, when I figured out, "Oh, there's a word for detransitioning." (Emma, gender nonconforming butch, US, 18)

Participants also mentioned that lack of representation as well as minimization of the prevalence of detransition resulted in them not existing socially:

People are still throwing around these statistics [...] saying, like, only 0.1% of people detrans [...] I remember being told that people just didn't do that, people just didn't detransition, like, it just didn't happen. [...] That scares me. [...] We're not even being seen as being real to some people because they're that convinced of something. (Sasha, detrans woman, US, 21)

This lack of representation generates difficulties in making their journeys intelligible, both for themselves and for the rest of society. This also leads to a reduced production of information and research accessible about them, as discussed earlier.

Feeling Like Pawns

Several participants expressed how their experience was used as an argument against transitions, as a “proof that trans people don't exist” (Olivia, woman, Indonesia, 19). Theo and Jada expressed feeling like “pawns against transitions” and explained how this instrumentalization was damaging for trans and detrans people, only serving the political agendas of people who are not concerned with transition or detransition:

I guess that there [are] people who try to use detransitioners as pawns against transition, [...] which trans people don't deserve and detrans people don't deserve. [...] The only people who benefit is rightoid politicians with their idiot culture wars and nobody else, which is, I think, quite sad. (Theo, Transfemale, US, 19)

But it does make me feel a little bit like a pawn, um, because they're unable to see my entire life for what it is and my decision to detransition for what it is. Instead, [...] they take an element of my story, and they use it to justify [...] that nobody should transition, so we have to change all these laws so that people don't get access to transitioning. And [...] it makes me feel bad because, like, that's not what I believe, and it's not my motive. Um, so, it does make me feel kind of crappy. (Jada, Female, Lesbian, but doesn't really give a thought, US, 22).

Jada illustrates how many detrans youth do not support these political discourses. Some are even afraid that their journeys will be used to invalidate trans lives, giving them a strong feeling of injustice and anger.

Being Left to Navigating Ambivalence

The highly polarized discourse regarding trans/detrans journeys places detrans youth in a very delicate position, described by Kit as “an ideological minefield, which makes it a personal minefield.” Indeed, detrans youth must navigate a certain ambivalence when faced with discourses that are both attractive and repulsive.

While many participants expressed solidarity with trans people, some noted instances where detrans people adhere to transphobic ideologies, generating ambivalent emotions and situations. In fact, stereotypes depicting detrans people as transphobic may perpetuate this issue. Detransition often involves challenging feelings like regret or anger at the beginning of the detransition journey as well as forms of exclusion from formerly strongly supportive trans communities. This may lead detrans youth to seek support from initially welcoming but ultimately controversial gender-critical communities, also labeled “TERF” by participants:

At the time, I was just bored and then quarantined and attention starved. And suddenly all these TERFs were like jumping on me, like bowing down to me. And I stupidly was like, “Oh, this is fine, I guess. Like “I'm being listened to for once. I actually have a lot of really nuanced things to say, and these people are listening to me, so I'm going to keep feeding it to them.” And I think that's what's happening in a lot of these stories. Like, detransitioners are so starved for just feeling they're being heard that they're kind of willing to let some of their morals slide a little bit loosen up on that, on the things, and then they just get used. It's really frustrating to see. (Sun, agender, US, 20)

The need for recognition and listening combined with ambivalent and sometimes challenging feelings towards their transition journey can lead individuals to temporarily or more permanently align with gender-critical discourses. Moreover, some parts of these discourses were relatable to some participants, like Andréanne, who relates to the stories of radical feminists without supporting transphobic drifts:

Well, to be honest, I recognize myself a lot in all the stories of women who say I was abused, I had problems, I experienced stereotypes, pressure, intimidation: I tried a transition, it didn't solve my problems, then I feel like reclaiming my femininity. I recognize a lot of myself in that, except that at the same time, when I read the, let's say, forums, I try not to, it's very bad for my mental health, but when I read the stories of, I'm talking about my TERF and SWERF here, but very radical feminists, often well, the angle of approach is this testimony, of a peer [...] who's been through something so similar I say to myself, “Wow!” I feel like adhering to that; it connects with me because these are important values; these are experiences that I really, really share... [...] But at the same time, well, it's that it's always sliding towards transphobia, and that makes me, in the sense that... (sigh) I don't know what trans women have done in this story to deserve so much hatred, but it doesn't concern them. (Andréanne, fluid, queer woman, feminine bisexual man, Canada, 25)*

As Andreeanne clearly illustrates, gender-critical or radical feminist discourses can be attractive to detrans youth (especially AFAB) because they acknowledge the challenges of gender nonconforming youth or women navigating a patriarchal cisheteronormative society.

