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Biopolitics of the Women's Gulag and "Dark Tourism" in Kazakhstan: The "Camp" as Biopolitical Paradigm of Modernity

Michael A. Peters* and Tina Besley*

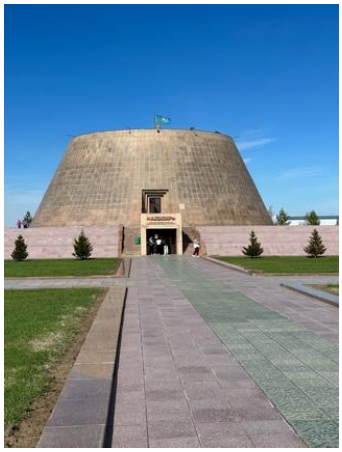
ABSTRACT. This paper explores the concept of dark tourism through the lens of a visit to the ALZHIR Museum and Memorial Complex in Kazakhstan, which was once a notorious Soviet women's camp. The authors, who toured with guides in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, discuss their experiences in the two major cities of Astana and Almaty, and their day trips to the steppe and wetlands, as well as the stunning Charyn Canyon National Park. The paper highlights the history of Kazakhstan, from its nomadic beginnings to its independence from Soviet Russia in 1990, and the Russian occupation and the imposition of Russian schooling on the Kazakhs. The authors also touch upon the extensive process of collectivization imposed by the Soviet regime, which resulted in the death of an estimated 1.5 million Kazakhs from starvation. The main focus of the paper, however, is the ALZHIR Museum and Memorial Complex, which serves as a chilling reminder of the horror of the Gulag system. The authors discuss the ethical implications of dark tourism and argue that tourists have a responsibility to educate themselves about the culture and history of the places they visit, to promote historical understanding and cultivate a memorial experience that draws attention to what is commemorated by whom and for what reasons.

Keywords: dark tourism; Gulags; Kazakhstan; ALZHIR Museum; Memorial Complex; historical understanding; ethical tourism

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All photos by authors.
The main exhibition center,
“The Arc of Sorrow” and Watch Tower.

Introduction: The Akmola Women's Gulag, Kazahkstan

On a recent trip to Central Asia, to the mythical old cities of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan along the Silk Road, we toured with guides for the first time. Normally, we tend to find our own way around but, in these countries, we did not feel confident without the local language to simply wander around by ourselves. On this occasion we travelled to Kazakhstan a vast country, the ninth biggest in the world with over 2,724,900 sq km – the largest landlocked country in the world – and a population of an estimated 20,485,000. On this trip we focused on the two major cities of the new capital Astana and the old city of Almaty, located in the southern mountainous region of Tien Shan close to its border with China. We toured from these cities to visit the Charyn Cannon National Park, a wetland bird sanctuary on the Steppe and the Akmola Women's Gulag. Kazakhstan is a landlocked country bordering Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and the coastline of the Caspian Sea. Ethnic Kazakhs of Turkic and Mongolian origins comprise 71% of the population with a sizeable Russian ethnic minority of 14.9%. Kazakhstan is a Muslim country and a secular state with abundant oil reserves and other minerals that declared its sovereignty from Soviet Russia in 1990.

Stretching back to the Bronze Age, Kazakhs broke away as independents from Uzbeks in 1465 and settled between the Chu and the Talas Rivers where they became the nomadic masters of the Steppe. Like many of the territories in Central Asia Kazakhstan has a tangled history of conquest and occupation. As one of the Turkic peoples amongst the Mongols, Dzungars (Zungers, Junggars), Chinese, and Russian, Kazakhstan became a republic in 1936 under Soviet Russia and realized its full independence in 1991 under its first president Nursultan Nazarbayev who was re-elected in 1999 and again in 2005, 2011 and 2015, finally resigning in 2019 to be succeeded by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The Russian presence is everywhere beginning in the early eighteen century. The Russian occupation of the Kazakh Steppe was seen as a stage for the conquest of Muslim Central Asia and with the imposition of Russian schooling the Kazakhs proved both adept and innovative. Of all the conquests and occupations the most extensive was the process of collectivization that was imposed by the Soviet regime that settled a nomadic people and killed an estimate 1.5 million people who died in large numbers from starvation.









Inside the camp.

With only a week in Kazahkstan we focused on the two main cities and day trips to the steppe and wetlands a couple of hours from Astana and the stunning Charyn Canyon National Park. In the return from a Kazahk lunch (*plov*) in a hurt we stopped at the ALZHIR Museum and Memorial Complex that is located in Tselinograd district of the Akmola region close to Almaty. This is the notorious Soviet's women's camp where some 18,000 women had been incarcerated over the near two decades of its existence until its closure in 1953. It was a camp established in August 15, 1937 by Order No. 00486 of the USSR's People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), Акмолинский лагерь жен изменников родины, "the Akmola camp of wives of traitors to the homeland" named by the prisoners themselves that marked the beginning of an era of mass repressions of totalitarianism.[1] This article concerns this camp and the concept of memorial tourism in Kazakhstan. The memorial complex was open May 31st 2007 and consists of the "Arch of Sorrow" a monument made from in the form of a traditional women's headdress (*ak zhaulik*) that symbolises a women's grieving for her lost husband and children as well as the main exhibition building, a watch-tower, sculptures, a memory wall, and surrounding grounds. The effect is chilling, evoking the horror of the Gulag system with photos and possessions of the prisoners and historical documents, love letters, drawings and children stories.









The camp was established during the later years of the period of "The Great Purge" (1937–38) that sentenced prisoners for political crimes with a small proportion of less then 10% being women, mostly for alleged political crimes committed by their husbands. As Julia Maria-Xavier notes: "Centering on the voices of women within the penal system offers the ability to understand how gender impacted punishment, work, sociality, and the construction of the camps themselves, and complicates what resistance to state oppression looks like."[2] The biopolitics of the camp included mass rape and forms of sexual corporal punishment. Attacks on women were daily occurrences and gender was commodified where sex was bartered in a system that was nonreciprocal. Many women became pregnant and received relief from night work and increased rations. This was a way to reclaim maternal rights and receive unconditional love.[3] Rights to see one's child were restricted and babies after their first birthdays were orphaned at state nurseries often never to be seen again (see the description by Maris-Xavier). I was told by the guide there were at least a thousand babies born at the Gulag.



«АЛЖИР» тұтқыны әнші Тубекшы Рысқұлова (1911-1988) – мемлекет қайраткері Тұрар Рысқұловтың жұбайы. 1911 жылы Жаркент қаласында туған, ұлты – қазақ. Мәскеу өнертанушы институтын тәмамдаған.





«АЛЖИР» тұтқыны Мариам Лазаревна Аппис (1899-1984) – Красный Луч қаласы комсомолының хатшысы Завель Мулендің жұбайы. Вольскі губерниялық фабрикалық директоры болды.



Some of the many women
who were sentenced.

“Dark Tourism” or Tourism of the Gulags

The recent concept of “dark tourism” or tourism of the Gulags begins to raise some critical issues about tourism, about the very concept of “the tour”, and the notion that tourism comes with ethical protocols and norms that obliges the tourist to educate themselves of another country’s culture and history, if only to avoid the worst excesses of exploitation but also in a deeper sense to promote historical understanding and cultivate a memorial experience that draws attention to what is commemorated by whom and for what reasons.

Dark tourism, also known as “black tourism,” refers to travel to places associated with death, suffering, or tragedy, such as former Gulags, concentration camps, disaster sites, or tours of sites and antiquities associated with human slavery. The recent interest in this type of tourism has sparked important discussions about the nature of tourism and its ethical implications. The concept of “the tour” has long been a part of travel and leisure, but dark tourism raises questions about the appropriateness of visiting such places for entertainment or educational purposes. Some argue that tourists have a responsibility to educate themselves about the culture and history of the places they visit, not only to avoid exploiting the local population but also to gain a deeper understanding of the events that took place there. In the case of Gulags, which were a system of forced labor camps established by the Soviet government during the 20th century, dark tourism can serve as a way to remember and honor the victims of this tragic period in history. By visiting Gulag sites, tourists can learn about the conditions endured by those who were imprisoned and killed there, and gain a more profound appreciation for the struggles faced by people in different parts of the world. There is an ethical and political approach to dark tourism where caution and respect for the local population and the memories of those who suffered ought to be paramount. Tourists should be aware of the ethical and moral implications of visiting such places and should strive to learn as much as possible about the history and culture of the region in order to gain a deeper understanding of the events that took place there.



Малиновки ауылындағы (қазіргі Ақмол ауылы) «АЛЖИР» тұтқындарының кездесуі. Қазан айы 1989 ж

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Opening the memorial.
Remembering. Our guide.

Guillaume Tiberghien from Glasgow University and John Lennon from the Glasgow Caledonian University recently presented their research on two Soviet labour camps in Kazakhstan, stressing that the two could become destinations for "dark tourism" indicating that 26,000–27,000 people visted the camps in 2018 compared to millions that visit the Holocaust museums.[4] They emphasized that the tourism of the Gulags is tourism of a huge tragedy involving more than 20 million people and there is a need to focus on the visualization techniques used to create tourism of this form and more general questions about black tourism, thanatourism or grief tourism, that form associated with death or human and nonhuman tragedy.[5] There is no doubt that this form of tourism raises basic ethical questions about the responsibility of the tourist and a form of tourism that can educate people and help them to understand the complex lessons of dark tourism destinations including Auschwitz, Ground Zero, and the Killing Fields in Cambodia. Responsible tourism in this case must include respect for the victims and the descendants of victims; it must avoid exploitative practices and mass tours that are merely for the curious rather than those who have a genuine historical interest. The voyeuristic is to be avoid and circumvented, where, for instance, busloads of tourists turn up to take photos of Grenfell the London tower-block where 71 people lost their lives.[6]

I remember how I felt on my first flight into Munich staying in a local hotel within walking distance of Dachau memorial. I was in the city to attend an academic convention and the dreaded the occasion for I knew that I could not avoid going to the camp. I felt a responsibility to go and to be one of millions who bore witness to a memorial of the atrocities that were committed at Dachau, the first and prototype of the Nazi labor camp later turned into an extermination camp. A young man who was there to attend the same

meeting asked me if he could accompany me. He was Jewish. I had to politely decline as I knew I would have enough trouble keeping it all together on my own. With him beside me it would be somehow even more unbearable. As it was the occasion was very sombre and upsetting. I knew something of the background of the camp having written and published a couple of papers on the death camps and war crimes.[7] How does one "tour" the gas chambers? How does one deal with other people's tragedies and atrocities? For me, only possible in solitary silence. No doubt dark tourism can pass on the lessons of part tragedies but the framing, history and memorialization of these events require careful scrutiny.[8] I was surprised, for instance, that there was an eating place nearby for tourists who had been to Dachau.

Memorialization practices at the women's Gulag Alzhir has been analysed by Satymbekova Raikan (2017) at the Central European University. As she argues "To analyze the processes of un/silencing of the women's memories of the female camp "ALKZHIR", it is crucial to map the historiography of research of the camp" and to consider the fact that the camp was part of the Gulag system which she proceeds to do by reference to Solzhenitsyn's (1973) now-famous *Gulag Archipelago* who was first to write about "Women in Camp". Raikan (2017) suggests that Solzhenitsyn's descriptions were both conservative and instrumentalized such that he asserts that women could use their bodies sexually to make deals and get by, a process she disputes.

Raikan (2017) also tracks a brief history of the "memorial" after perestroika when it was no longer illegal to remember and honor victims of the Stalinist purges. "Memorial" became a society that took up the cause of erecting monuments to the victims of repression collecting archival material and interviews with women who experienced the Gulags. Only recently have historians begun to investigate women's narratives. She contests the revisionist histories, analyzing the memorialization process at Alzhia to uncover and make available the issue of sexual violence at the camp for further research and investigation.

Her work also alerts us to the fact that the dimension of gender and sexual violence is a common experience for women in their everyday lives that can be magnified many times in the administration of the camp. This gender dimension of the camp is intrinsic to the nature of politics rather than something added. We can hypothesise this gender and sexual violence as an endemic part of the modern camp.

The Concept of the "Camp" as a Biopolitical Paradigm of Modernity

The concept of the "camp" as a biopolitical paradigm of modernity refers to the idea that modern forms of governance and power increasingly focus on the management and control of biological life itself, rather than just the

traditional exercise of sovereign power over territory and subjects. This notion was prominently explored by Michel Foucault (2008) and Giorgio Agamben (1998) in their work on biopolitics and the state of exception. Michel Foucault is credited with introducing the concept of biopolitics in his lectures and writings. For Foucault, biopolitics refers to the way modern forms of power and governance increasingly focus on the management and regulation of biological life at the level of populations. He traced the emergence of biopolitics to the 18th century, when the preservation and optimization of life itself became a central concern for states and institutions.

Foucault analyzed biopolitics as a shift from a sovereign power that operated primarily through the threat of death to a more pervasive and productive form of power that aimed to foster, regulate, and maximize the life of populations. This included various techniques and mechanisms for managing birth rates, public health, hygiene, and the overall well-being of the population.

Agamben (1998), while drawing inspiration from Foucault's work, developed a distinct perspective on biopolitics. Agamben's central concern was the relationship between biopolitics and the state of exception, which he saw as a fundamental characteristic of modern politics. He focused on the figure of the "homo sacer" (sacred man) and the concept of "bare life" – a life stripped of its political and legal protections, reduced to its mere biological existence. He argued that the logic of the camp, where individuals are reduced to bare life and subjected to sovereign violence, represents the biopolitical paradigm of modernity. While Foucault emphasized the productive and regulatory aspects of biopolitics, Agamben highlighted its exclusionary and lethal dimensions. He saw the camp as a space where the distinction between the political and the biological, the norm and the exception, becomes indistinguishable, and where sovereign power can decide on the very conditions of life and death. Despite these differences, both Foucault and Agamben were concerned with the ways in which modern forms of power increasingly intervene in and manage biological life, whether through regulatory mechanisms (Foucault) or the exposure of life to sovereign violence (Agamben) although neither discussed sexual violence nor the phenomenon and women's Gulags.

In Agamben's (1998, 2000) analysis, the camp (e.g., concentration camps, refugee camps, detention centers) emerges as a central metaphor and materialization of the biopolitical paradigm. The camp represents a space where the normal rule of law is suspended and where individuals are reduced to their bare biological existence, stripped of their political and legal rights.

The camp is seen as a paradigmatic space of modernity because it represents a zone of indistinction between the biological and the political, where the sovereign power decides on the very conditions of life and death. Agamben argues that this logic of the exception, originally confined to the

camps, has become a generalized technique of governance in modern societies, where populations are increasingly subjected to various forms of control, surveillance, and management of their biological existence.

The camp, thus, becomes a metaphor for the way in which modern states and institutions increasingly govern and regulate the biological dimensions of human life, from public health policies to immigration control, from security measures to environmental management. The camp represents a space where the line between the political and the biological, the norm and the exception, becomes blurred, and where the sovereign power can decide on the very conditions of inclusion and exclusion, life and death. Yet Alzhir, the women's Gulag provides a different understanding of the camp as a biopolitical paradigm that focuses on sexual violence, the experience of women feeding debates on the nature of modern power, the limits of human rights, and the potential for women's resistance and emancipation within the biopolitical framework.

The notion of the camp as a biopolitical paradigm of modernity can be illustrated through various historical examples, where spaces of exception were created and populations were reduced to bare life, subjected to sovereign violence and control over their biological existence. Historically, the camp has provided a model for colonization and for racial, gender politics and sexual violence.

1. The British in South Africa: The concentration camps established by the British during the Second Boer War (1899–1902) in South Africa, where Boer civilians (mainly women and children) were interned under harsh conditions, leading to significant mortality rates, can be seen as an early manifestation of the biopolitical paradigm of the camp.
2. The American Indian Reserve: The forced relocation and containment of Native American populations in reservations by the US government in the 19th and early 20th centuries can be viewed as a form of biopolitical management and control over indigenous populations, where their traditional ways of life were disrupted, and their biological existence was regulated and subjugated.
3. The German Labour Camp: The network of forced labor camps established by the Nazi regime during World War II, such as Dachau and Sachsenhausen, where prisoners were subjected to extreme forms of exploitation, violence, and dehumanization, exemplified the camp as a space where individuals were reduced to bare life and subjected to sovereign power over their biological existence.
4. The German Extermination Camp: The Nazi extermination camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka, represent the most extreme and horrific manifestation of the biopolitical paradigm of the camp, where entire populations were systematically subjected to industrialized mass murder, their lives reduced to bare biological existence to be eliminated.

5. The Russian Gulag: The vast network of forced labor camps and prisons operated by the Soviet Union, particularly under Stalin's rule, can be seen as a form of biopolitical control and management of populations, where political dissidents, ethnic minorities, and others were subjected to extreme forms of violence, deprivation, and regulation of their biological existence.
6. The Refugee Camp: Contemporary refugee camps, such as those in regions of conflict or natural disasters, can be seen as spaces where displaced populations are confined and their biological existence is managed and regulated by humanitarian organizations and state agencies, often under precarious conditions and with limited political and legal rights.

Each of these examples illustrate how the camp, as a space of exception and biopolitical control, has manifested itself in various historical and contemporary contexts, reflecting the ways in which modern forms of power have intervened in and managed biological life, often with devastating consequences.

Concentration Camps: A British Imperial Legacy

While concentration camps are typically associated with 20th century totalitarian regimes, Forth (2012) explores an earlier history of the British Empire concentrating colonial populations into camps. The term "concentration camp" first emerged during the South African War (1899–1902) to describe refugee and internment camps established by the British. Rather than framing these merely as punishment or extermination camps, Forth's dissertation recasts British concentration camps as instruments for both military coercion and humanitarian aid. Their origins can be traced to practices first developed in British India during famines in the 1870s and 1890s, when officials concentrated displaced populations into rudimentary camps to ration relief efforts and facilitate surveillance. The global plague pandemic of 1896 provided another impetus, as authorities in India and South Africa used camps to isolate contagion and evacuate unsanitary areas deemed socially and epidemiologically dangerous. By the 19th century's end, camps had emerged as a favored tool of imperial governance for disciplining and providing relief to colonial subjects portrayed as evasive, inscrutable and potentially threatening.

However, concentrating large populations in constricted spaces led to high mortality rates. In response, a cadre of camp "experts," many transferred from India, devised sanitation and disciplinary guidelines to reduce deaths in the South African camps. While the harsh conditions sparked controversy, reforms drawing on Indian camp management and British workhouses eventually helped lower fatalities. This cemented concentration camps as a viable, even humanitarian, technology for controlling and caring for displaced populations during emergencies. The dissertation traces continuities between

British camps and those of other regimes, while arguing for a new genealogy positioning camps as a recurring liberal instrument for managing "undesirables" throughout the 20th century and beyond. In viewing the conflation of coercion and care at the origins of concentration camps in the British Empire, we can better understand how putatively humanitarian "refugee camps" remain instruments of discipline today.

British imperialism was not restricted to South Africa. In *Imperial Reckoning*, historian Caroline Elkins exposes a brutal chapter of British colonial rule that was deliberately covered up for decades. From 1952–1960, in response to the Mau Mau anti-colonial uprising by Kenya's Kikuyu ethnic group, the British government detained and brutalized hundreds of thousands of Kikuyu civilians. Dismissing the Mau Mau rebels as savage threats to civilization, British authorities established a vast system of detention camps and fortified villages to crush the independence movement. Nearly 1.5 million Kikuyu, including women and children, were interned in these camps under horrific conditions of violence, starvation and fear. Their only path to release was fully renouncing their desire for Kenyan independence.

After World War II's triumph of democracy over fascism, Britain resorted to draconian tactics typically associated with totalitarian regimes to cling to its fading empire. When Kenya gained independence in 1963, the British government destroyed records of its repressive detention camp system to bury this stain on its imperial legacy. Drawing on nearly a decade of research, including interviews with Kikuyu survivors and their British captors, Elkins's pioneering account recovers the harrowing history that the British empire desperately tried to erase. Her landmark exposé laid bare systematic human rights abuses and high-level cover-ups that marked the waning days of Britain's colonial rule in Kenya.

The American Indian Reserve

American Indian reservations represent a distinct form of biopolitical governance and population control imposed by the U.S. government over Native American tribes and nations. Biopolitics refers to the strategies and mechanisms through which state power is exerted over the biological lives of populations. The establishment of reservations was a biopolitical project aimed at controlling the indigenous populations of North America and remaking them according to colonial-settler objectives. By forcibly relocating tribes onto reservations, usually onto marginal lands, the U.S. sought to restrict and contain Native American populations within designated territorial boundaries.

This geographic enclosure enabled more effective management and subjugation of Native peoples by the settler-colonial regime. It disrupted traditional subsistence patterns and lifeways, confining tribes to circumscribed

spaces that could be more easily policed and their movements and activities monitored and regulated. The treaties and policies creating reservations were thoroughly biopolitical in their motivations and effects. They intervened into the most intimate areas of Native American lives – questions of land, resources, mobility, kinship systems, reproduction, and social-cultural integrity. Reservations fragmented Native populations, interrupted family/community bonds, and enabled processes of forced assimilation into Euro-American cultural norms.

Policies like the Indian boarding school system, religious suppression, prohibition of Native languages, and allotment of reservation lands to nuclear households represented calculated biopolitical tactics to remake Native peoples as idealized racialized citizen-subjects. Even the geography of reservations as isolated, bounded territories facilitated intrusions of biopower into Indigenous communities.

In modern times, reservations continue to structure Native American populations in certain biopolitical configurations subject to federal administration, underfunded services, and socioeconomic marginalization. While reservations allowed for cultural resilience, they also enabled biopolitical modes of governance that rendered Native lives as domains to be optimized, allocated, and regulated by the settler-state.

The Nazi Labor and Concentration Camp

The Nazi labor and concentration camp system was an extreme and horrific manifestation of biopolitical control over populations deemed "undesirable" or threats to the racial ideology of the Third Reich. So much has been written on this topic it is not possible to summarise the main currents of research here except merely to note some key aspects of the biopolitics of Nazi camps Population control and "racial hygiene" was a major aspect of Nazi biopolitics. The camps were part of the Nazis' larger program of "racial purification" aimed at creating an idealized "Aryan" population. Undesirable groups like Jews, Romani, Slavs, LGBTQ individuals, political dissidents were segregated into the camps. This legitimized state power over the biological existence of certain groups, controlling their movement, reproduction, and ultimately whether they were allowed to live.

Camps as biopolitical spaces enable total spatial control. The geographic enclosure and spatial ordering of the camps enabled total control over inmate populations Camps were highly regimented sites of biopolitical optimization – every aspect of inmates' biological lives was monitored and managed. Starvation rations, forced labor, medical experimentation, and systems of punishment asserted biopolitical dominance.

"Making Live and Letting Die" became the slogan. The Nazis enacted selective policies of "making live" some groups like ethnic Germans while

consigning others like Jews to death. This represented an extreme version of biopolitical calculus over which groups were allowed to thrive or wither. Mass killing operations like the Holocaust brought industrial rationality to the exercise of "letting die" undesirable populations

In the posthuman condition inmates in the camps were systematically stripped of rights and humanity. They were reduced to "bare life" without political status, existing in a state of exception outside legal protections. This enabled the Nazi biopolitical project to treat them as objects to be worked to death, experimented on, or exterminated. The concentration camp system exemplified biopolitics taken to its most extreme and depraved form – giving the state power over which groups could exist biologically and maximizing control over these "subhuman" populations.

The Soviet Gulag – Solzhenitsyn, Foucault

The Gulag Archipelago is a monumental three-volume work by Russian author and dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1973). Written between 1958 and 1968, it provides an exhaustive narrative investigation into the Soviet gulag forced labor camp system. First published in the West in 1973, the book drew from a vast array of sources including official records, interviews with survivors, diaries, and Solzhenitsyn's own experiences as a gulag prisoner. It represented one of the first comprehensive accounts of life within the brutal camp network that had been an open secret during the Soviet era. *The Gulag Archipelago* paints a harrowing portrait of the violence, dehumanization and harsh conditions in the camps, where millions of perceived political rivals, criminals and other "undesirables" were imprisoned and worked to death. Solzhenitsyn constructs rich descriptions through the diverse testimonies he collected.

While initially circulated in secret samizdat publications within the USSR, the full text did not appear publicly until 1989 during glasnost. Even then, it was only partially published over three issues of the journal Novy Mir. After the Soviet collapse, it gained official publication status in Russia. Beyond documenting the camps themselves, Solzhenitsyn's work provided cutting insight into how the Soviet ideology and system justified and enabled this machinery of repression. He argued that the gulag was the ultimate expression of revolutionary evil cloaked in utopian ideals of progress. *The Gulag Archipelago* proved hugely influential in spreading awareness of Soviet political prisoners and human rights abuses. Its circulation represented a nakedly defiant challenge to state censorship and obfuscation around the camps' existence. Solzhenitsyn's literary masterpiece ensured the gulags would be permanently etched into historical memory.

In the early 1970s, French philosopher Michel Foucault became preoccupied with several interrelated issues that culminated in his championing

of Soviet dissidents against the Brezhnev regime's human rights abuses. 1974 saw the French publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, laying bare the brutal Soviet labor camp system. This galvanized the so-called "nouveaux philosophes" like André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy to decisively break from Marxism, using Solzhenitsyn's expose as evidence against Soviet communism.

Foucault himself broke from Marxism during this period and allied himself with the nouveaux philosophes to some degree. His 1975 work *Discipline and Punish* marked a rupture with his earlier structuralist leanings toward a more Nietzschean philosophical phase. Methodologically, he transitioned from an "archaeological" approach uncovering deep discursive structures to a "genealogical" one focused on the conditions, limits and institutionalization of discourses.

Foucault also became an indefatigable activist for Soviet dissident causes throughout the 1970s. This essay examines the interconnections between Foucault's reaction to The Gulag Archipelago, his repudiation of Marxism, his alliance with anti-Marxist thinkers, his Nietzschean turn, his new genealogical method, and his anti-Soviet activism. The focus is on how Foucault attempted to incorporate the Soviet gulag system into his analyses of prisons and modern power relations. At times he associated the gulag with pre-Enlightenment punitive practices, at others with 19th century bourgeois penality. Ultimately, the author argues, the Soviet gulag remained a paradox that did not fully fit Foucault's evolving philosophical frameworks, for methodological and epistemological reasons he could not fully resolve.

While the brutal conditions and staggering death toll of the Soviet gulag labor camp system might seem to preclude any official concern for prisoner welfare, the camps did in fact operate an extensive medical infrastructure and policies aimed at managing the health and lives of their captive populations. This can be viewed through the lens of "biopolitics" – the mechanisms and rationalities by which state power is exerted over the biological processes of human lives and populations.

From the 1930s onward, the gulag overseers constructed a dedicated "Sanitation Department" subordinate to the NKVD secret police ministry. This parallel medical service employed thousands of doctors, nurses, paramedics and other personnel to monitor and ostensibly improve the physical condition of prisoners. A central Moscow office directed regional networks of infirmaries, clinics and hospitals across the camp system that expanded to over 165,000 beds during World War II.

Camp authorities perceived maintaining a minimal level of prisoner health as necessary for ensuring productivity from forced labor. But the medical service also represented a biopolitical apparatus for surveilling, categorizing and intervening in the bodily lives of detainees. Comprehensive

records allowed camp doctors to scrutinize and treat prisoner bodies according to official medical norms and work requirements.

Many medical professionals were themselves arrested and forced into this system, coerced to apply their skills and knowledge toward propping up the brutal camp regimes. Other "free" civilian doctors and nurses were directly recruited by camp authorities desperate to source medical labor. Even prisoners were trained as paramedics to fill shortages. The gulag medical infrastructure exemplified core aspects of biopolitics – the systems of knowledge, regulations and interventions enacted by state institutions to optimize and subjugate life itself to political-economic imperatives. In the camps, this meant preserving just enough health among detainees to extract their labor value, while broader conditions ensured mass death, starvation and attrition of "undesirable" populations. Analyzing this underexplored dimension of the gulag thus reveals how biopolitical governance of human lives and biological processes was integral, not antithetical, to one of the 20th century's most inhuman systems of repression and social control.

The Refugee Camp

In a recent paper we noted the diversity of "camps", the growing significance of the refugee camp, its association with the politics of genocide, and its role in colonialism as "the generation and reproduction of a technology of extermination" (McConnachie (2016) expression taken from Bauman):

> Living in the early twenty-first century, it is impossible to avoid the fact and moral significance of 'the camp' in its pervasiveness and diversity: labor camps, concentration camps, extermination camps, death camps, reservations, immigration camps, and camps for seemingly more benign purposes such as school, health or scout camps. Above all, at this time we cannot fail to notice the prominence of the refugee camp. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) indicates there are 65.3 million displaced people worldwide, 23.1 million refugees, and 10 million stateless people. The US Committee for refugees and Immigrants statistics show 4.2 million refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the Middle East with Palestinians, Afghans, and Iraqis comprising the majority, 3.2 million refugees and IDPs in Africa with the majority coming from Sudan, 2 million refugees and IDPs in south and central Asia, with over one million Afghanis living in Pakistan alone (Peters, 2018: 1165).

In "Camps of Containment: A Genealogy of the Refugee Camp", Kirsten McConnachie (2016) argues:

> Ultimately, analyses of the camp as biopolitical or a state of exception pay insufficient attention to the core *function* of a refugee camp, and the characteristic that makes this space fundamentally unlike other spaces of marginalization and exception: containment.

And proposes the following definition:

> A site that is spatially bounded (i.e., it is an identifiable site); temporally limited (i.e., it exists pending an end to conflict or an alternative durable solution); is biopolitical (i.e., is designed and administered for a category of population rather than for individuals); and segregates residents from a surrounding population by formal or informal restrictions.

Her analysis of camps as containment review several types noted above to focus on "Camps as a Response to Forced Migration (1915–Present)". She continues:

> The history of camps of containment shows them to be spaces of contradiction in numerous respects. They are sites that can perform humanitarian functions of protection, security, and service delivery while simultaneously serving political goals of containment and control. They are sites for the generation of human rights protection and for the abrogation or evasion of those protections. They are sites characterized by restricted autonomy and by resilient agency. They are sites that render unwanted populations invisible but which nevertheless consistently generate public outcry and opposition. Perhaps the most profound contradiction is that a model that exemplifies stasis has proven so dynamically adaptable (pp. 407–8).

McConnachie was writing at the end of the decade some seven years ago. Since then the 21st century has seen a huge increase in forced migrations including most recently the Israeli forced migration of the Palestinians in 2024 first in northern Gaza and then south during the Rafal offensive outlawed by the UN's International Court of Justice on May 24 in its reconsideration of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa vs Israel). In its Order the Court issue the judgement (13 to 2) for "Immediate halt its military offensive" and it noted that more than one million Palestinians had been force to flee on 6th May and more than 100,000 Palestinians were ordered to evacuate the eastern portion of Rafal resulting in the reported displacement of 800,000 people from Rafal as of 18 May.[9] As UNICEF reports:

> The escalation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip is having a catastrophic impact on children and families. Children are dying at an alarming rate – more than 14,000 have reportedly been killed, according to the latest estimate by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, and thousands more have been injured. Around 1.7 million people in the Gaza Strip are estimated to have been internally displaced – half of them children. They do not have enough access to water, food, fuel and medicine. Their homes have been destroyed; their families torn apart.
>
> In Rafah, hundreds of thousands of children have taken shelter, many in tents or informal and unstable housing. Many children have been displaced multiple times and have lost homes, parents and loved ones. They need to be protected, along with the remaining services that they rely on, including medical facilities and shelter.[10]

In these conditions the injured, displaced and the traumatized are open to further abuse as the humanitarian crisis deepens.

Gender and Sexual Violence

In all of these examples the camp is often represented without recognizing the dimension of gender and the differential experience of women and children. Gender and sexual violence in different types of camps, particularly refugee camps, is a pressing issue that manifests the complex interplay between gender, power, and violence in situations of displacement and conflict. It is important to approach this topic with sensitivity and an understanding of the multiple factors at play. Refugee camps, as temporary settlements for people fleeing conflict, persecution, or natural disasters, often lack the legal frameworks, infrastructure, and services that can protect individuals from gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual violence (SV). These forms of violence are not simply random acts of cruelty; they are often deeply entrenched in the power dynamics of the camp environment, reflecting broader social and political structures.

The biopolitical paradigm, as described by Foucault and Agamben, refers to the ways in which states and governments manage the lives of their populations. In the context of refugee camps, this can mean the control and regulation of the most basic aspects of life, including healthcare, sanitation, and even birth rates. Gender and sexual violence are part of this broader management, often used as tools of control and subjugation.

Refugee camps are perhaps the most well-known type of camp and often face the most severe challenges regarding GBV and SV. The overcrowding, lack of privacy, and constant insecurity create an environment where violence can thrive. Internally Displaced Person (IDP) Camps house people who have fled their homes but remain within their country's borders. They

may face similar challenges to refugee camps but can also be subject to different forms of control by the host government or other groups. Temporary shelters are often makeshift or quickly constructed accommodations that lack the infrastructure to provide adequate protection from violence. Resettlement camps are for refugees who are in the process of being resettled in a third country. While conditions may be better than in other types of camps, the process of resettlement can still expose individuals to risk of violence.

Gender and sexual violence in these camps have profound impacts on individuals and communities, including physical harm, trauma, stigmatization, and displacement. They can also have broader implications for the camp's social fabric and the refugees' ability to rebuild their lives. Interventions to address GBV and SV in camps must be multifaceted and include not only prevention programs in the form of education and awareness campaigns to change social norms and promote gender equality but also access to medical care, mental health services, and legal assistance for survivors. The creation of safe spaces such as secure areas where women and vulnerable individuals can seek refuge and support and the establishment of a legal framework with clear rules and mechanisms to prosecute perpetrators and protect victims is necessary. Engagement of community leaders and members in the design and implementation of violence prevention and response strategies is also required. The international community, including governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have a huge responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of refugees and displaced persons. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the biopolitical context in which camps operate and a commitment to addressing GBV and SV as central issues in humanitarian response and long-term development strategies.

The Gulag of Alzhia indicates that it was a camp like others that were a brutal tool of political repression and social control under the Soviet regime, and they affected millions of people, including men, women, and children. Above all it is a reminder that gender and sexual violence were pervasive in the Gulag system, reflecting the broader patterns of repression and violence that characterized the Soviet era. Women faced unique forms of mistreatment and abuse within the camps and continue to face these conditions and forms of violence in camps around the world. In the Gulag system women faced systemic sexual exploitation. Women prisoners were often targeted for sexual exploitation by camp guards and administrators, who used their positions of power to coerce sexual favors. This systemic exploitation was a form of gender-based violence that was enabled by the camp's structure and the dehumanization of prisoners. Rape and other forms of sexual violence were commonplace in the Gulag. These acts were not only used for

entertainment or punishment but were also tools of control and intimidation to maintain order within the camps.

In many cases, women were forced into prostitution to survive, or they were explicitly raped as a means of punishment or control. The camp authorities sometimes turned a blind eye to these activities or even profited from them. The sexual violence experienced by women in the Gulag had severe health consequences, including sexually transmitted infections, pregnancies in incredibly harsh conditions, and sometimes death due to complications from childbirth or abortion. The trauma of sexual violence in the Gulag had long-lasting effects on the survivors, who often carried the scars of their experiences for the rest of their lives. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Gulag system and its atrocities gradually came to light, and the international community began to recognize the scope and severity of the human rights abuses that had occurred. The memory of the Gulag and its victims has been commemorated through various means, including literature, historical research, and public acknowledgments of the Soviet government's responsibility for the camps. While the Gulag system is not operational today, the lessons learned from this dark chapter in history continue to inform discussions about human rights, gender equality, and the importance of preventing and addressing violence in all its forms.

In conclusion, the issue of gender and sexual violence in camps, including refugee camps and the Gulag, is a pressing and complex issue that manifests the interplay between gender, power, and violence in situations of displacement and conflict. These forms of violence are not random acts of cruelty but are often deeply entrenched in the power dynamics of the camp environment, reflecting broader social and political structures. The ALZHIR Museum and Memorial Complex serves as a poignant reminder of the dark history of the Gulag system and the pervasive gender and sexual violence that occurred under the Soviet regime. It stands as a testament to the importance of acknowledging and learning from the past, and informs discussions about human rights, gender equality, and the prevention of violence in all its forms.

The Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip also serve as a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges faced by refugees and the importance of addressing gender-based violence in these contexts. The lessons learned from the Gulag and other camp experiences should inform our approaches to these ongoing issues, highlighting the need for comprehensive interventions that include prevention programs, access to medical and mental health services, legal assistance, and the establishment of safe spaces and legal frameworks to protect individuals from violence.

Dark tourism, which includes sites such as the ALZHIR Museum and Memorial Complex, plays a significant role in raising awareness about the dark chapters of history and the human rights abuses that occurred. It serves

as a means of confronting the past, learning from it, and ensuring that such atrocities are not repeated. As we continue to grapple with the challenges of gender and sexual violence in camps and other displacement settings, it is crucial to remain committed to the principles of human rights, gender equality, and the prevention and addressing of violence in all its forms. The international community, including governments, international organizations, and NGOs, must work together to ensure the safety and well-being of refugees and displaced persons, and to ensure that the lessons learned from the past are applied to inform and improve current and future responses to gender and sexual violence in camps.