However, while these discourses may resonate with some youth, they can also negatively affect their mental health (as underlined by Andréanne). Some participants believe that using a rhetoric of regret and labelling detrans bodies as ruined or mutilated could lead detrans people to focus on

their suffering and negative emotions rather than helping or supporting them in their journey and emotional management. For Sun, reading such content represents a form of self-harm:

I started reading, like, radical feminist stuff. [...] They're calling bodies like mine mutilated. And I just kind of got addicted to it because it was, in some ways, cathartic. [...] It was literally self-harm [laughs]. But, yeah so, I just felt mutilated; I felt unlovable; I started, like, looking at pictures of myself before I even cut my hair and just thinking like, "Okay, I didn't actually look that bad," without even stopping to think how uncomfortable I was all the time. But I just started to feel like maybe I ruined myself. (Sun, doesn't have a gender identity, US, 20)

Some participants described these rhetorics as unhelpful and alienating and expressed a form of fatigue regarding them:

I just feel very alienated because of this, radical feminist, kind of... outlook, where... anything that men do must be related to patriarchy or misogyny, like... I've dealt with anorexia a lot, and, the moment I talked about that, they suggested that I had misogyny, for being anorexic [which] felt dehumanizing, in a way. And... [...] a lot of detrans people don't like their takes. Like they're sick of the radical feminists. Like, call them TERFs; call them whatever, but, like, a lot of us are just tired of their rhetoric of how trans men are this or trans people are that or whatever, or trans men are just, you know, oppressed lesbians. (Ethan, male/nonbinary/agender, Canada, 24)

Detrans youth can face challenges in navigating these discourses, often experiencing ambivalence ranging from adherence to avoidance. This profusion of conflicting narratives can make it difficult for detrans youth to find a sense of belonging, which can result in them feeling alone or affiliating with groups that may not entirely align with their views in order to rebuild a support network.

Experiences of Alienation and Silencing

Several participants thought discourses should not portray trans and detrans lives and experiences as diametrically opposed. For example, Eleanor would like to see more discourses about detrans individuals supporting trans people. However, the current state of debate gave her little hope in this regard. Some participants explained how using detransition narratives to invalidate trans lives, advocate for gatekeeping or serve political agendas leads to forms of silencing, often taking place through the dynamics of exclusion.

More than a third of participants discussed the issue of exclusion or rejection from trans communities: they were excluded from online groups, blocked by individuals on social media or faced mass attacks and had to leave certain groups:

I was very vocal about [detransition], and they said that it would be... to be honest, I really didn't understand why; they were so negative about it. I have my theories, of course, what was going on with them. But they never really gave me one clear reason; they just said that they picked on small things. And, then it was really, like, they started [...] talking behind my back. And suddenly a lot of people that I didn't even really know started blocking me everywhere, and it was really making around that I'm now the TERF. (Aren, agender, Europe, 24)

Chris, a 17-year-old woman from the US, talked about the fear that could arise from not knowing whether people in one's circle would be supportive. Indeed, some participants, like Addie, Sam and Shane, lost support from their communities when they detransitioned:

I got a lot of hate on the Internet from random people, just because, I mean, I don't have a lot of followers. I have about 2,500, um, on, like, my Twitter and Tumblr, just from being pretty active in trans circles. But once I started to come out about these things, I lost a lot of support and [...] community, just because these people felt like I'm a traitor now and, like, I'm problematic, and I don't actually care about the community. (Shane, agender, US, 21)

Others, knowing that the subject is delicate, chose not to talk about it to avoid violent reactions to or exploitation of their statements. Therefore, nearly half the participants reported experiences that reflected a form of self-silencing. For example, Olivia chose to leave social media during her detransition to avoid having to explain herself and face negative consequences. Jada talked about the backlash that detransitioning individuals can experience, saying that it makes her nervous about discussing her detransition with her trans and nonbinary friends. Sasha's testimony illustrates the issues detrans youth face when wanting to talk about their experiences:

I don't know, like, how to talk about this or, like, where I can talk about this because I feel like if I go to some support group and start talking about this, I'm gonna absolutely offend the freak out of somebody. [...] And I don't really want to do that. Like, it's unfortunate, um, that there's really a very hard ability for, for people who are detrans and people who are trans to have, um, helpful conversations; it tends to be not too good. [...]