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Unpacking Epistemic Genderism: An Investigation on Trans Women's Encounters with the Gender Binary within South African Knowledge Systems – "What Are You Doing Here? You Are Not Supposed to Be Here!"

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ABSTRACT. Genderism, understood as a social structure that supports the notion that gender is a fixed binary of man and woman, results in the perpetuated marginalization of many trans people. Epistemic genderism describes the enactment of the gender binary in knowledge systems, in ways that uphold discrimination against gender-diverse persons. A Critical Trans Politics (CTP) framework argues that trans people's lived experiences must be at the center of transformative efforts in educational spaces. Drawing from a CTP framework, this study explored five trans women's experiences of epistemic genderism within South African knowledge systems, across three provinces. Participants engaged in individual telephonic interviews in 2021. Data was analysed using a Critical Narrative Approach. Three broad themes emerged: 1) Gender binary was used as a regulatory mechanism in knowledge systems; 2) An unmarked gender hierarchy existed where trans learners were constructed as problematic; and 3) Gender binary norms underpinned pedagogic practices, invisibilizing trans identities. The voices of the participants in this study disrupt, and challenge the hegemony of epistemic genderism in local South African knowledge systems. Compelling concerns about the inequitable arrangements of these education contexts emerged, with important implications for reform through educational theory (e.g., the mobilization of a theory of genderism in education), policy (e.g., challenging gendered administrative policies that exclude trans persons) and practice (e.g., providing appropriate institutional support for learners seeking to transition).

Keywords: trans women; epistemic genderism; gender binary; knowledge; education; South Africa

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1. Epistemic Genderism: Understanding Genderism in Local Knowledge Systems

Knowledge systems shape teaching, research, and learning practices (Mwinzi, 2015). However, existing scholarship and epistemology in the education sector have often overlooked the experiences and positions of trans individuals (Clarke et al., 2010). In fact, Nicolazzo (2016) notes that institutions of education, resonant with the broader society in which they are situated, are deeply rooted in the oppression of trans individuals. Here, we employ the concept of epistemic genderism to describe an organizing ideological assumption and structure that operates in knowledge systems to emphasise and legitimize the gender binary, and in so doing biases against anyone who transgresses it. Fundamentally, epistemic genderism is expressed in the belief in the binary model of gender as the 'truth' of what is known and understood about the world and the nature of being a gendered human being; showing up in how knowledge is constructed, distributed, and maintained in knowledge systems.

Francis (2023), drawing on ethnographic interviews with seven 16–18-year-old racially diverse school-attending transgender and non-binary South African youth, explained that the exclusion of trans people is reinforced by practices, discourses, and structures in educational spaces that normalize societal assumption about the binarised construct of gender where being cisgender (identifying with the gender assigned at birth) and being hetero-sexual (having an attraction to the 'opposite' gender) is believed to be the only normal and natural ways of being. It is underscored by researchers that these limiting gendered constructions are critical as they can harmfully find their way into educational practice, like the school curriculum, in ways that may not even be easily noticed by teachers and school leaders (Martino et al., 2020; McBride & Neary, 2021).

As a consequence, knowledge systems and institutions pose unique structural challenges for gender-diverse people, many of whom report intolerance and systemic discrimination within the school context (Omercajic & Martino, 2020). Almost half of the sample of North American secondary school trans learners reported missing at least one school day in the past month due to safety concerns (Greytak et al., 2009). In a sample of 11,447 North American high school learners, sexually and gender-diverse learners demonstrated significantly higher rates of school absenteeism, lower grades, and poorer education intentions (such as exiting secondary school pre-maturely, or not attending tertiary-level education) relative to their non-LGBTQ counterparts (Aragon et al., 2014). Victimization was a key factor accounting for these educational disparities. These findings are supported by previous studies that explicate the disproportionately poor educational out-comes of trans learners (Espelage & Swearer, 2008; Robinson & Espelage, 2011).

These troubling statistics emphasize how learners who challenge societal norms of gender within knowledge systems are typically met with a form of epistemic genderism that is enacted through higher levels of violence and aggression which they experience in comparison with their cisgender peers. However, this aggression extends beyond the peer relationship to include authority figures within these knowledge systems. For example, Francis and Reygan (2016) found that a South African sample of high school, gender-diverse learners reported heterosexist biases and microaggressions from their teachers in the school environments. Teachers reportedly verbalized harmful pathologizations of nonnormative sexual and gender minorities, and voiced overall discomfort with, and disapproval of sexually-diverse identities (Francis & Reygan, 2016).

Nare Mphela, a South African transgender woman and activist, achieved a significant legal victory against the Limpopo Department of Education in 2017 after filing a case for human rights violation (Ubisi, 2021), for the ongoing genderism and consequent discrimination she experienced from her high school principal, due to her trans identity (Botha, 2017). She reported that the severity of the prejudicial antagonism perpetrated against her led to her failing her matric exams (Geldenhuys, 2021). Her case represented progress in protecting trans learners in schools, but also highlighted painful experiences of exclusion and vulnerability that speak to larger problems of heterosexist and cissexist violence in South Africa (Francis & Monakali, 2021). Three years after her legal victory, Mphela was tragically killed in an anti-transgender attack in Limpopo.

These examples of epistemic genderism enacted through the oppression of trans identities extend into institutions of higher education as well, which replicate the larger societal environments they operate within (Nicolazzo, 2021). One case study is that of Kaeden Kass, a student at Miami University in the United States, whose experience was documented by Nicolazzo and Marine (2015), and speaks to the institutional policies and practices that perpetuate trans marginalization in tertiary education settings. Despite identifying as transmasculine, Kass encountered resistance from university officials during his application for a resident assistant position at Miami University regarding his gender identity and eligibility to be treated and addressed as a man. Ultimately, Kass was notified that should he be considered for the position, he would be placed in the residence as a woman, as per his legal sex designation that is officially on file with the academic institution. When Kass was finally offered the leadership position, the appointment letter arrived in an envelope inscribed with his legal name rather than his chosen name, which he used on campus, effectively disregarding his identity. Kaas was placed in a female suite with female roommates despite identifying as a man. White and Jenkins (2017) highlight how this particular incident is symbolic of the gendered binary division of

space that is a normative reality trans people negotiate in their daily lives. The exclusionary institutional practices that Kass contended with expose the manner in which knowledge systems fail to recognize gender as a fluid, open, and shifting identity (Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015). Such genderism perpetuates the marginalization of many trans students in higher education. The scarcity of case examples of inclusion within the education system, both globally and more specifically in the South African context, further illustrates how unsafe and invalidating the school climate can be to trans learners.

While there has been an increase in education-related research concentrating on LGBTI and queer communities (McBrien, 2020), these samples are commonly treated as a wide, monolithic social category. A focus on sexual diversity dominates, leading to the marginalization of trans peoples' experiences and the various intersections they navigate in knowledge systems (Francis & Monakali, 2021). There is also a persistent conflation of gender identity with sexual orientation, alongside the perpetuation of an understanding of gender as an inflexible, binary variable (Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Fiani & Han, 2019). This limits the ability to build a diverse, inclusive agenda in education that recognizes, accommodates, and embraces gender differences (Omercajic & Martino, 2020). Addressing this historical, epistemological disregard for trans people in education research, this research study foregrounds trans people's experiences navigating such epistemic genderism in South African knowledge systems.

2. A Critical Trans Framework and Narrative Approach

As arguably evidenced by the case examples of Nare Mphela and Kaeden Kaas, the use of storytelling serves as a powerful tool for organizing human experiences and analysing the complex interplay between individuals and their social, cultural, and political environments (Sonday et al., 2020). Conceptually, this study grounds itself in a Critical Trans Framework for the field of education developed by Kean (2021). This is a distinctive framework that pays special attention to trans realities, amplifies trans knowledges, and directly addresses structural trans oppression in the form of epistemic genderism. Building upon the work of scholars in queer and trans scholarship who have laid the foundation for challenging binaries and disrupting long-held assumptions about sexuality and gender in education and other contexts, Kean's (2021) framework carefully delineates important principles for approaching gender in teaching, learning, and research, encouraging ways of doing from a stance that celebrates gender diversity and takes trans experiences from the margins to the center of education practices. Kean (2021) supports an approach to gender that appreciates the complexity of gender as a multidimensional system – understanding gender oppression as occurring at individual, institutional, and cultural levels.

The framework maintains that genderism is a social system that is key to the structural oppression of trans people and thus conceptually central to an analysis of trans lived experience. Within this structure, genderism is defined as a social structure that supports the ideologically embedded notion that gender is a fixed binary composed of man and woman – categorizations of individuals held as inherent and linked to their biological sex (Jun, 2018). Genderism is understood as a structural system that operates concurrently with other systems of oppression (Kean, 2021), opening possibilities for capturing the interlocking oppressions that contribute to the societal marginalization of trans women in education. Here, epistemic genderism refers specifically to these forms of oppression and discrimination enacted within knowledge systems.

One of the principles of a Critical Trans Framework puts forward that trans people's lived experiences and (counter)narratives must be at the center of transformative efforts in educational spaces. Kean (2021: 274) argues that the knowledge that trans people "create through the experience of being" comes with the radical potential of challenging dominant oppressive narratives regarding the construct of gender. It also comes with the possibility of advancing ways of knowing, doing, and engaging gender in a manner that is transformative, liberatory, and healing (Nicolazzo, 2016), alongside ways of understanding the world in "more expansive, creative, and fluid" terms (Kean, 2021: 272). For purposes of this research project, a critical narrative approach was used to deepen understanding of the lived experiences of epistemic genderism in South African knowledge systems.

3. Research Methods

This study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of epistemic genderism within South African knowledge systems, through the narratives told by five trans women, addressing two research questions:
1) What narratives do trans women tell about their experiences of inclusion and exclusion within South African knowledge systems?
2) What are the everyday societal structures, practices, and norms in these knowledge systems that enable and facilitate these experiences for trans women?

Narrative research is built on the assumption that human lives are storied and that stories serve as constructed models of human experiences (Fraser, 2004). Although the use of narratives within studies of trans lives has not been commonly used in education research, a Critical Narrative research design promises utility in the commitment to explore the interconnections between stories, identity, and context. Within a paradigm of Critical Trans Politics, it is argued that stories carry the potential to facilitate meaning

through which the lives of trans women can be theoretically appreciated within a particular socio-historical context (Nay & Steinbock, 2021), organized through specific sociocultural and political processes.

Participants

Five South African trans women were sampled for this study. While these voices do not aim to represent the entire transgender community in South Africa, considering the diverse range of experiences among transgender individuals, they serve as significant examples of South African knowledge systems and societal norms that influence trans experiences. Transgender women are individuals whose gender identity, as they self-identify, does not align with the gender assigned to them at birth (Stryker, 2006). Instead of seeking a singular narrative, the framework of Critical Trans Politics (CTP) embraces "multiple, competing, and conflicting renderings of reality" (Pasque et al., 2012: 13), promoting intersectionality and recognizing complexity. Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the five transgender women participants.

Table 1 The demographics of the participants who participated in this study

Pseudonym	Age	Preferred pronouns	Gender	Location
Phumeza	29	She/her	Trans woman	Gauteng
Shanduka	30	She/her	Trans woman	Limpopo
Lerato	29	She/her	Trans woman	Limpopo
Laila	24	She/her	Trans woman	Northern Cape
Mpho	22	She/her	Trans woman	Gauteng

Gauteng, characterized by its significant urban area, includes larger infrastructure, more economic prospects, and cultural diversity, notwithstanding considerable economic disparities within its populace. In contrast, Limpopo and the North West provinces represent more rural settings with less developed infrastructure.

Sampling Strategy

The study used a purposive sampling technique. The first author (SS) created a digital poster and published it on their social media platforms – namely, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. The researcher's social media community was requested to share the posters widely. Interested participants responded to SS via the respective social media platforms. SS had no prior relationship with any of the participants.

Data Collection

Individual telephonic interviews, conducted in a semi-structured format, took place over a span of two months in 2021, with each interview lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. Participants were asked about their personal

experiences within South African knowledge systems (primary, secondary schooling and tertiary education). Questions included: "How has being a transgender woman influenced your experiences while at school?" "What challenges did you commonly encounter during your schooling experiences?" and "What positive experiences do you recall from your schooling history?" The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate analysis.

Data Analysis

The study used Fraser's (2004) phased analytical approach, guided by a Critical Narrative perspective. The two authors (SS and MC) conducted independent analyses initially, identifying emerging themes and narratives. The authors considered participant experiences across intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural dimensions. They connected these themes to broader societal structures and power dynamics, considering factors such as class, gender, race, sexual orientation, age, and socio-geographical location. Subsequently, the researchers shared and compared their analyses. SS integrated these into the final analysis, taking into account the content, type, and tone of the narratives.

4. Findings

Three broad themes emerged from the analysis: 1) Gender binary was used as a regulatory mechanism in knowledge systems; 2) An unmarked gender hierarchy existed where trans learners were typically constructed as deviant and problematic; and 3) Gender binary norms underpinned the pedagogic practices of these knowledge systems, invisibilizing trans identities.

4.1 Gender binary as a regulatory mechanism in knowledge systems: "Males go that side, females go that side!"

The narratives shared by these trans women described South African knowledge systems as sites where gender was systematically regulated. Standardised institutional practices and the enactment of school policies and protocols segregated "boys and girls" under systemic assumptions that viewed gender as a fixed, stable and dichotomous category. The participants' stories highlighted how this rigid regulation resulted in no accommodations for diverse gender identities and expressions. Shandukani noted: "And then the other challenge that I faced in high school was the separation of gender. You will find in most cases they will say, "Males go that side; females go that side. You won't even know where to go". These gender classifications were associated with gender scripts that assumed all learners to be cisgender. This assumption created challenges for women like Shandukani, who disrupted and disorganised traditional gender scripts. Her narrative alluded to the exclusionary nature of these school gender binary system.

Lerato reported that she would manage her anxiety about the binary segregation of gender by avoiding school gatherings such as assemblies: “I used to dodge those assembly things. Then I would go to class. Or maybe I would go… They would put you in lines as Grade 12 learners – male and female. And now I would be out”. The segregation of boys and girls would exclude Lerato, effectively, othering her. Beyond being an othered learner, the entrenched gender binary system also alienated Lerato: “And they wouldn’t get me. At school, sometimes we would sit around and chat and I would tell them my background. Some would understand and some wouldn’t. But for me, the teachers were very critical because they wouldn’t understand my situation... It was so scary for me… I felt so stupid”. Lerato’s experience of being so misunderstood depicted how normative truths about the construct of gender (as binary, stable, and biologically determined), reiterated by organizational and pedagogic practices, relegated her to a position of otherness. This marginalisation occurred on grounds of Lerato’s failure to conform to the gendered sensibilities of the school system, rendering her gender culturally inconceivable or unintelligible.

Laila’s narrative aligned with this experience of alienation: “Absolutely, I feel like people treat me like I’m some sort of an outcast or an alien”. This sense of being an alien or outcast alluded to an intense separation Laila experienced from those around her. Similarly, Mpho explained how: “They just push you over there if you are not what they’re looking for. They will just push you or say some words just to hurt you and make you feel little about yourself”. Mpho’s depiction of an alienating position of "lessness" - of power(lessness), norm(lessness) or meaning(lessness) in the context of her school community, further highlighted how the act of categorising learners and methodically segregating them was not a neutral, objective exercise, but rather held larger structural implications. As Mpho explained: “I felt like it was my right to go there, but I was like, “On the other side, I could cause drama.” And the people there were not really accepting. And I remember once I wore earrings just to be more feminine. Then, sjoe, they were like, “What are you wearing? You are a guy. What are you doing?” And I was so hurt and I took them off… There were things I couldn’t do, I couldn’t get because I was seen as the other gender”.

Mpho’s explanation highlighted how the placement of learners into categories of binary gendered identities also dictated a set of normative behavioural expectations that learners ought to submit to, under the assumption that all learners were cisgender. In this sense, “males that side, females that side” was not an isolated exercise – it came with prescriptions of, for example, what one could and could not wear. It also came with prescriptions of and limitations for what sports one could and could not play, restricting meaningful self-identification, as shown by Lerato’s narrative: “The sport that was

'meant' for me was basketball and baseball and stuff. And I wanted netball and stuff like that. For me, it was my choice... If there is a case where they want all boys, then they are going to point at me. If there is a trip where girls are going and guys are not going, I would be left behind". Lerato's experience illustrated how her gender categorisation as a boy at school, occurring on the grounds of her medical and legal sex assignment at birth, restricted how she ought to behave, interact and embody her identity based on preconceived societal gender norms.

Shandukani explained how, while attending pre-school, a meeting was called between her teacher and parents to address, question and discipline the manner in which she embodied her forming identity. Her mother was asked "What is wrong with your child?" Shandukani's story spoke to a culture of cisnormativity in her school that privileged cisgender learners as normal while stigmatising gender-diverse expressions of identity, representing them as illegitimate, inferior and problematic. This problematisation of the trans learners, informed the institutional erasure of these learners through a lack of inclusive policies and customs. Lerato provided a further example: "I had changed my hair. So, I couldn't write my exams... He (teacher) chased me out of the class and then I went home… He said that I must just go and fix myself and become a man so I could write". Lerato's experience of being prevented from writing examinations for having a hairstyle considered to be for girls, ultimately going against institutional norms and policies, highlighted the real exclusionary consequences of the gender binary system in knowledge systems. It underscored the problematisation, harsh discipline and rejection of trans learners for their nonconformity to the social expectations of the gender categorisation imposed on them, reinforced by cisnormative school policies and practices that did not consider them.

4.2 An unmarked gender hierarchy: "I was locked in the toilet and all my clothes, they took them away".

Trans participants in this study revealed that they were typically constructed as deviant and problematic within their school systems. These knowledge systems appeared to include an unmarked gender hierarchy, where multiple forms of violence were metered against trans learners to discipline and punish their violations of the boundaries of the gender binary. School environments were represented as sites that were imbued with power dynamics, implicit in the social relationships cisgender learners had with trans learners.

Lerato detailed a brutal experience of targeted violence from her peers: "I was locked in the toilet and all my clothes, they took them away because I was at the toilet. There were two schools visiting each other and there was an event going on. So, the shame for me coming out from the toilet naked with

make-up on my face and some small braids. It was a shame. And that's when I said, no, this must stop. I must do something". She described how her cisgender peers used intimidation to police her and enforce her conformity to gender norms: "They would do it because most of the time. They would say something in front of me and I would stand up for myself. And then when there is chaos, they would say, "Hey, you have a problem? You can't sit with girls! You should go play these sports." And I didn't play any sports at school. I was that child." Lerato's experiences of violence included sexual exploitation. In this example she described her male peers as bossy and controlling, revealing the clear power differences that existed between her and her cisgender peers: "I remember the other time we went to winter school and I was placed with guys in the dormitory. I couldn't even take off my clothes in front of guys. Some other ones I had to sleep with them to show that I'm this kind. They are like a boss. They are controlling those guys. Just for my safety so that I can be safe". Lerato's experience illustrated the use of threats and violence by her privileged cisgender peers to entrench and maintain the binary status quo. This is similarly evident in Mpho's explanation: "…they will beat you or they will tell you that you cannot wear female clothing. You must wear male clothes because you were born male. So, they will tell you".

Shandukani described the violence enacted against her as a form of social exclusion: "Even the other problem that I faced in high school, I have been excluded from the students to practice my own social rights". She explained how teachers also contributed to a culture of anti-trans violence at her school: "There was even this educator who didn't like me because I was 'gay'. I ended up hating mathematics because of her. I failed it because I didn't get enough love from her". The violence perpetrated against her prevented her from participating effectively in school life, compromising educational outcomes. In this, Shandukani's exclusion surfaced as having a direct impact on her ability to practice her educational rights in a safe and enabling environment. Violence from peers and teachers, thus, emerged in these narratives as a systemic mode of discrimination that manifested both materially and symbolically to exclude the participants as trans learners from educational life.

The participants in this study were also seen to face significant problems with safe access to public spaces within the school environment, which were also regulated by an invisible gender hierarchy. Lerato explained: "Sometimes, maybe I would not go to the toilet because of the stigma and discrimination that I was going to get. I had to hold myself until it was so hard for me". The toilet space at school emerged as a site that exposed Lerato to hate violence, where she described hurtful discriminatory experiences with other cisgender learners as intimidating and traumatic for her as a

trans learner. Like Lerato, Laila similarly reported experiences of stigma and discrimination in the process of accessing gender-segregated toilets: "Especially a public toilet. Imagine you are driving from here to Johannesburg, and you have to stop at a garage and you have to go to the toilet. And then there's a lot of people in the queues and people are going to stare at you. They're going to stare at you, [saying] "What's going on here now?" There is this other friend that I met at this support group of ours. She is also trans now. But then she went into the female toilet and then one lady was like, 'What are you doing here? You are not supposed to be here!" And then she then stood there and cried". For Laila, the process of entering bathrooms, typically resulting in aggressive accusations of being in the wrong toilet, produced anticipatory anxieties.

These narratives exemplify how the gendering of space is a mechanism in which the policing of gender is empowered. These narratives depict these trans women as subjugated others within the boundaries of a marginalising gender binary system that silenced and erased them. It is noteworthy that no alternative narratives of social inclusion were found in relation to this theme amongst participants.

4.3 Gender binary norms underpinned pedagogic practices that invisibilize trans identities: "I think they need to do a lot when it comes to the visibility of trans women ."

The narratives of these study participants revealed gender binary norms underpinning the pedagogical practices of their school systems. In these contexts, these trans women were not represented or visible in school curricula. Instead, these curricula prioritized cisgender worldviews. This invisibilisation of trans identities was a broader societal concern that was portrayed through the silencing of their experiences, perspectives and expressions in their communities as well as through the underrepresentation of their identities in many sectors of society. The marginalisation and subordination of trans knowledges and perspectives was a pronounced theme across the narratives the women in this study told. These women spoke about the lack of access to information about and exposure to gender-diverse identities, and the predominance of cisgender heterosexual norm.

Lerato explained that lack of information about her gender identity caused difficulties in her journey as a trans woman: "I was the only trans in my rural area… It was so difficult for me because I know then I didn't have much information about trans women". Lerato's story alluded to a sense of alienation, driven by being the only trans person in her community. This alienation was exacerbated by not having access to information regarding her own gender identity. Shandukani shared a similar experience: "So my mother was supporting me, but because we are coming from a poor/

disadvantaged background, getting resources and lacking information on how to transition was a problem". From Shandukani's account, it emerged that this lack of information about gender transitioning not only became a barrier to initiating and facilitating her gender transitioning process, but later also constrained the intrapersonal and social formation of her identity as a trans woman.

Mpho was already 19-years-old when she accidentally learned about trans identity: "Ja, and then people who are a woman like me, they testified. After they testified, I found out that I'm actually trans. I didn't follow this gay stuff. They were telling people: "You could be this type of a person and this type of a person." And then they said what is trans. And I was like, "Oh, now I see." I was so interested in the word that I actually found out that you can actually be a woman from being a man. That interested me because I had been watching the trans community since 2018 and around 2019 I started identifying as a trans woman". Mpho's narrative emphasise the importance of language, and vocabulary in helping people to make sense of who they are and the world around them. Gendered identities are imposed on trans women through language. Similarly, gendered identities are (or can be) chosen and invented through language – language which most of the participants in the study stated they did not have, for the most part of their young lives in knowledge systems that prioritized cisgender understandings. This inaccessibility of knowledge (through the means of language) compromised Lerato's, Shandukani's and Mpho's capabilities to conceptualise and assert their identities, constraining their exercise of gender self-determination.

Lerato reported that trans women drop out of schooling due to poor self-understanding, but also due to the lack of knowledge about trans identities and as a consequence, being misunderstood by peers, teachers, parents and others in authority within these knowledge systems: "Because in Limpopo, a young trans woman has dropped out because at school they do not understand their sexuality. And they drop out and end up being a sex worker. In their family, they don't understand them and in society as well, they are not understood". Lerato's narrative underscored the exclusionary consequences of existing outside the definitions of constructed gendered norms. In contrast, Shandukani's story of her relationship with her mother demonstrated the power of an affirming experience of being justly and correctly understood by an attachment figure: "The only person that I can say was supporting me from my foundation it was only my mother, who was on my side. So, I grew up with my mother. So, she was the only one who understood my life, who knew what was happening with my life. She knows all about my life".

Shandukani's narrative also stressed the importance of inclusive public education that addressed the experiences and positions of trans people:

“Educate young gays about this transitioning thing. You need to go for laser, you need to go for hormonal treatment. We need a lot of information. I have insufficient information also because I need to be educated more about this thing”. She spoke of the need for trans women to have education on trans identities and their transitioning processes and the importance of the availability of this information to the broader public too. Her narrative suggested a form of epistemic invisibility currently apparent in cisnormative public education systems that marginalizes the stories, perspectives and positions of trans persons: “Remember I am from a rural community in Limpopo. So, there are organisations there but the only thing they are interested in is HIV and stigma. There is insufficient education in the public… Our educators during Life Orientation, there is a sex talk, a sexuality talk. We should be included in that education to educate people or young children. When they grow up, they should already know what being trans is… The government, also, should try to uplift us and our rights also and deploy many organizations… Education should be presented at a younger age”.

Shandukani’s narrative framed the underrepresentation of trans women in society as a structural and constitutional concern where trans women are invisibilised and excluded in educational engagements about sex and sexuality in knowledge systems and broader society. She noted that the South African life orientation curriculum provided limited knowledge about the diversity of human sexualities and gender expressions. Her narrative suggested a form of epistemic injustice, where the stories, perspectives and positions of trans persons are ignored, silenced and disregarded in favour of more hegemonic discourses of gender. Aligning with the confrontation of epistemic injustice, Lerato highlighted the underrepresentation of trans women in South African media: “Maybe some shows where there is a trans woman... Media… So you don’t only hear that there is a trans woman but you get to see it physically and to see it happening with their physical eyes. So that people can see that trans women are also people. They should be included in everything…I think they need to do a lot when it comes to the visibility of trans women and trans men”.

Lerato’s narrative suggested that representation has wide-ranging implications in that it provides empirical proof of the existence of one’s community. Yet, trans women and their truths in this current study emerged as not only being under-represented in the media and their communities but also as gravely misrepresented. For example Phumeza explains: “It’s a bit tough with people not being knowledgeable about what a trans person is and the difference between a trans person and a gay guy and whatnot. So, in that sense, having to explain to them how or what a trans person becomes different... Let’s say I am going with my gay friends, then they’ll be like, these are gay people…

They take everyone as gay. They do not understand what a trans person is, what a gay person is, what a lesbian is, what a queer person is. So they just put us in one bag… and that becomes a problem because you are not able to voice out and say, "I am not this person." These narratives of invisibility, underrepresentation and misrepresentation expose and confront the injustice of privileging cisgender subject positions while oppressing others.

5. Discussion

Kean (2021) in developing a critical trans framework for education, employed genderism as a central framework for understanding the unique barriers and violence faced by trans people. Farmer and colleagues (2020) position genderism as a societal system that perpetuates gendered oppression, and reinforces a binary view of gender. This system pathologizes, denigrates, and isolates gender-variant identities while privileging normative cisgender identities. Kean (2021) supports this view describing genderism as a structure that reinforces dominant hegemonic gender norms, and emphasizes conformity to binary gender expectations.

Our study, expands on Kean's (2021) position, by introducing the concept of epistemic genderism, which specifically addresses the role of knowledge systems in perpetuating gendered oppression. This is important because knowledge systems reinforce and institutionalise the gender binary through learning, research, and teaching practices, shaping how gender is exercised, known, and experienced in schools and the larger social space. A study by Bottoman (2021) on young trans people who have undergone basic education found that educational environments place unfair exclusions and learning barriers on trans learners due to the gender binary. Francis (2023) in a qualitative study of educational staff and seven trans and gender-diverse school-attending youth in South Africa argued that schooling is a space where trans and gender-diverse youth come to terms with their place in the world, which is one marked by exclusion and marginalization. These findings are all congruent with the dominant narratives shared by the trans women of our research study. We argue that the findings of our study illustrate three key aspects of gender oppression amplified within knowledge systems, thus motivating for the utility of the concept of epistemic genderism.

5.1 Rigidity of the regulation of gender

One aspect of gender oppression aggravated in these knowledge systems is the rigidity of the regulation of gender and the violent imposing of the gender binary, informing whose voices and perspectives are considered credible or authoritative in discussions about gender. Genderism is a construction that drives the expectation that every person with a penis will naturally assume gender as a boy/man and every person with a vagina will

naturally assume gender as a girl/woman. As Bragg et al. (2018) pointed out in an exploration of young people's views on gender diversity within and beyond school contexts, schools are strongly rooted in the vigorous social reproduction of the gender binary, constructing and institutionalizing learning, teaching, and research in ways that serve to consolidate this gender binary. For example, most schools have gender classifications on official documents. They also have gendered dress codes, and gender-segregated facilities (Davies et al., 2019).

The detrimental influence of genderism is internationally and regionally established in a review of publications conducted by Kwok (2020) in Hong Kong, who highlighted the gender discrimination trans students experience in schools. Kearns et al. (2017) in Canada, focusing their investigation on critical incidents related to transphobia in schools, similarly addressed the enduring gender binary that presents itself in schools in ways that marginalize them. In a global context that epistemically and ontologically values the binary over complexity, expansiveness, and fluidity, the stories of the trans women in this study in the same way revealed the constant disregard and rejection their perspectives, stories, and rights experience across systems and institutions that generate and represent knowledge. Their stories demonstrate the rigidity of these knowledge systems in regulating gender and at times violently imposing the gender binary.

In this study, findings revealed that gender regulations in schools are evidently confining, often reproducing subjective states of anxiety for trans pupils, who are typically denied the safety and freedom to define themselves outside the boundaries of the gender binary without being questioned. A simple process of entering a bathroom, typically resulting in aggressive accusations of being in the wrong toilet, produced significant anticipatory anxieties. Through these gendered regimentations, as also argued by Cohen (2011), who studied sex segregation as a systemic issue in the United States of America, gender is reflected as systemically constituted in constellations that open up possibilities and set limits for who students can be (Youdell, 2005).

Tobin and Levi (2013) argue that the denial of equal access to facilities that correspond to a student’s gender identity singles out and stigmatizes trans students. It inflicts humiliation and trauma, and empowers bullies. Horton (2023), investigating trans children’s experiences in primary and early secondary education in the UK, maintained that rigid expectations centered on cisnormativity normalize gender injustice, making it acceptable for trans children, who defy the binary, to lose access to education, or to experience trauma in school.

The erasure of learners of the trans experience in schools is also evident through standards, codes of conduct, and cultural norms in school systems that normalize the genders of cisgender learners while effectively providing

very little accommodation for trans learners, who defy the confines of institutionalized gender norms in the school environment.

5.2 Segregation based on gender reinforcing the gender hierarchy

A second aspect of gender oppression aggravated in these knowledge systems is segregation based on the gender binary, which perpetuates a gender hierarchy and constructs trans learners as deviant and problematic. According to Paraskeva (2020), epistemic genderism, alongside racism and sexism, are the most hidden forms of social segregation in the global societal system that we all occupy. Emerging in a variety of participant narratives in our study, genderism found expression in the structural construct of sex segregation in the context of public education and schooling. Mirroring Cohen's (2011) definition of sex segregation, the participants gave details about navigating school systems that restrictively assumed the "binariness of gender" (Stern, 1993: 561), revealing that their school cultures systematically separated boys and girls, often with particular rigidity that oppressively rejected gender variance and fostered the systemic erasure of trans expressions of gender. Sex segregation remains a normative practice in school culture (Ingrey, 2023; Tueller, 2024), with Kriesi and Imdorf (2019) stating that gender segregation in education is still prevalent, particularly in Western countries.

Gender segregation is potent as it often serves as a tool for institutional gender control driven by cisnormativity (Bauer et al., 2009). Cavanagh (2010) pointed out that gender desegregation is a device for the reinforcement of gender norms. This is because implicit in the structural segregation of 'boys and girls' is a social process of regulating gender by rigidly assigning learners into binary categories of identity that dictate a set of normative behavioral expectations that learners ought to submit to. According to Tueller (2024), sex/gender segregation, regardless of the context, perpetuates and reinforces gender stereotypes to the detriment of everyone, especially LGBTI persons. Chapple (2015) argued that stereotypes flourish when groups are segregated based on visible characteristics, such as sex category, where stereotypes are perpetuated about how 'males' and 'females' should behave, what they should aspire to, and what talents and capabilities they possess. According to the stories told by our study participants, segregating learners according to strict gender categorizations came with institutionalized gendered prescriptions of, for example, what 'female' and 'male' learners can and cannot wear and set limitations for what sports 'female' and 'male' learners can and cannot play per their sex/gender assignment. Such prescriptions perpetuate a hierarchy of what constitutes acceptable gender expression and construct trans learners who don't subscribe to these prescriptions as deviant and problematic.

Participants in our study describe school environments as imbued with power dynamics, implicit in the hierarchal social relationships cisgender

learners have with their trans peers. Cisgender peers were seen to have frequently used intimidation to police and enforce our participants' conformity to gender norms. The subordination of trans learners is portrayed through violent disciplinary actions to which they were routinely subjected by their cisgender peers (and cisgender teachers). This highlights an unmarked gendered hierarchy in schools that not only privileges boys over girls, masculinity over femininity, heterosexuality over homosexuality but also cisgender learners over trans learners.

Schools are often sites of surveillance for students as behaviors are governed and regulated by gendered norms and sexed expectations (Davies et al., 2019). Gender regulations are seen to not only constrain self-definition but also reinforce power relations based on sex and gender among learners. Studies show that while some trans youth have affirming experiences, the majority are exposed to strongly gendered institutional cultures that make them vulnerable to macroaggressions and violence within school settings (McBride, 2020). A secondary analysis of the 2015–2016 California Healthy Kids Survey found that trans youth reported significantly higher rates of physical and nonphysical victimization and discriminatory peer bullying than non-trans peers (De Pedro et al., 2019). While Schafer-Garcia (2023) demonstrated that educational contexts silence and stigmatize trans people. Likewise, the trans women in our study revealed that they were in most cases bullied and excluded by their peers in school.

Greytak et al. (2009) found that trans exclusionary interpersonal incidences occur mostly as a result of the trans learners' rejection of gender norms in schools. Bottoman (2021) explained that the exclusion of trans people in education particularly exists as a punitive consequence of their nonconformity to the standard of compulsory (cis)heterosexuality in schools, an ingrained guideline about doing gender rooted in the binary that not only 'naturalizes' being cisgender and heterosexual (Wright & Greenberg, 2023) but also enforces conformity to this norm.

5.3 Alienation and epistemic invisibility of trans identities

A third aspect of gender oppression amplified in these knowledge systems is a sense of alienation and invisibility. As a consequence of living in a regulated cisnormative social world, the trans women in our study were found to typically experience themselves as alienated in their schooling cultures as well as society at large. This is revealed by participants' narratives of being alone, different, and other, speaking to a sense of cultural alienation that Kerry (2014) addressed in their exploration of the experiences of indigenous and non-indigenous trans-Australians. Studies highlight a consistent picture of poor mental health and experiences of social isolation and loneliness in the trans community (Wright, 2020). In a study aiming to explore the intersubjective experiences of trans and gender-diverse people,

interactions were often characterized by a sense of alienation and invisibility, with these feelings demonstrated through the negation of identity and invisibility in the system (Ker et al., 2021).

However, in this study, trans women's alienation appeared to also be driven by a state of being separated from normative societal ideas about the world heralded by those around them. This study conjectures this latter form of alienation as a function of the epistemic invisibility of trans people, echoed by a genderist cultural system in South African democracy that prioritises cisgender viewpoints of the world while marginalizing trans perspectives. Epistemic invisibility, which Dilley (2019: 2) wrote as "another form of the unseen", was materialised through participants' narratives which indicated that trans identities were hardly reflected in the languages, customs, and knowledge systems that shape their communities. To illustrate this point, it was articulated that gender variant identities were excluded from the subject Life Orientation in public schooling. A study conducted by Francis and Monkali (2021) revealed that schooling is constructed in such a way that the gender binary also determines curriculum and pedagogy; highlighting how teaching, learning, and pedagogy (in addition to classroom routines and school practices) reproduce cisgender norms. Hobiaca et al. (2019) assert that the current curricula is cisnormative by ignoring trans identities and assuming all students are cisgender. Epistemic genderism is manifest here through the cultural and pedagogical reproduction of knowledge about gender that reinforces and legitimizes the gender binary model, leading to the eventual alienation of gender-diverse persons, who transgress these normatively fundamentalist ways of knowing and valuing gender in schools and broader society.

Similarly, participants in this study alluded to the underrepresentation and misrepresentation they receive from mainstream South African media. This media ignored, silenced and disregarded trans stories, perspectives, and voices in favour of more hegemonic discourses of gender. It is this epistemic invisibilisation that underpinned most participants' contentions that a lack of information and vocabulary to make sense of their trans identities for the most part of their lives, delaying their gender transitioning processes. McLaren & Brown (2021) highlight that the representation of transgender characters in fictional television has often been plagued by stereotypical and negative portrayals that do not accurately reflect the real experiences of transgender people.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

By foregrounding the stories and perspectives of those culturally constituted as abnormal for challenging gender conventions (Stryker, 2006), this study has practically challenged hegemonic narratives of the cisgender regime that

render the marginalized trans subject voiceless. The voices of the participants in this study – existing as "counter-narratives of gender" (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004: 221) mark, disrupt, and challenge the hegemony of genderism as manifest in local knowledge systems. The study argues that within these knowledge systems the rigidity of the regulation of gender, and the segregation based on gender experienced by people in these systems, reinforces a gender hierarchy that alienates trans identities leading to a powerful sense of invisibility. These three aspects of gender oppression may not be unique to knowledge systems but are sufficiently amplified and antagonised within them to warrant recognition as epistemic genderism.