I want to talk about this and, like, you know, do something, but I don't want, like, my story to be used for, like, an agenda either. [...] I was like, "Oh my god! I've been identifying this way for so long." I went through all of these things. [...] I was in a couple Facebook groups. I wasn't super active in them but a couple like trans ones and I'm, like, I have to leave all of these now. Like, I can't, like, I'm not part of this anymore. [...] I was definitely, like, concerned [about] people being, like, mad or being, like, upset, um, who were connected to that. [...] When I voice my opinions on, like, some of these things now and like my concerns on, on things [...] Um, things that genuinely make me scared that people are gonna hate me because of, like, my perspectives now. Um, it has been a big fear for me [...] I don't know how to say it without offending someone, and, like, I don't want to offend people. (Sasha, detrans woman, US, 21)

For many, this phenomenon perpetuates the lack of representation and the misrepresentation in discourses regarding detrans people. It also impoverishes discussions and dialogue.

Discussion

Participants feel that detransition representations are lacking and fail to reflect their reality, leaving them feeling invisible, instrumentalized, silenced or rejected. These observations suggest epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2007) where minority groups are denied credibility or recognition. Specifically, detrans individuals may experience hermeneutical injustice (a lack of visibility preventing them from making sense of their experience) and testimonial injustice (a lack of credibility).

The invisibility and downplaying of detrans experiences can lead to isolation and confusion. Indeed, participants stressed that recognition and normalization are key for both public and personal understanding, similar to the needs of trans and nonbinary youth (Pullen Sansfaçon & Bellot, 2016). As "meaning making occurs in the context of social relationships" (Park, 2016, p.169), the lack of relatable figures may compromise this process.

This lack of representation combined with rejection from trans communities (MacKinnon et al., 2022a; Vandebussche, 2022) may push detrans youth in search of belonging towards other groups, despite some initial political divergences (MacKinnon et al., 2022b). Gender-critical and radical feminist discourses, which draw from feminist reflections (Bassi & Lafleur, 2022), may resonate – especially for AFAB – due to shared experiences of misogyny, homophobia or sexism. However, they can also be harmful: some participants described finding "TERF articles"

perplexing, hurtful and alienating, as they channel negative emotions. Park (2016) explains that if the process of meaning making (the reappraisal of a traumatic situation in alignment with one's belief system) can sometimes alleviate distress, some reappraisals may be less likely to do so, notably those that blame the person or others for preventable events. We hypothesize that the portrayal of detransitions in mainstream and social media – often using rhetorics of regret, mistake, mutilation and prevention – may negatively affect meaning making and resilience.

The invisibilization and misunderstanding of detrans youth's experience, which impede meaning making and social recognition, constitute a hermeneutical injustice that advantages those who spread these altered narratives by feeding a cisgenderist, essentialist, binary and linear vision of gender. Cisgenderism is defined by Lennon and Mistler (2014) as a systemic ideology denying and pathologizing trans identities and presenting cisgender identities as more valuable (which creates a system of power and privilege). Presenting detrans people as returning to their "true gender" (the one assigned to them) and their trans experience as a "mistake," the result of a "social contagion" or a product of a "gender paradigm," feeds a cisgenderist narrative by suggesting that transition is an illusion, the same way underlying mental health issues (or madness) are used to invalidate gender dysphoria and transness (Gould et al., 2024). Moreover, the saturation of the discursive spaces with a homogenous narrative deprives detrans youth from expressing the diversity of their experiences, for example not having regrets, still identifying as trans or nonbinary despite discontinuing some aspect of their transition or simply the complex, ambivalent and nuanced feelings most of them experience (MacKinnon, Kia, et al., 2022a, 2022b; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2023a). These narratives that disrupt a binary and essentialist vision of gender are erased or rendered meaningless.

Billard (2023) shows how this disinformation is a strategy aimed at demonizing trans people, excluding them from feminist movements and securing some privileged positions (those of white, cisgender women) perceived as threatened by trans people. Bassi and Lafleur (2022) explain how gender-critical movements that spread these narratives and bring back the question of the naturalness of gender (implying gender roles and hierarchies) renaturalize the heteronormative sexual roles and serve some forms of structural power (white supremacy, xenophobia, nativism, ableism, eugenics). Therefore, these discourses constitute a form of injustice as defined by Fricker (2007) in the sense that they are part of power dynamics that in this case favor cisgender people over gender-diverse people (including detrans people). Echoing Slothouber (2020) and Millette et al.'s findings (Under review), our participants highlight the political aspect in narratives framing detransition as the negative outcome of a mistake and focusing on regret. The detrans experience