In foregrounding the unique experiences of these trans women, compelling concerns about the inequitable arrangements of education contexts in South Africa are raised. These questions provide important implications for educational theory, policy and practice.

7. Theory and Policy

This study encourages the continual questioning and revision of ideas and arrangements of society that maintain the relegation of trans persons to the gender margins. In this regard, the study recommends the mobilization of a theory of genderism in education contexts, in the form of epistemic genderism, in the interest of challenging gendered legalities, administrative processes, policies, discourses, practices, customs, and norms that exclude trans persons in institutions dictated by limiting norms of the gender binary. For schools and academic institutions to be more trans inclusive, it is crucial to name, problematise and destabilise genderist structural processes within educational systems that consistently reproduce gender transgressive bodies as non-normative, out of the ordinary, and unintelligible (Butler, 2004; Francis & Monakali, 2021).

8. Practice

The following practical recommendations are made, inspired by Martino and colleagues (2020):

i. Employing intersectional diversity approaches in schools by expanding currently existing anti-bullying and non-discrimination measures to ensure that they explicitly name mistreatment based on gender and sexual orientation as punishable offenses.

ii. Creating administrative channels for trans and non-binary students to make themselves visible within the school system.

iii. Providing appropriate institutional support for learners seeking to transition at schools. Promoting the trans student's right to self-determine by

provide a space free of discrimination for social transition to safely take place.
iv. Altering school structures to be open to gender diversity.
v. Having gender-affirming training and guidance for school employees.

9. Limitations

While a sample size of five may be considered appropriate for an exploratory and critical enquiry, aligned with the methods of this study, these findings do not speak to the lived experiences of all South African trans women. Rather, the study highlights prevalent ideologies, customs, and structures that reinforce the marginalization of trans women in post-apartheid South African knowledge systems. However, the perspectives of trans men and others who diverge from traditional gender norms are absent from this account. Nevertheless, aligned with the principles of trans* epistemology, this study embraces the diversity of trans perspectives, recognizing that there is no singular, uniform transgender experience.

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Pedagogical Representations of Gender in Early Years Sector

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ABSTRACT. Early Years (EY) sector is experiencing an interesting phenomenon in terms of gender representation at staff level. This article aims to investigate possible barriers of the low numbers of male practitioners in "a largely feminised workforce" (Mistry and Sood, 2012) supported by international context. Literature review, independent and Government reports will be considered throughout the article to highlight possible reasons for the underrepresentation of men within EY settings, such as stigma or gender stereotyping, childcare sector being considered as "women's work" (Rolfe, 2006). The perceived barriers of male stereotypes in early years are critically analysed in the context of the benefits for children's learning and development, with a consideration for risk adversity and differing play behaviours (Brandes, 2011).

Keywords: Early Years; pedagogy; male; gender stereotyping

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Gender in Early Years Sector

In their 2008 study, Timmerman and Schreuder characterised the predominantly female workforce in the childcare sector as a "moral panic." Their research, conducted with a group of childcare practitioners, aimed to explore how these workers contributed to the ongoing social and academic discourse regarding the consequences of the feminisation of early childcare. The discussion surrounding the perception of gender and gender stereotypes is multifaceted, as highlighted by Warin and Adriany (2017). They posit that these perceptions may exert an influence on the educational, social, and emotional well-being of individuals. Cameron and Moss (2007: 37) reported that "gender is an almost invisible issue in the field of early childhood. It is rarely acknowledged, even by male workers, and available data on this topic is sparse."

Subsequent research has identified the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Kambouri-Danos and Evans (2019) delve into how gender stereotypes emerge from behaviours typically associated with men and women within a given culture. Chandler and Munday (2016) underscore the polarisation of these stereotypes within the media, encompassing expected appearances, traits, and occupations.

June O'Sullivan, MBE, and CEO of LEYF Nurseries in the United Kingdom (UK), emphasised the need for a diverse workforce with various interaction styles, interests, and teaching approaches, irrespective of gender. She conducted a small research investigation to understand the low participation of males in this profession, with the following results: 60% of participants noted that it was not a career choice typically offered to males, over 50% attributed this to societal attitudes toward males caring for infants, and almost 30% cited the relatively low salaries in the early childhood sector. O'Sullivan & Chambers (2012) further elaborated that there exists a lack of awareness regarding the educational role and expertise of practitioners and how this impacts children's potential and future life prospects.

Cameron (2013) continued to address the gender imbalance in this field, attributing it to the gendered nature of the work and the ingrained assumptions about practices predominantly defined by the female majority. In Norway, there has been a negotiation between the work organisation in kindergartens and the division of labour which has contributed to a construction of gendered practice and gender-neutral processes. Therefore, Martin (2006) highlights the importance of gaining gender reflexive practices among staff and further research is needed in the work culture, especially for male practitioners.

Warin et al. (2019) also noted the persistently low representation of male staff in early childhood education and care (ECEC) worldwide, typically ranging from 1% to 3% in most countries, with exceptions like Norway, Denmark, and Turkey where the percentages are higher (Drudy et al., 2005;

Brody 2014). In their research, Warin et al. (2019) elucidated that many male ECEC practitioners felt marginalised, as their perspectives were often overlooked. They were perceived by their colleagues that, as non-parents, they lacked the experiential insight of their colleagues.

In their study, O'Sullivan and Chambers (2012) discovered that childcare practitioners stressed the significance of portraying men as nurturing, sensitive, and positive role models for children. They discussed how the perceptions of men working in childcare could evolve with increased visibility of males in this profession. These workers also emphasized that mixed-gender teams contributed to more successful work environments, with male care practitioners serving as valuable role models for children from fatherless families.

The Department of Education in the UK acknowledges this shortfall, expressing a desire for both male and female role models in early years provision and encouraging more men to choose careers in the early years sector (DfE, 2017). As exemplified by O'Sullivan and Chambers (2019), male teachers often actively engage with children in various ways, such as reading books while lying on the floor with them or facilitating small group or individual reading sessions during breakfast time, fostering positive role modelling.

Their practical conclusions encompassed the need to review and ensure that their practices reflected a balance of gender-neutral choices and play. They recommended ongoing observation and reflection within teams to identify and rectify potentially gendered language, particularly in interactions with children. They also aimed to ensure that all activities were child-led and that personal care and sleep routines were managed by all practitioners. They expressed concerns that personal values and beliefs could unconsciously influence behaviour, for instance, labelling play activities as gender-specific. Lastly, O'Sullivan and Chambers (2019) recognised the potential for male practitioners to be perceived as novelties or tokens within the setting.

Gender stereotypes can have adverse effects on both children and adults as they rely on assumptions, impose limitations, perpetuate inequality, and reinforce ideas about behaviour and culture. They contribute to the construction of concepts of masculinity and femininity, influencing children's roles within society. Approaching early childhood education with a gender equality perspective involves collaboration with families and stakeholders to empower children to reach their aspirations, which, in turn, impacts their future choices (Blakemore et al. 2008).

The Challenge of Increasing the Number of Male Practitioners in Early Childhood

Gender equality and quality education are linked as a priority through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations 2015). Children's

identity, development and learning are constructed on what they see and the experience around them supporting the importance of the environment which includes the practitioner role (Culhane and Bazeley, 2019).

Children need to explore and develop their sense of identity, and this can have different meanings depending on their experience and age. Social identity, the feeling of belonging and acceptance underpins inclusive practice. How someone feels concerning the level of belonging in their family, peer group and wider society can heavily impact a child's sense of self (Raburu, 2015; Branje et al., 2021). Their sense of self develops and evolves throughout their lives, manipulated by the experiences and challenges they face (Branje et al., 2021). Characteristics of Identity development arise within the dynamic and occasionally contentious social and cultural environments. Personal identity is formed at a very early stage of life through relationships and attachments and is individual and unique to each person, including self-image and self-esteem. However, in turn, this can influence the construction of expectations, values, beliefs and biases carried through life. Bowlby supported this narrative by suggesting that, an individual's Internal Working Models (IWMs) of attachment are built on their social experiences (Pierrehumbert et al, 2009).

When looking into gender in early childhood experiences it is impossible to ignore the gender imbalance in the workforce (Sousa and Moss, 2022). Men are a crucial part of developing children's identity in those early years, particularly in boys. Friedrich Froebel recognised the importance of a mixed-gender workforce to support children and tried to implement this when he opened his first kindergartens. He believed that men and women would complement each other with their different approaches towards the education of the very young (Rabe-Kleberg, 2003). Male practitioners as role models for young children can play a vital role for boys and girls where a male is not present in their lives (Rohrmann, 2020). For early childhood, this can equate to the importance of gender equality for the practitioners in the setting. Gender inequality in the Early Childhood sector has long been acknowledged with The European Commission Network (Childcare) setting one of its targets as "20 per cent of staff employed in collective services should be men" (1996: 24) which has still not yet been achieved. Perkins et al. (2019) recognised that 17 of the 27 European member states, male workers represent under one per cent of the workforce. However, the highest number of male practitioners was recorded in Norway and Denmark at 15% with a further 10% holding assistant positions (Eurostat, 2014). Russell (2020) suggests an average of just 3.2% male early childhood practitioners across Europe.

Van Laere et al. (2014) suggest that the focus in Norway on outdoor play and embracing the use of the natural environment suggests a reason why there are more male practitioners in their kindergartens. Rohrmann (2020) believed that men are often drawn to stereo-typical tasks within the Early

Childhood setting, e.g., forest schools, gross motor play, silly play or handicraft activities. Societies' attitudes towards male practitioners are rooted in the diverse and often contradictory assumptions about the significance of gender equality in early childhood, the male role in children's gendered development, and the very "nature" of men and women. Portraying male practitioners as less nurturing in an ideology that reflects male stereotypes has begun to form discourse that challenges this narrative (Potter et al., 2012).

Perkins et al. (2019) concluded that although stereotypical biases do exist particularly among women, they found some men had experienced a feeling of not belonging in the setting. Nonetheless, raising awareness with training and CPD opportunities ensures children begin to see a balance. Warin (2017) suggests an introduction of gender sensitivity training which emphasises gender flexibility, and the ability to critique gender to embed a competent system that supports gender diversity. Perkins et al. (2019) acknowledged that countries in Europe are making significant improvements in the diversification of their early years' workforce, but this may take time and has many other barriers to address for men and women such as pay, funding and professional identity. According to Rohrmann (2020), as equality for women in society improves, particularly for early childhood educators, alternative interpretations begin to emerge and evolve. By supporting a gender-flexible environment, where stereotypes are challenged, and staff consciously avoid biased gendered language, practices can improve (Josephidou, 2020). This does not mean that practitioners should adopt the passive approach (gender blindness), refuse to acknowledge gender (gender denial), or have a gender-free environment as these perspectives contradict the ethos of a child-centred curriculum (Josephidou, 2020). Nevertheless, the wider societal bias may take much longer to address but change has to start somewhere, the farther-figure narrative has come a long way in recent years which can be supported by the evolving ideology of the caring and supportive male practitioner. Equality of a mixed-gender workforce could in turn potentially have a positive impact on professional identity and pay conditions across the sector.

In our sociocultural role as educators, we must give young children the finest life opportunities possible, free from outdated gender norms. Because the term "gender" implies a common set of traits and qualities that are both masculine and feminine, we must be mindful of how we use it. It is not only about gender; it is also about how we use this discussion to take into account children's knowledge of inclusivity in all its forms. Young children should see representations of our diverse society in their nurseries.

Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care

Knowles (1978) defined pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children. According to Learning and Teaching Scotland (2005), pedagogy is currently

about learning, teaching and development, influenced by the cultural, social and political values and principles we have for children and underpinned by a strong theoretical and practical base. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002: 28) defined pedagogy as "that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment."

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has been viewed and considered a feminine profession for a long time all over the world. It was from primary education onwards that men were part of the educational system. Timmerman and Schreuder (2008: 2) explained that ECE "was the domain of low-paid women and volunteers" before 1990s. Therefore, in the Netherlands "national and local policy did not pay much attention and money to ECE, even though most toddlers went to playgroups and the need for daycare centers was rising dramatically." However, in the last thirty years, ECEC has gained its own rightful place on the public agenda, policies and legislation, although it is still predominantly a female domain. The cultural bias dominated the public discourse until recently and it was based on "the assumption that being a woman is a natural and sufficient qualification for caring for children."

Warin et al. (2021) analysed the findings of the Gender Early Years Education project, a research conducted in England between 2018 and 2020, which aimed to examine the recruitment, support and retention of male teachers within early years education (EYE). Although the study aimed to highlight the ways in which a more gender diverse workforce in the sector could be achieved, the findings were disseminated by the authors by looking at the historical data regarding the number of men in early education and care. Thus, they started from the question: "Has there ever been a time when men occupied a greater role in early years education?" (p. 872). The authors answered by citing Burn and Pratt-Adams (2015: 15) who researched the topic of men teaching children, covering ages 3–13, in England sustaining: "At the start of the 19th century, the first infant school teachers were radical young men who aimed to change society." The work of Robert Owen who set up an infant school in 1817 for the children of his factory workers was also used as evidence in supporting the role of men educators in the early 19th century. The influential Victorian Infant School Movement (Warin et al., 2021: 872) changed the rapport of gender in ECE, due to "essentialist discourses of men's and women's 'natural' aptitudes to reproduce an idealised model of the heterosexual family within the public world of the infant school." The consequences of this were to be observed by the middle of 19th century, when the male presence in the early education sector was no longer in evidence.

In recent years, in England the male early years workforce represented 2% (Wright and Brownhill, 2018: 21), this "stubborn" resistance contradicting the general view of the world that is desired to become more gender sensitive and inclusive. All the discussions revolve on gender workforce, however, the most important aspect should be how men influence and support early childhood education and care.

Male Educators and Pedagogy

Huber and Traxl (2018: 454) conducted a pilot study on the effects of male ECEC educators on children. The aim of the study was to collect the first differentiated evidence of possible 'gender specific' effects of mixed-gender and female-only educator teams in Austrian ECEC settings, by observing the concrete, every day, reciprocal interactional practices of the educators with children (Rohrmann and Brody, 2015).

The Austrian W-INN pilot study, carried out between 2010 and 2012, used a cross-sectional mixed-methods design (video-based observations and questionnaires) to research possible pedagogical differences and similarities between male and female educators, and their impact on boys' and girls' behaviour in early childhood education institutions. Ten Austrian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) groups were recruited: 5 female-only and 5 mixed-gender teams of educators, 30 children (15 boys, 15 girls) aged 4–6 (Huber & Traxl, 2018).

The data on educational dimensions revealed that male and female educators hardly differ – the exception being that men are significantly more permissive. Mixed-gender teams produce significantly greater social mobility among children than female-only teams do.

According to the study there are some differences and similarities in the way children reacted to the male and female educators as follows:

- Girls react less obviously to an educator's gender;
- Boys are drawn significantly more frequently to a man in the ECEC team;
- Boys tend to display introvert behaviour in female educator group, but a strong extrovert behaviour in male educator group;
- Girls distribute contact behaviour rather evenly between male and female educators;
- Boys' contact behaviour is more predominant towards male educators rather than female educators. (Adapted and cited from Huber & Truxl, 2018).

Huber and Truxl (2018: 466) explained that the study demonstrated there is "clear gender-specific effects between educators and children," although, it "cannot yet conclusively clarify why exactly this 'man-boy effect' occurs." One possible explanation can be the absence of male figures in everyday life

of children, that leads to conferring the male educators "special" or "exotic" status, thus becoming more attractive for the children.

The conclusion of the pilot study was "that boys have a fundamental need for same-gender exchange and identification." Children perceive the educators as role models. However, Brownhill (2010) sustained that there was a "lack of consensus on what is a role model, as this could be male and female, and to be mindful of the 'unreported negative impact' that role models can have on children's lives" (Mistry and Sood, 2015: 121). Having a clear understanding of the role of male and female educators in the ECEC education would lead to better outcomes for children and a more consistent representation of male practitioners in the early years sector.

The studies analysed throughout this article demonstrated the importance of male educators for both boys and girls which can be explained by the archetype of the traditional family still dominant in our societies. The ECEC would benefit from equal representation of both male and female educators, however, for this to be attained, a better pay scale and overcoming stereotyping the profession are among the essential few conditions.

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Raising Awareness on Gender Issues in Higher Education: A Pilot Intervention in EFL Teacher Training from Spain

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ABSTRACT. There are biases and discriminations in relation to gender identity and sexual orientation issues in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, either through outdated and sexist materials or even teacher discourse and beliefs, as, according to several studies, teachers unconsciously transmit their negative attitudes and stereotypes to their students. As it has been proven by different studies, conducting training for teachers and future teachers with respect to non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities brings positive results. Thus, this paper proposes a pilot classroom intervention designed to train pre-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) from the Bachelor's degree in Education Studies and the Master's degree in Teaching Secondary School, enrolled at the University of Burgos, Spain, during the academic year 2020-2021. The results of the intervention reveal the necessity of raising future teachers' awareness on the different non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities, in order to create more inclusive classes for all students and teachers.

Keywords: teacher training; gender; sexual orientations; awareness; prospective teachers of English; EFL

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1. Introduction

The educational system perpetuates the status quo by privileging a particular class, race, gender, and sexual orientation, while overlooking, silencing, or even stigmatising what is considered non-normative. It is necessary to build an education of quality for everybody, where all students are included in the educational discourse, regardless of their personal characteristics. Therefore, it is imperative that classrooms are built on the democratic principles of equity, solidarity, justice, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, freedom, and respect for differences (Forteza, 2011: 141). For a country to be truly democratic, it should address its minorities and strive for their full participation in society (CIE, 2008). This requires inclusive education that responds to the needs of all students, contributing to the effective inclusion of individuals and groups within society at large (UNESCO, 2005, cited by González and Martín, 2014: 13).

The English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class and the education system in general influence individuals, serving as a space that shapes, socialises, sets rules and guidelines for the behaviour of its members and presents implicit rules through the hidden curriculum, which encompasses all the daily interactions that occur in the classroom between teachers and students, transmitting knowledge and values that are not explicitly taught (Hernández, 2011: 125). Thus, as it typically covers current topics and introduces a new culture, it plays a crucial role in representing minorities.

However, within the field of EFL teaching, there are still biological and dualistic conceptions of gender which generalise and exaggerate differences between women and men, ignoring the social, cultural, and situational forces that shape gender categories, relationships, and learning outcomes (Sunderland, 2000). Additionally, this view does not consider the fact that not everyone defines themselves as strictly male or female, thereby excluding non-binary, trans, and other non-normative gender identities. Similarly, heteronormativity is perpetuated, assuming that heterosexuality is the only valid and normal sexual orientation in society, discriminating against anyone within the LGBTQ community, whether due to their sexual orientation or non-normative gender identity.