is not seen for what it is, and our participants feel used like pawns against access to transition. In fact, antitrans discourses do not originate from detrans communities, neither do they really focus on actual detrans needs and revendications. Instead, they come from gender-critical groups that weaponize detrans experiences and use disinformation to advance their political agenda against trans rights (Billard, 2023). In the words of Slothouber (2020), who initially discussed the weaponization of children, “Rarely is politics worried about actual [detrans youth]. In the case of these discourses, [they] become political pawns in debates about regulating access to medical transition” (p. 93). By doing so without addressing detrans people’s need for support (Expósito-Campos, 2021; Hildebrand-Chupp, 2020; MacKinnon et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c), gender-critical discourses objectify detrans experiences and contribute to make them blurry and unintelligible. This feeds what MacKinnon et al., (2022a, 2022b) call detransphobia, defined as the “proximal and distal gender minority stressors, discrimination, and stereotyping experienced by those who have shifted or reversed a gender transition” (p. 238). Detransphobia, as observed by MacKinnon et al., (2022a, 2022b), manifests itself through stereotypes and prejudices such as the idea that detrans people are transphobic or that they are transtrenders, implying that transition is just a trend. This results in creating or amplifying community fragmentation within detrans groups and alienation from trans and queer communities, making detrans youth feel “crappy” or furious. Indeed, detrans people are often perceived as transphobic (MacKinnon et al., 2022b; Vandebussche, 2022), and their experience is often minimized by trans and gender-affirming communities, which perceive them as a threat to their rights and credibility.

These detransphobic representations constitute what Fricker (2007) designates as the central case of testimonial injustice: the identity-prejudicial credibility deficit. Indeed, detransphobia affects detrans credibility. In line with MacKinnon’s study, our participants constantly had to justify themselves about not being transphobic, a strategy to mitigate this deflection of credibility. Additionally, because detrans youth are presented as nonexistent or as never having really been trans, they are deprived of their credibility to talk about their gender trajectory or their decisions to transition and detransition. Any story that does not fit the regret/mistake or transtrender narrative is unintelligible and discarded. Therefore, detrans people cannot truly share knowledge about what they experience, their concerns and actual needs. Identity prejudices not only affect how their voices are received, but it also leads to internal forms of silencing where detrans youth themselves report self-censuring out of fear of being seen as transphobic or having their testimony instrumentalized against trans rights, which is also reported by MacKinnon et al., (2022a, 2022b).

Policy Implications

In the current context, detransition experiences are often used as an argument to justify policies that restrict access to gender-affirming care, especially for trans and nonbinary youth. Our data show that, on the one hand, this instrumentalization of detrans stories does not serve detrans youth’s interests. Instead, it is harmful, not only to trans and nonbinary youth but also to detrans youth, as it pits trans and detrans communities against one another, feeds detransphobia and gives rise to epistemic injustices. On the other hand, portraying these experiences as too anecdotal to mention or rejecting detrans youth based on detransphobic stereotypes is equally harmful. Therefore, when discussing policies that affect trans and detrans rights, detrans narratives should not be framed as an argument against trans rights nor downplayed to counter antitrans rhetoric. Interestingly, Gould and colleagues suggest that detrans narratives might counter the invalidation of transness based on madness by integrating both experiences (madness and transness) as a way of expanding self-understanding (Gould et al., 2024). Embracing a dialectical and intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) perspective on detransition – which both validates identities and recognizes the complexity of factors that may intersect – may help overcome polarized debates on trans and detrans experiences, instead producing nuanced knowledge on detrans youth’s complex realities and needs to better support them. Efforts must also be made to provide inclusive spaces for detrans youth within LGBTQ+ communities, where they would feel safe in sharing their experiences and receive support without being erased or instrumentalized.

Limitations

Because we are gender affirming, and the interviewer identifies as gender fluid, using they/them pronouns, there was a risk that interviewees would refrain from expressing views that could be seen as contentious regarding trans rights. However, by being open and curious, the interviewer managed to have honest conversations, and interviewees were able to express diverse viewpoints. This research focuses on the perspective of detrans youth on detransition narratives and the present impacts on their detrans experience. However, it is not possible to know how discourses on transition have affected them in the past. This is beyond the scope of the paper.

Conclusion

Detrans discourses are generally perceived by detrans youth as inaccurate or lacking and seem to negatively impact their resilience. Further research should observe longitudinally

the impacts of representations on detrans experiences and on resilience over time. Moreover, these results call for caution in the way detrans narratives are framed, as it can often serve political agenda rather than detrans youth's best interests.

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Declarations

Ethics Approval The study obtained certification from the ethical research boards of the PI's institution and co-researchers' institution. The ethical certificate number is CERSC-2020-076-P(1).

Consent to Participation and Publication Written and oral informed consent to participate in the study (and to publication of the data) was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study up until publication.

Competing Interests The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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