According to Reveco (2011b, cited by González and Martín, 2014: 15), to advance in a comprehensive education for young people, a gender perspective must be incorporated into educational practices and the curriculum. This implies teacher training that provides the knowledge and skills necessary to establish connections between the classroom and real life. In fact, at the 48th International Conference on Education by UNESCO, *Inclusive Education: The Path to the Future*, teacher training was identified as the key to the development of future generations (Acedo, 2011).

2. EFL Teacher Training

Making students feel represented in EFL classrooms cannot be entrusted to publishing houses or the administration; rather, it is the responsibility of the teaching staff to take the initiative in creating an inclusive class without the support of these institutions, as, according to Paiz (2015), publishing houses often do not create inclusive materials in order to maximize their profits by catering to a broad range of markets.

Given this reality, the creation of an inclusive class begins with a teaching staff who is committed to representing all students in their EFL classes, as they have the ethical responsibility to set aside their biases in order to maintain an objective assessment of students. However, various studies reveal that teachers' personal values and beliefs often manifest implicitly in their teaching, negatively impacting vulnerable groups, such as women and LGBTQ+ individuals, who often experience educational settings as hostile environments where they fall victim to abuse and harassment by students or even the teaching staff itself (Pilkington and D'Augelli, 1995, as cited by Morgan, 2003). According to Barozzi (2014), Guijarro Ojeda and Ruiz Cecilia (2013), Hall and Rodgers (2018) and Malo-Juvera (2015), among others, this is primarily due to a lack of knowledge on the subject, not out of malice.

Riggs (2011) concludes that the most effective way to reduce negative attitudes towards people with non-normative gender identities or sexual orientations is through the combination of cognitive and affective methods. Thus, various studies have been carried out, showing positive results following training sessions for teaching staff and future educators regarding non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities. This demonstrates how such training contributes to greater awareness among teaching staff regarding equality (Schneider and Tremble, 1986, as cited in Morgan, 2003; Elsbree and Wong, 2007; Kitchen and Bellini, 2012; Riggs et al., 2011, as cited by Malo-Juvera, 2015).

However, while the acronym LGBTQ is mentioned in previous interventions (in various different versions, depending on each work), most do not take into account gender identities belonging to the LGBTQ+ community such as transgender, bisexual or intersex individuals, thus solely focusing on homosexuality, i.e., the L and G in the LGBTQ+ acronym. Similarly, these interventions do not acknowledge that the female gender, in general, is a minority gender identity, as women, whether cis or trans, are oppressed by patriarchy, and, therefore, they face discrimination in educational settings in the same way as individuals of different races or abilities.

3. The Intervention

To mind the gap found in the literature, a new pilot in-person intervention was carried out in which all identities within the LGBTQ+ community were taken into account when training pre-service teachers on gender equality and sexual orientation issues in the EFL classroom.

3.1. Participants

A total of 115 future teaching professionals enrolled in both the Bachelor's degree in Education with a focus on English (future primary EFL teachers), and the Master's degree in English teaching (future secondary and adult EFL teachers) at the University of Burgos, Spain, participated in the study.

The participants were divided into three groups: third year of the Education bachelor's degree (46.1%), fourth year of the Education bachelor's degree (43.5%), and the Master's degree in teaching (10.4%). The groups were heterogeneous, with the majority being cisgender women (71.3%), aged between 18 and 30 (95.6%), heterosexual (85.2%), coming from cities with populations between 100,001 and 500,000 (60.9%), and having relationships with at least one person from the LGBTQ+ community (93.9%).

From them, an alarming number stated that they had never received any training related to gender identity (64.3%) or sexual orientations (53%). Furthermore, less than half (45.2%) had experienced discussions in class about sexual orientations other than heterosexuality, and 47.8% had never addressed topics related to sexual orientation in class. Over half (56.5%) had never addressed topics related to gender identity in their university classes. More than half responded that they had never been exposed to vocabulary related to sexual orientations (60.9%) or gender identities (80.9%) in English. Almost 60% of the participants had never learned about inclusive vocabulary regarding sexual orientations (59.1%) or gender identities (56.5%) in the classroom. Additionally, 49.6% stated that they had never been presented with didactic material representing all sexual orientations or gender identities (75.7%).

Moreover, the surveyed individuals expressed that they had not been taught to establish direct connections with real-world issues such as sexism (49.6%), homophobia (50.4%), or transphobia (71.3%). More than half affirmed that they had never been taught how to address homophobic (63.5%) or transphobic (74.5%) comments that might arise in their classrooms.

The data demonstrate the limited prior knowledge that the majority of pre-service teachers possessed before the present intervention.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments used to compile the data were two anonymous questionnaires (initial questionnaire and final questionnaire), a Likert scale, and a

short reflection text at the end of the first intervention, all anonymous. After the second intervention, participants were also asked to produce a written paper, which was not anonymous.

The written work in the second intervention was divided into two tasks: prospective primary EFL teachers were asked to design an inclusive teaching unit in a group of three or four people, while prospective secondary EFL teachers were asked to review an article on the topics covered in the individual interventions.

3.3. Methodology

This longitudinal practical intervention was divided into two sections: The initial interventions were split into five sessions. Each of the three aforementioned groups received a theoretical session lasting between an hour and a half to two hours. This initial intervention took place during the first semester of the 2020–2021 academic year at the University of Burgos, Spain, in November 2020. The subsequent interventions occurred four months later (in March 2021) with two out of the three groups that attended the first session, as the fourth-year primary Education students did not continue the EFL subject in the second semester. The approximate duration of the second intervention was also between an hour and a half to two hours.

These interventions were organized into three main steps: Firstly, the focus was on assessing the future teachers' level of knowledge on the topic, for which an anonymous questionnaire was filled out at the beginning of the first session. Secondly, the classroom experience was divided into an initial theoretical session of one and a half to two hours for each group and a second also theoretical session for two of the groups that participated in the first session. Finally, as an assessment, in the initial interventions, future teachers were asked to provide their opinions on the attended session; for the subsequent interventions, a final assessable assignment was requested.

For each session, Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) was followed: First, knowledge was presented to the trainees through the Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) method. Second, the participants had to explain the given information through debates. In the third stage, they had to interpret the information, in the form of individual and group activities, divided into initial activities – those that introduce the topic, development activities – where students assimilate new concepts, and compilation activities – which reinforce the learned knowledge. Next, they compared what they have learned with other information they already knew. And, finally, they formed their own opinion on the subject in the form of an assignment.

3.4. Contents

Regarding the content taught, it is based on both theory and practice. The theory focuses on queer theory and inclusive feminism, leading to a perspective

on gender and the concepts of gender and sex, followed by specific terms related to sexual orientations and non-normative gender identities (LGBTQ+). Inclusive vocabulary concerning gender and sexual orientation is taught. Within the gender context, the aim is to teach both non-sexist vocabulary and inclusive vocabulary for all non-normative gender identities.

In terms of practice, videos and practical examples are employed to demonstrate how to implement all the knowledge taught during the theory sessions. Practical exercises are also presented, allowing students to apply the acquired knowledge during the interventions.

4. Results

After the intervention, the majority of the participants (93.4%) stated that they felt they had acquired the necessary terminology to address sexual orientations and gender identities in English. Most declared feeling more familiar with inclusive vocabulary related to sexual orientations (92.1%) and gender identity (93.8%). 86.8% claimed to have sufficient material to introduce topics related to sexual orientations in their future English classes, and 75% stated the same regarding gender identities. Moreover, the majority asserted they felt capable of addressing issues such as sexism (90.8%), homophobia (92.1%), or transphobia (82.9%) in their future EFL classes. Likewise, most expressed confidence in addressing homophobic (85.5%) or transphobic (76.3%) comments.

Concerning participants' attitudes toward using non-normative content in their future English classes, before the intervention, only half of the future English teachers expressed that the topic of gender identities (53.4%) and sexual orientations (50%) had a place in English classes. However, after the initial intervention, the majority of participants agreed on the importance of presenting such topics in classrooms (76% and 72%).

A minority of future English teachers did not think perpetuating gender (7%) and sexual orientation (6.2%) stereotypes in the EFL was a concern before the intervention. However, after the first intervention, at least 5% of these individuals experienced a shift toward a more inclusive view of their future English class.

Regarding the use of inclusive materials in the classroom, a significant percentage disagreed with the use of inclusive texts with all gender identities (8.8%) and all sexual orientations (6.2%) before the intervention. In contrast, only 2.6% of participants continued to believe that presenting inclusive educational material with all gender identities was not appropriate.

Concerning the use of inclusive language regarding gender identity and sexual orientation, even before the intervention, over half of the future English teachers (59.6%) considered that using inclusive language regarding gender identities and sexual orientations could help create a positive

atmosphere in the class. After the initial intervention, this number increased to 77.3%, with only one person (1.3%) disagreeing with this statement.

Similarly, when asked about the importance of teaching this inclusive language for the inclusion of all students, over half (69.3%) supported this assertion, while after the intervention, this percentage increased to 93.3% support. On the other hand, before the intervention, only 18.4% stated that words expressing a specific gender (such as inclusive pronouns) should be used only when strictly necessary and relevant to the context. In contrast, after the intervention, half of these participants (52%) agreed with this statement.

Finally, regarding the impact that using inclusive language regarding gender identities and sexual orientations could have on student education, before the intervention, over half (60.5%) declared that this impact would be very positive. After the intervention, it was the majority of future English teachers (90.7%) who agreed that using this type of inclusive language would be positive for their future students. Moreover, none of the participants thought the impact could be negative. 39% affirmed they would use inclusive language in their future English classes to avoid sexism and the misrepresentation of gender or non-normative sexual minorities. They also emphasized that it is "very important to address these issues with boys and girls from an early age, as it is the stage where they can acquire the most information and change it for a better world."

On the other hand, the results of the questionnaire conducted four months after the initial intervention show that a percentage of students did not recall several key concepts necessary for conducting inclusive teaching on topics of gender identities and non-normative sexual orientations that were covered during the first intervention: Firstly, more than half of the students (58.53%) did not remember the difference between the concepts of sex and gender. 24.39% did not know the definition of the word "straight," a minority was unfamiliar with the definition of "homosexual" (17.07%) or "non-binary" (14.63%), and 36.58% were unaware of the meaning of "intersex." Finally, it is noteworthy that a surprising 17.07% did not remember that the community of individuals with a gender identity or sexual orientation different from what society considers the norm is the LGBTQ+ community.

Finally, the results of the final evaluation of the Primary Education bachelor's degree groups show that, out of a total of 13 working groups, only 4 managed to create a truly inclusive teaching unit regarding gender identities and sexual orientations. However, the results of the final evaluation of the Secondary Education Master's degree group show that, in general, they perceive this topic as highly relevant. They suggest that it should be taught in university classes, in addition to emphasizing their intention and readiness to include these topics in their future English classes.

5. Conclusions

After arguing for the need to create more inclusive classrooms where students can stop being harassed for their non-normative gender identity or sexual orientation, whether they are women or individuals from the LGBTQ+ community, this paper aims to contribute to the body of training interventions for future EFL teachers regarding the diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations.

Following the implementation of this pilot intervention, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of future English teachers (93.3%) reaffirmed the importance of teaching inclusive language related to gender identities and sexual orientations throughout their formal learning period in university, both in the Teaching degree and the Teaching Master's program, after the initial intervention.

However, due to the longitudinal nature of the intervention, it was observed that an isolated four-hour intervention is not sufficient to achieve the goal of eliminating the ignorance of future teachers regarding gender identity and sexual orientation issues to create more inclusive classrooms. For the training to be effective it would be necessary, on one hand, more hours of training, and on the other hand, a specific training addressing these issues in a comprehensive and continuous manner throughout their academic training.

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Patriarchal Intolerance in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*

Andreea Ionescu*

ABSTRACT. Elif Shafak, a best-selling novelist of Turkish origin, once self-declared bisexual, is controversial today in her motherland, as she questions the patriarchal culture and all its traditions. In her latest novel, Shafak speaks about migration and relocation, and chooses to include two homosexual characters facing the intolerance of the islanders from the two communities in Cyprus' divided capital – Nicosia. The two male characters are not only in a love affair, but they also belong to politically opposing nationalities: Greek and Turkish. Shafak's talent makes the story to be very meaningful for our complex existences and the next generations to come.

Keywords: Turkish-English literature; gender identity; political conflict; brother enemies; personal trauma

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Patriarchal Intolerance in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*

Elif Shafak by herself is a controversial writer in Turkey as she writes her novels in English, which is seen as a "cultural betrayal" (Shafak, "*Critical Outtakes*"[1]), but also because she has declared herself bisexual in a powerful TED Talk[2] about diversity, thus losing the more traditional readers in a still patriarchal society (Turkey nowadays), and yet gaining more open-minded readers around the world.

Her latest novel, *The Island of Missing Trees*, that appeared in August 2021, speaks about migration and relocation, being dedicated to all the "immigrants and exiles everywhere, the uprooted, the re-rooted, the root-less", but also to the "trees we left behind, rooted in our memories". The book is full of botanic and bird imagery as Shafak wants to present the beauty of the island Cyprus at the far end of the Mediterranean Sea in contrast with the terrible bloodsheds that take place on this island in 1974 when part of the book plot is set. Cyprus had been a land with "golden beaches, turquoise waters, lucid skies, but once the island was riven into two pieces – the north and the south, it became a no man's land" (Shafak, p. 3).

Reading the novel, one would say that the very beautiful depictions of the island and the remembrance of the Cyprus' recent history are like good advertising, making the readers immediately want to hop on a plane or ferry to visit the island on their next holiday, yet the novel is a novel of love: love for one's motherland, heterosexual love between a Turk and a Greek and homosexual love between a Turk and a Greek.

The novel's main narrative is Defne and Kostas Kazantzakis' story, two islanders, who fall in love with each other in the year 1974, when they are teenagers and when Cyprus is torn apart by the internecine conflicts between the Greek and Turkish communities, with "Nicosia, the only divided capital in the world" (Shafak, p. 3). After the partition, political attempts are made by both parties – the Turkish and the Greek – to construe the others as an alien group, but, in reality, both sides have lived on the same spot for several hundred years since the full-scale Ottoman conquest from the 16th century, when the Turkish community started to be formed.

The regional and internal conflicts have roots deep in the past, reflecting the survival in a small geographical space of separate identities derived from long-past clashes. Here, speaking about dissensions and their intensity in small geographical spaces such as Cyprus, we could consider the words of Garrett Fitzgerald, who said that: "United States and Russia, which are engaged in space exploration, both competitive and co-operative, may, for example, find it easier to arrive at a sense of sharing an interest in common destiny than Greeks and Turks in Cyprus, or Israelis and Arabs in Palestine, especially as the smaller the land space in which people with different identities seek to assert themselves, the more intense the conflict between them" (Mendus, p. 19).

Also, speaking about the bloody conflicts between the Turkish and Greek communities from Cyprus, we can draw attention to what Michael Ignatieff calls "the Cain and Abel Syndrome" when he talks about the case of Northern Ireland: the "ironic fact that intolerance between brothers is often stronger than that between strangers" (Mendus, p. 1). As such "the Cain and Abel Syndrome" can be applied as well to the Turkish and Greek communities from Cyprus, because although they are ethnically and religiously different, geographically they are close brothers, being inhabitants of the same beautiful island. Despite the antagonism between the Turkish and Greek communities from Cyprus, the two antagonists have been living together for so long that they are "brother enemies". (It is then no coincidence that when Kostas returns to Cyprus in the early 2000s, the Turkish taxi driver calls him "brother".) Yet, in her novel, Elif Shafak goes even further and instead of unveiling us "brother enemies," presents us two couples affectionately in love. As if the main characters Defne and Kostas' heterosexual love story is not enough, Shafak introduces us to another unusual love story – the homosexual love story between the Turk Yusuf and the Greek Yiorgos.

Thus, in the summer of 1974, Defne and Kostas are two teenagers who chose to hide from the disapproving eyes of their parents, relatives, and neighbors, who, especially due to the separation of the two communities, cannot agree with a relationship between a Greek boy and a Turkish girl. The two secretive lovers meet late at night, "at a bend in the road by an ancient olive tree" (Shafak, p. 76), because the author tells us that "an island, large or small, was filled with eyes watching from behind every latticed window, every crack in the wall, and through every red-tailed hawk that rose high on the wind – an unblinking, raptor gaze." (Shafak, p. 78)

Fully aware of the danger of being seen with Defne, Kostas finds a *safe place* for meeting her – a lovely popular tavern called The Happy Fig. The name of the tavern comes from the beautiful fig tree or *ficus carica* that stands tall in the middle of the tavern. The author tells us that "in this very spot (The Happy Fig Tavern) was offered the best food, the best music, the best wine and the best dessert, specialty of the house – oven-roasted figs with honey and aniseed ice cream. But there was something else to the place, too, so said its regular customers: it made one forget, even for just a few hours, the world outside and its immoderate sorrows" (Shafak, p. 54). The very pleasant atmosphere from the Happy Fig Tavern attracts Turkish and Greek alike, and also many tourists and even the British soldiers, who have come to restore peace on the island. At the Happy Fig Tavern we also encounter two men: Yusuf who is Turkish and Muslim and Yiorgos who is Greek and Christian, and whose tragic story is closely connected to that of Defne and Kostas.

In the summer of 1974, every week, Kostas sells his mother's stuff (carob jam and *melitzanaki glyko*[3]) to the two owners of The Happy Fig Tavern,

Yusuf and Yiorgos, and in a very short time becomes their friend. Kostas describes the two men as "very nice people – complete opposites, though. One is incurably chatty, always telling some story or joke. The other is quiet. It takes a while to get to know him. […] They are honest and hardworking, they mind their own business. Imagine they meet all sorts of people, but never gossip about anyone. I like that about them" (Shafak, p. 83). The two men share a dangerous secret – they are in love with each other and, like Defne and Kostas, they choose to hide their love from the intruding eyes of the islanders. In fact, Yusuf and Yiorgos are bound to hide their love because they are living in a totally patriarchal society, which sees homosexual love as a threat to the ways in which people's lives and institutions are organized. So, when Kostas accidentally discovers their love affair, he is instantly afraid that the homosexual ménage of his two friends will arouse hostile comment and reaction, because he too is fully aware of the fact that they are all living in a patriarchal society:

> Kostas took a step back. Suddenly dizzy, he swallowed hard. In his mouth was the taste of dust and sun-baked stone. As quietly as he could, he walked away, blood pounding in his ears. His thoughts fractured into more thoughts and those into newer ones, so that there was no way he could tell how he felt right now. He had spent so much time with these two men, day in, day out, and yet it had never occurred to him they could be more than business partners. […] He now realized that Yusuf and Yiorgos could be in greater danger than he and Defne had ever been. God knew there were enough people on this island who would hate to see a Turk and a Greek involved romantically, but the number of those people probably quadrupled if the couple in question were gay (Shafak, p. 152).

Kostas immediately feels the larger patriarchal society is so adamantly adversarial towards his two gay friends, because he instinctively knows that the world in which they are all living is male dominated, male identified, male centered and organized around an obsession with control.

Here, if we think about patriarchal societies, we could consider the words of Allan G. Johnson from his famous book – *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*:

> […] patriarchy is like a fire burning deep underground, spreading and burning into the Earth for thousands of years. We notice what breaks through the surface and may think that's all there is. We may focus on not getting burned in the moment even though we can sense something larger and deeper down below. But if we're serious about change, we have to wake up to the fact that there's more going on than gendered brushfires springing up in episodes of miscommunication, harassment, discrimination, violence, and

> all the other day-to-day occurrences that add up to life under patriarchy. If we're serious about this, we've got to dig, preferably with plenty of company and with a full appreciation of the fact that although we didn't start the fire, it belongs to us now (Johnson, p. 129).

Through the story of Yusuf and Yiorgos, Shafak reveals first the intolerance of a patriarchal society, where a homosexual love story is something unheard of and, at the same time, something that must be immediately eradicated and, secondly, an ethnic-religious intolerance of the two separated communities that cannot allow their members to mingle. However, the patriarchal intolerance to homosexual love mentioned above is more powerful than the ethnic-religious intolerance, or at least, this is what we understand from Kostas' reaction, when he discovers the secret relationship between Yusuf and Yiorgos, as well as from the events that follow: the islanders respond with violence and first they warn the gay couple with an anonymous message, and then with a bomb that almost destroys The Happy Fig Tavern. This patriarchal intolerance that Shafak so revelatory portrays in the novel with the help of her two gay characters cuts like a serrated knife and has a very tragic ending for Yusuf and Yiorgos, who are eventually kidnapped, beaten and murdered. Yusuf and Yiorgos' death is closely related with the fear of the patriarchal community, as intolerance goes hand in hand with fear, as Garrett Fitzgerald says:

> intolerance rarely remains entirely one-sided. The fear that induces intolerance will often take the form of concrete actions directed against the feared community, and that action may in turn induce fear, and then intolerance, on the part of the feared community itself. (Mendus, p. 20) Fitzgerald continues by saying that 'an imaginative leap is required by each side. Each side must seek to understand, and to show understading of, the other's fears' (Mendus, p. 22).

Allan G. Johnson tells us the same thing about feelings of fear and rage provoked by gays and lesbians who "challenge basic patriarchal assumptions and arrangements":

> […] femininity and masculinity are powerful weapons of social control that help maintain the patriarchal order. The truth of this is reflected in how inconsistently and unevenly they are applied, for it is primarily when someone threatens patriarchy and its core values that they're invoked. […] when appearance or behavior raises questions about the male-identified, male-dominated, and male-centered nature of patriarchy, the heavy cultural artillery comes rolling out and gender identities get attacked left and right. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the treatment of gays and lesbians, much of whose persecution and oppression has relatively

> little to do with sexual behavior and orientation per se. Instead, they are attacked because they undermine the patriarchal model that defines maleness in sexual terms. A key aspect of male privilege and women's oppression is rooted in heterosexual relations that subordinate women to men's right to sexual access and control. Gay men undermine this by not relating to women in this way, as do lesbians who choose women rather than men as sexual partners. By the examples set by their own lives, lesbians and gays challenge basic patriarchal assumptions and arrangements. In the process, they often provoke feelings of fear, betrayal, and rage in men who depend on male solidarity and female acquiescence in order to feel secure in themselves and their privilege (Johnson, p. 94).

In the light of the above, Yusuf and Yiorgos are seen as a threat and, for this reason, are killed with cold blood. Shafak, with the humanized voice of the fig tree, tells us that they are thrown into a fountain well "after being chained first to each other, then to a three-litre olive oil tin filled with concrete to ensure they will never surface again" (Shafak, p. 5).

For Defne and Kostas, Yusuf and Yiorgos' death is a personal trauma that they carry with them throughout their lives, especially if we think that Yusuf and Yiorgos are killed when trying to protect Defne, who is about to have an abortion done by Doctor Norman in The Happy Fig Tavern. Thus, Shafak confers great significance to the death of these two gay characters, who do not die in vain, but die while defending their dear friend.

It is very interesting how Shafak makes the fig tree to be the most important character of the novel, by giving it a voice of its own. Thus, the fig tree from the tavern tells many stories, but, most importantly, the story of Yusuf's and Yiorgos' tragic end. It is from this fig tree that we find out that over the years, when Defne is already a grown up and working for the Commission on Missing Persons, her only desire is to dig up the bones of her beloved friends, Yusuf and Yiorgos and offer them a proper burial, which eventually happens. Making use of a beautiful metaphor, and again with the help of the fig tree, Shafak tells us that one day Yusuf and Yiorgos corpses are found as "No captivity is forever. Someday the water will rust away the metal and the chains will snap, setting free the two corpses that will ascend towards the blissful blue of the sky overhead, at first slowly, then fast and frantic, like pearl divers gasping for air. Sooner or later, this old, dilapidated well on that lonely, beautiful island at the far end of the Mediterranean Sea will collapse on itself and its secret will rise to the surface, as every secret is bound to do in the end" (Shafak, p. 5).

As shown so far, in *The Island of Missing Trees*, Shafak presents a gay love story that is suppressed by a patriarchal society gone mad in a time of ethnic-religious unrest, when *fear and chaos reign*, but, most importantly, the novel speaks about hope for new beginnings, as well as about the legacy

that we pass on to our children. Although Yusuf and Yiorgos end up tragically, Defne and Kostas, whose love story is deemed impossible by the two separated communities, are reunited over many years, when Kostas returns on the island as a botanist and finds Defne working for the Commission. Defne and Kostas continue their love in a new place, migrating to a new island – England, taking with them hidden inside a black leather suitcase a piece of their motherland – a small twig of the *ficus carica* from the now deserted The Happy Fig Tavern. The fig tree in Defne and Kostas' new house from London is the only connection that they have with their native island, with their longtime missing dear friends Yusuf and Yiorgos and also the only connection that their daughter Ada has with her parents' homeland, as Defne and Kostas have never spoken about it, making it to be a big mystery for Ada. Even in England, they still carry with them the scars of the left behind patriarchal island through the *ficus carica* that Kostas has planted in his back garden. In the novel, Shafak very beautifully says that "the places where we were born are the shape of our lives, even when we are away from them. Especially then" (Shafak, p. 33).

By a meaningful portrayal of Defne and Kostas' life, as well as Yusuf and Yiorgos' sad story, Shafak reveals for the generations to come the pervasive dominance-and-control mentality that unfortunately can still be found in patriarchal societies from our recent history and that is destructive for both females and males. Especially by Yusuf and Yiorgos' story, Shafak also shows what terrible damage patriarchal culture does to gender relations and sexuality.

Although real history shows that the causes of intolerance cannot be eradicated, but only somehow mitigated, especially in the recent past years, Shafak tells through her characters (Defne and Kostas and Yusuf and Yiorgos) that the gulf between the two Cypriot communities is bridged by pure love. Making "an imaginative leap for a better world," as Garrett Fitzgerald says, Shafak builds a solid bridge between the two conflicting communities, with the help of these four characters.

As an ending to this short article on patriarchal intolerance, I invite you to reflect on what George Carey has wisely said about tolerance: "tolerance involves entering into the <strangeness> of others and feeling their pain" (Mendus, p. 53), and we have to discover that "<strangeness> does not necessarily mean <bad> but can be a different expression of <good>" (Mendus, p. 54).

NOTES

1. “It caused a lot of reaction and bitter criticism in Turkey when people heard I had started writing fiction in English”, admits Shafak in this interview, “people took it as a cultural betrayal.” Whereas, in her book, *Towards Turkish American Literature*, speaking also about Shafak, Elena Furlanetto affirms that „rather than supplanting the mother tongue, English provided Turkish American authors with <an alternative medium which guaranteed a wider readership> and a platform for the expression of a postnational identity. Besides, the use of English may be understood as central to the achievement of a cosmopolitan condition and global citizenship.” – Furlanetto, p. 42.

2. *The Revolutionary Power of Diverse Thought* was the title of her talk. It was part of a TEDGlobal event in New York City in September 2017.

3. Preserve made of baby aubergines (in Greek).

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Digital Clothing Try-on Apps, Augmented Reality Beautification Filters, and Artificial Intelligence-powered Mood Detectors in Body Image Disturbance

Sofia Bratu*

ABSTRACT. The aim of this systematic review is to synthesize and analyze augmented reality try-on lenses, 3D-rendered digital outfit, and artificial visual perception and deep-learning-based facial expression recognition systems. With increasing evidence of photo retouching apps, artificial intelligence-based speech synthesis and voice cloning, and 3D augmented reality try-on and multi-sensory perception technologies, there is an essential demand for comprehending whether context-aware emotion recognition and facial expression recognition technologies, augmented reality face filters, and deep learning and machine-based eye-tracking algorithms further visual imagery and representations. In this research, prior findings were cumulated indicating that generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on tools, digitally altered images, and 3D digital garment photorealistic simulations shape beauty ideal cultural constructions by use of cognitive and affective algorithms. A quantitative literature review of ProQuest, Scopus, and the Web of Science was carried out throughout February 2023, with search terms including "body image disturbance" + "digital clothing try-on apps," "augmented reality beautification filters," and "artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors." As research published between 2020 and 2022 was inspected, only 164 articles satisfied the eligibility criteria, and 18 mainly empirical sources were selected. Data visualization tools: Dimensions (bibliometric mapping) and VOSviewer (layout algorithms). Reporting quality assessment tool: PRISMA. Methodological quality assessment tools include: AXIS, Distiller SR, ROBIS, and SRDR.

Keywords: digital clothing; try-on app; augmented reality; beautification filter; artificial intelligence; mood detector; body image disturbance

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1. Introduction

Augmented reality face filters are pivotal in body image perception and concerns, body appearance dissatisfaction, and beauty ideal cultural constructions. Beauty filter algorithms require 3D digital garment photorealistic simulations, avatar makeup wearables, and artificial neural network-based neuromorphic computing systems. The purpose of my systematic review is to examine the recently published literature on digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors and integrate the insights it configures on body image disturbance. By analyzing the most recent (2020–2022) and significant (Web of Science, Scopus, and ProQuest) sources, my paper has attempted to prove that face retouching filters further gendered beauty ideals in terms of dysfunctional appearance beliefs, body image perception and dissatisfaction development, and body shape perceptions. The actuality and novelty of this study are articulated by addressing photo retouching apps, artificial intelligence-based speech synthesis and voice cloning, and 3D augmented reality try-on and multi-sensory perception technologies, that is an emerging topic involving much interest. My research problem is whether idealized beauty representations and images integrate negative mood and self-esteem, appearance-related dissatisfaction, and poor body image.

In this review, prior findings have been cumulated indicating that beauty apps and filters necessitate visual and haptic imagery, artificial sensory neural network systems, emotional sensing technologies, and deep learning-based virtual try-on. The identified gaps advance bio-inspired artificial perceptual and synthetic speech augmentation devices, deep learning-based multimodal emotion recognition and neurobiological computation technologies, and cognitive and affective algorithms. My main objective is to indicate that neuromorphic and bio-inspired computing systems, 3D virtual try-on and clothing simulation technologies, and spatial imagery processes articulate virtual bodily self-consciousness. This systematic review contributes to the literature on augmented reality try-on lenses, 3D-rendered digital outfit, and artificial visual perception and deep-learning-based facial expression recognition systems by clarifying that context-aware emotion recognition and facial expression recognition technologies, augmented reality face filters, and deep learning and machine-based eye-tracking algorithms further visual imagery and representations. This research endeavors to elucidate whether virtual makeover apps are instrumental in body image worry recognition, body shape perception and dissatisfaction, and appearance management behaviors. My contribution is by integrating research findings indicating that generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on tools, digitally altered images, and 3D digital garment photorealistic simulations shape beauty ideal cultural constructions by use of cognitive and affective algorithms.

2. Theoretical Overview of the Main Concepts

The manuscript is organized as following: theoretical overview (section 2), methodology (section 3), 3D virtual try-on and clothing simulation technologies shaping beauty filter-based appealing self-presentation, body image disturbance, and idealized online identities (section 4), digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors for visual imagery and representations (section 5), generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on tools, digitally altered images, and 3D digital garment photorealistic simulations articulating beauty ideal cultural constructions (section 6), discussion (section 7), synopsis of the main research outcomes (section 8), conclusions (section 9), limitations, implications, and further directions of research (section 10).

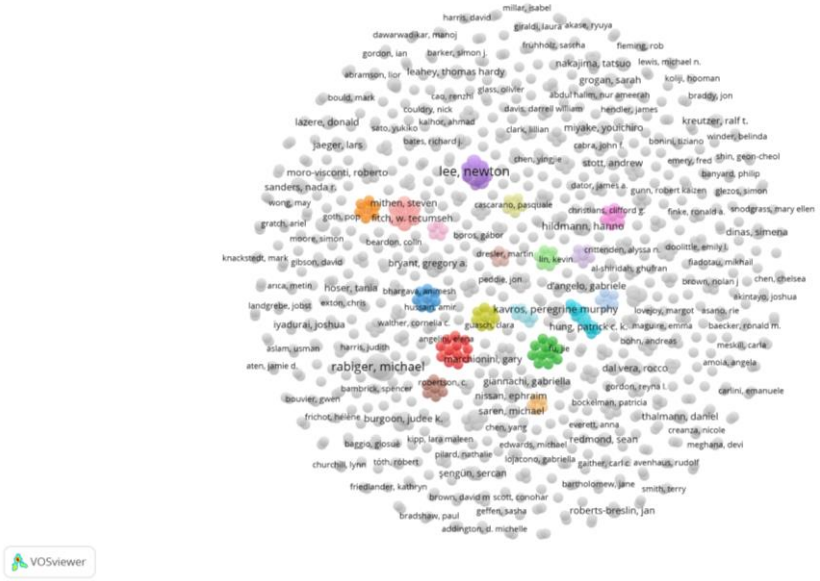
3. Methodology

A quantitative literature review of ProQuest, Scopus, and the Web of Science was carried out throughout February 2023, with search terms including "body image disturbance" + "digital clothing try-on apps," "augmented reality beautification filters," and "artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors." As research published between 2020 and 2022 was inspected, only 164 articles satisfied the eligibility criteria, and 18 mainly empirical sources were selected (Tables 1 and 2). Data visualization tools: Dimensions (bibliometric mapping) and VOSviewer (layout algorithms). Reporting quality assessment tool: PRISMA. Methodological quality assessment tools include: AXIS, Distiller SR, ROBIS, and SRDR (Figures 1–6).

Table 1 Topics and types of scientific products identified and selected.

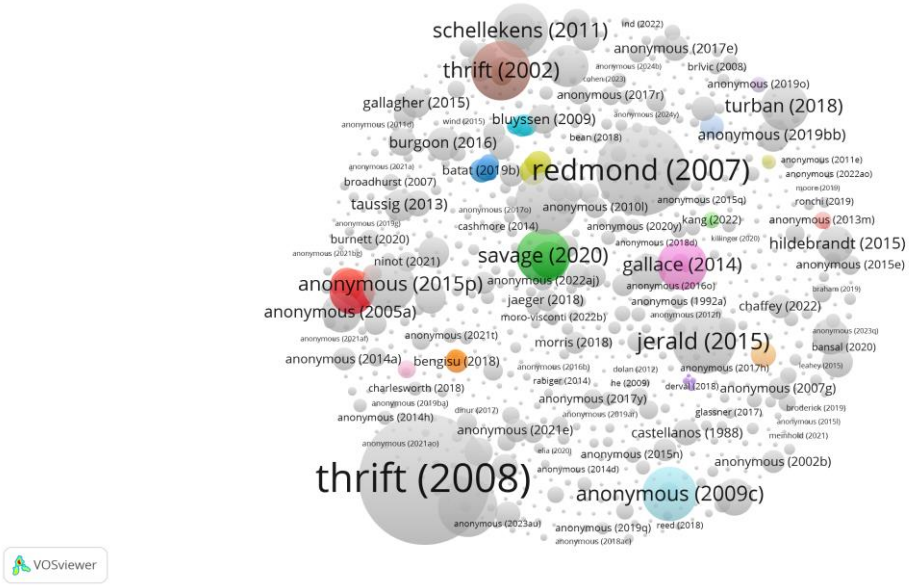
Topic	**Identified**	**Selected**
body image disturbance + digital clothing try-on apps	55	6
body image disturbance + augmented reality beautification filters	55	6
body image disturbance + artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors	54	6
Type of paper		
Original research	127	12
Review	23	6
Conference proceedings	11	0
Book	1	0
Editorial	2	0

Source: Processed by the author. Some topics overlap.



VOSviewer

Figure 1. VOSviewer mapping of digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors in body image disturbance regarding co-authorship.



VOSviewer

Figure 2. VOSviewer mapping of digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors in body image disturbance regarding citation.

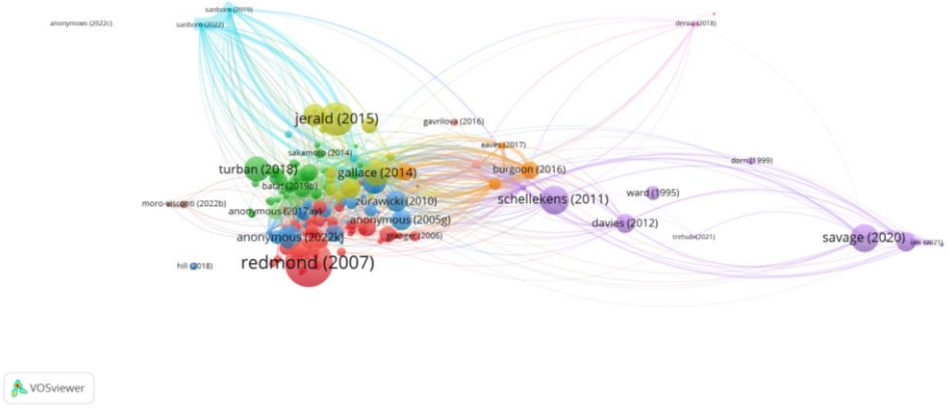


Figure 3. VOSviewer mapping of digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors in body image disturbance regarding bibliographic coupling.

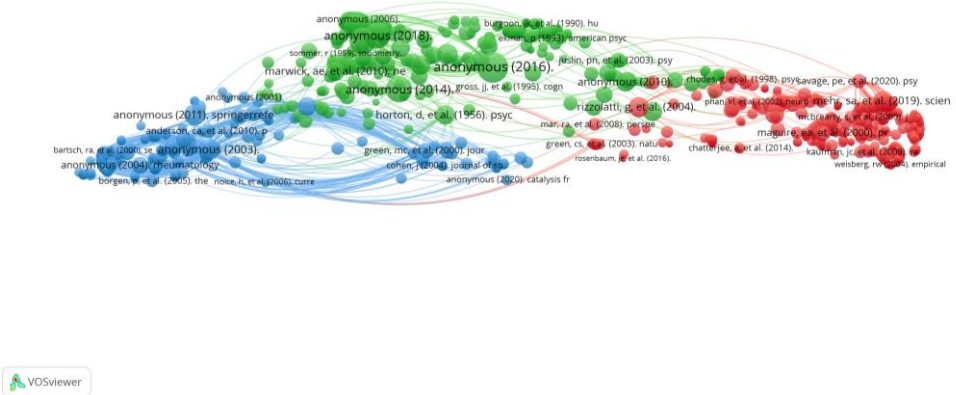


Figure 4. VOSviewer mapping of digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors in body image disturbance regarding co-citation.

Table 2 General synopsis of evidence as regards focus topics and descriptive outcomes (research findings)

Facial cues and expressions, synthetic image data augmentation, and deep-learning-based facial expression and motion-based gesture recognition systems configure digital twin-based detailed body shape representation and realistic digitally-rendered humans.	Barker, 2020; Morley, 2022; Vochozka et al., 2022
Real-time high accuracy voice analytics capabilities, augmented reality face filters, and body data-based generative artificial intelligence and tactile sensory neuromorphic computing technologies shape beauty filter-based appealing self-presentation, body image disturbance, and idealized online identities.	Carey, 2022; Ota and Nakano, 2021; Rowland, 2022
Photo retouching apps, artificial intelligence-based speech synthesis and voice cloning, and 3D augmented reality try-on and multi-sensory perception technologies optimize online visual self-presentation, physical appearance and attractiveness, and visual body processing mechanisms.	Eldaly and Mashaly, 2022; Palash et al., 2022; Yang, 2022
Generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on and realistic makeup simulation tools, eyewear frame digital twins, and 3D body tracking sensors assist augmented reality beauty apps and filters in personal body image management.	Frieiro et al., 2022; Rowland, 2022; Vochozka et al., 2022
Augmented reality try-on lenses, 3D-rendered digital outfit, and artificial visual perception and deep-learning-based facial expression recognition systems configure negative body image in terms of idealized appearance and imagery.	Carey, 2022; Golf-Papez et al., 2022; Morley, 2022
Appearance-focused social media use, perceived sociocultural pressures, and ideal beauty standards develop on digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors.	Carey, 2022; Lim and Bentley, 2022; Rowland, 2022
Bio-inspired artificial perceptual and synthetic speech augmentation devices, deep learning-based multimodal emotion recognition and neurobiological computation technologies, and cognitive and affective algorithms enable augmented reality technology-powered virtual try-ons.	Millière, 2022; Peng, 2020; Vochozka et al., 2022
Augmented reality face filters, virtual beauty try-ons, and digital beauty and facial emotion recognition technologies articulate body image issues in terms of shape and attractiveness, unrealistic physical appearance, and social values and beliefs.	Carey, 2022; Morikawa et al., 2021; Skov and Nadal, 2021
Affective computing and sentiment analysis with regard to physical appearance ideals, body dissatisfaction and shame, and social values and behaviors require emotion analytics and visual sentiment algorithms, neuromorphic and bio-inspired computing systems, and context-aware emotion recognition and virtual reality-based visual perception technologies.	Morley, 2022; Rowland, 2022; Swerzenski, 2021

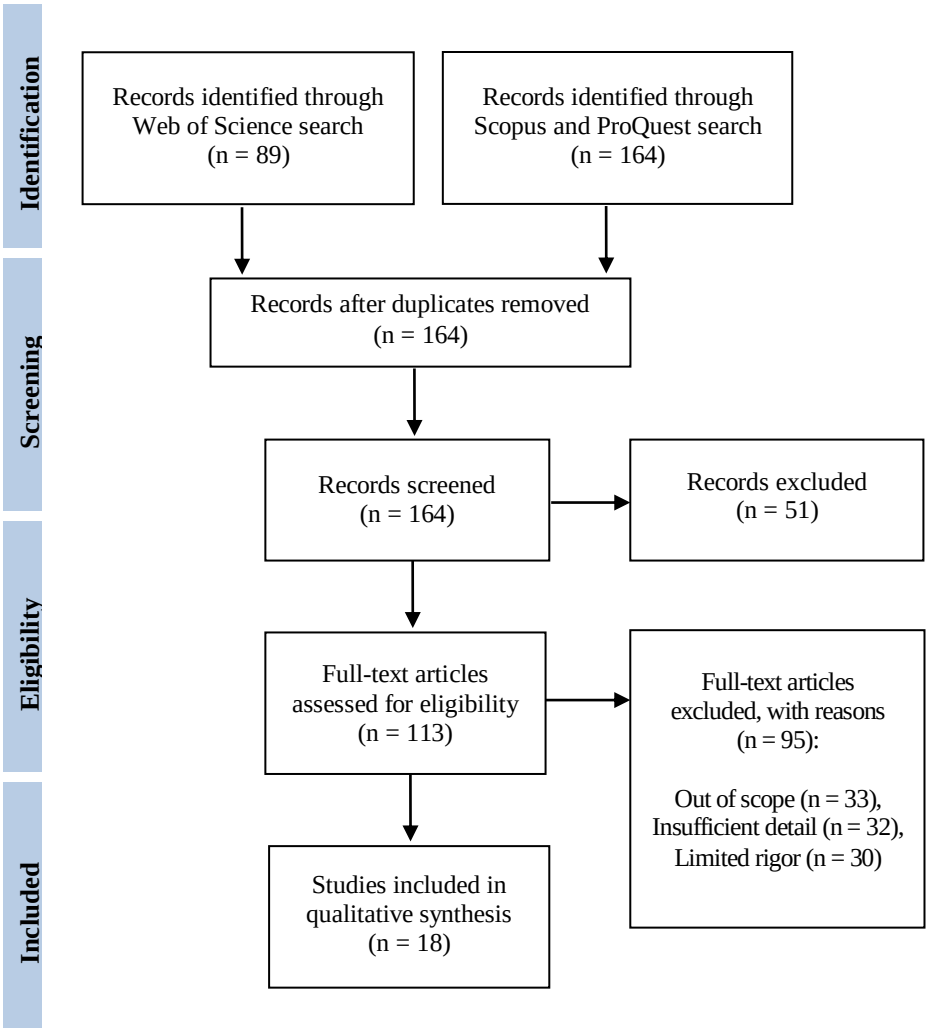


Figure 5 PRISMA flow diagram describing the search results and screening.

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) guidelines were used that ensure the literature review is comprehensive, transparent, and replicable. The flow diagram, produced by employing a Shiny app, presents the stream of evidence-based collected and processed data through the various steps of a systematic review, designing the amount of identified, included, and removed records, and the justifications for exclusions.
To ensure compliance with PRISMA guidelines, a citation software was used, and at each stage the inclusion or exclusion of articles was tracked by use of custom spreadsheet. Justification for the removal of ineligible articles was specified during the full-text screening and final selection.

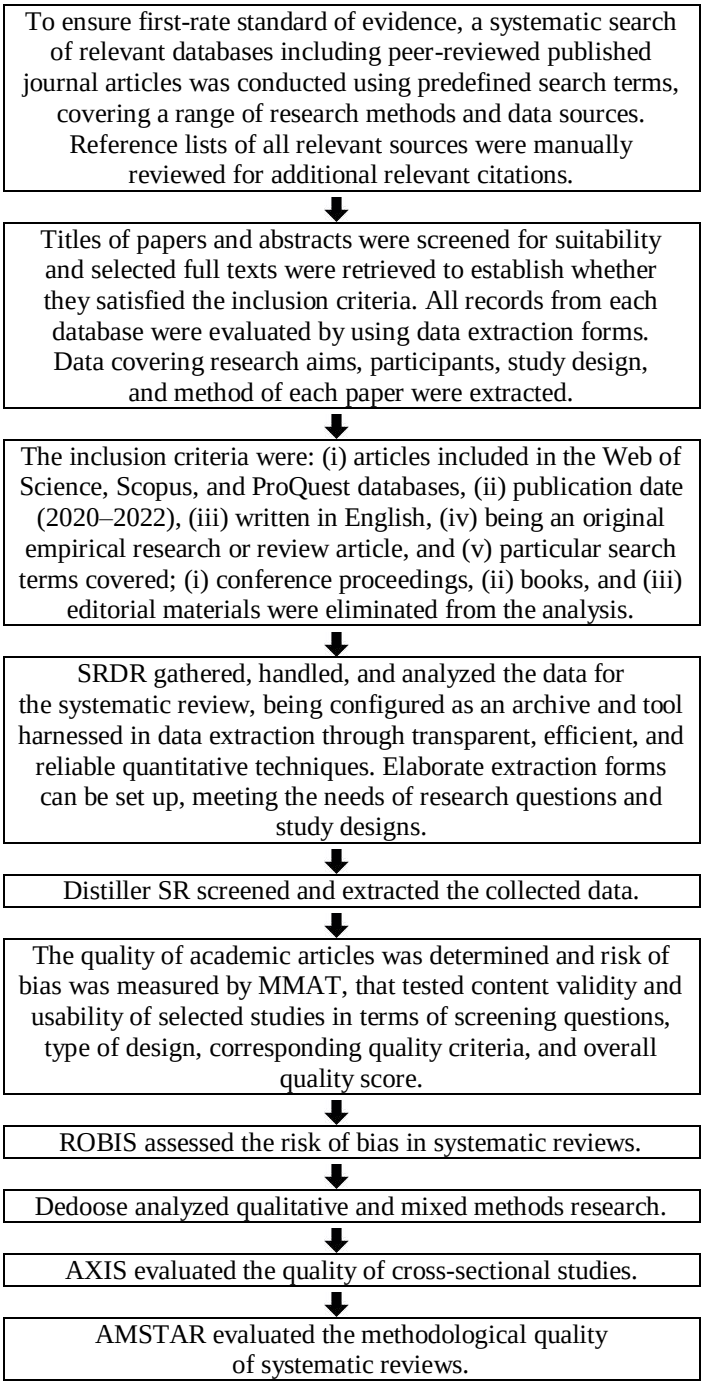


Figure 6 Screening and quality assessment tools

4. 3D Virtual Try-on and Clothing Simulation Technologies Shaping Beauty Filter-based Appealing Self-presentation, Body Image Disturbance, and Idealized Online Identities

Facial cues and expressions, synthetic image data augmentation, and deep-learning-based facial expression and motion-based gesture recognition systems (Barker, 2020; Morley, 2022; Vochozka et al., 2022) configure digital twin-based detailed body shape representation and realistic digitally-rendered humans. Neuromorphic and bio-inspired computing systems, 3D virtual try-on and clothing simulation technologies, and spatial imagery processes articulate virtual bodily self-consciousness.

Real-time high accuracy voice analytics capabilities, augmented reality face filters, and body data-based generative artificial intelligence and tactile sensory neuromorphic computing technologies (Carey, 2022; Ota and Nakano, 2021; Rowland, 2022) shape beauty filter-based appealing self-presentation, body image disturbance, and idealized online identities. Beauty apps and filters necessitate visual and haptic imagery, artificial sensory neural network systems, emotional sensing technologies, and deep learning-based virtual try-on.

Photo retouching apps, artificial intelligence-based speech synthesis and voice cloning, and 3D augmented reality try-on and multi-sensory perception technologies (Eldaly and Mashaly, 2022; Palash et al., 2022; Yang, 2022) optimize online visual self-presentation, physical appearance and attractiveness, and visual body processing mechanisms. Augmented reality face filters are pivotal in body image perception and concerns, body appearance dissatisfaction, and beauty ideal cultural constructions. (Table 3)

Table 3 Synopsis of evidence as regards focus topics and descriptive outcomes (research findings)

Facial cues and expressions, synthetic image data augmentation, and deep-learning-based facial expression and motion-based gesture recognition systems configure digital twin-based detailed body shape representation and realistic digitally-rendered humans.	Barker, 2020; Morley, 2022; Vochozka et al., 2022
Real-time high accuracy voice analytics capabilities, augmented reality face filters, and body data-based generative artificial intelligence and tactile sensory neuromorphic computing technologies shape beauty filter-based appealing self-presentation, body image disturbance, and idealized online identities.	Carey, 2022; Ota and Nakano, 2021; Rowland, 2022
Photo retouching apps, artificial intelligence-based speech synthesis and voice cloning, and 3D augmented reality try-on and multi-sensory perception technologies optimize online visual self-presentation, physical appearance and attractiveness, and visual body processing mechanisms.	Eldaly and Mashaly, 2022; Palash et al., 2022; Yang, 2022

5. Digital Clothing Try-on Apps, Augmented Reality Beautification Filters, and Artificial Intelligence-powered Mood Detectors for Visual Imagery and Representations

Generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on and realistic makeup simulation tools, eyewear frame digital twins, and 3D body tracking sensors (Frieiro et al., 2022; Rowland, 2022; Vochozka et al., 2022) assist augmented reality beauty apps and filters in personal body image management. Face retouching filters further gendered beauty ideals in terms of dysfunctional appearance beliefs, body image perception and dissatisfaction development, and body shape perceptions. Virtual makeover apps are instrumental in body image worry recognition, body shape perception and dissatisfaction, and appearance management behaviors.

Augmented reality try-on lenses, 3D-rendered digital outfit, and artificial visual perception and deep-learning-based facial expression recognition systems (Carey, 2022; Golf-Papez et al., 2022; Morley, 2022) configure negative body image in terms of idealized appearance and imagery. Augmented reality-based virtual try-on experiences can be achieved by use of 3D scene generation techniques, 3D object recognition and path planning, and augmented reality body and face filters.

Appearance-focused social media use, perceived sociocultural pressures, and ideal beauty standards (Carey, 2022; Lim and Bentley, 2022; Rowland, 2022) develop on digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors. Context-aware emotion recognition and facial expression recognition technologies, augmented reality face filters, and deep learning and machine-based eye-tracking algorithms further visual imagery and representations. (Table 4)

Table 4 Synopsis of evidence as regards focus topics and descriptive outcomes (research findings)

Generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on and realistic makeup simulation tools, eyewear frame digital twins, and 3D body tracking sensors assist augmented reality beauty apps and filters in personal body image management.	Frieiro et al., 2022; Rowland, 2022; Vochozka et al., 2022
Augmented reality try-on lenses, 3D-rendered digital outfit, and artificial visual perception and deep-learning-based facial expression recognition systems configure negative body image in terms of idealized appearance and imagery.	Carey, 2022; Golf-Papez et al., 2022; Morley, 2022
Appearance-focused social media use, perceived sociocultural pressures, and ideal beauty standards develop on digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors.	Carey, 2022; Lim and Bentley, 2022; Rowland, 2022

6. Generative Artificial Intelligence Virtual Try-on Tools, Digitally Altered Images, and 3D Digital Garment Photorealistic Simulations Articulating Beauty Ideal Cultural Constructions

Bio-inspired artificial perceptual and synthetic speech augmentation devices, deep learning-based multimodal emotion recognition and neurobiological computation technologies, and cognitive and affective algorithms (Millière, 2022; Peng, 2020; Vochozka et al., 2022) enable augmented reality technology-powered virtual try-ons. Beauty filter algorithms require 3D digital garment photorealistic simulations, avatar makeup wearables, and artificial neural network-based neuromorphic computing systems.

Augmented reality face filters, virtual beauty try-ons, and digital beauty and facial emotion recognition technologies (Carey, 2022; Morikawa et al., 2021; Skov and Nadal, 2021) articulate body image issues in terms of shape and attractiveness, unrealistic physical appearance, and social values and beliefs. Generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on tools, digitally altered images, and 3D digital garment photorealistic simulations shape beauty ideal cultural constructions by use of cognitive and affective algorithms.

Affective computing and sentiment analysis with regard to physical appearance ideals, body dissatisfaction and shame, and social values and behaviors (Morley, 2022; Rowland, 2022; Swerzenski, 2021) require emotion analytics and visual sentiment algorithms, neuromorphic and bio-inspired computing systems, and context-aware emotion recognition and virtual reality-based visual perception technologies. Idealized beauty representations and images integrate negative mood and self-esteem, appearance-related dissatisfaction, and poor body image. (Table 5)

Table 5 Synopsis of evidence as regards focus topics and descriptive outcomes (research findings)

Bio-inspired artificial perceptual and synthetic speech augmentation devices, deep learning-based multimodal emotion recognition and neurobiological computation technologies, and cognitive and affective algorithms enable augmented reality technology-powered virtual try-ons.	Millière, 2022; Peng, 2020; Vochozka et al., 2022
Augmented reality face filters, virtual beauty try-ons, and digital beauty and facial emotion recognition technologies articulate body image issues in terms of shape and attractiveness, unrealistic physical appearance, and social values and beliefs.	Carey, 2022; Morikawa et al., 2021; Skov and Nadal, 2021
Affective computing and sentiment analysis with regard to physical appearance ideals, body dissatisfaction and shame, and social values and behaviors require emotion analytics and visual sentiment algorithms, neuromorphic and bio-inspired computing systems, and context-aware emotion recognition and virtual reality-based visual perception technologies.	Morley, 2022; Rowland, 2022; Swerzenski, 2021

7. Discussion

I integrate my systematic review throughout research indicating how generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on tools, digitally altered images, and 3D digital garment photorealistic simulations shape beauty ideal cultural constructions by use of cognitive and affective algorithms. My research complements recent analyses clarifying how augmented reality face filters are pivotal in body image perception and concerns, body appearance dissatisfaction, and beauty ideal cultural constructions. I elucidate, by cumulative evidence, previous research demonstrating how beauty apps and filters necessitate visual and haptic imagery, artificial sensory neural network systems, emotional sensing technologies, and deep learning-based virtual try-on.

8. Synopsis of the Main Research Outcomes

Context-aware emotion recognition and facial expression recognition technologies, augmented reality face filters, and deep learning and machine-based eye-tracking algorithms further visual imagery and representations. Face retouching filters further gendered beauty ideals in terms of dysfunctional appearance beliefs, body image perception and dissatisfaction development, and body shape perceptions. Virtual makeover apps are instrumental in body image worry recognition, body shape perception and dissatisfaction, and appearance management behaviors.

9. Conclusions

Relevant research has investigated whether augmented reality-based virtual try-on experiences can be achieved by use of 3D scene generation techniques, 3D object recognition and path planning, and augmented reality body and face filters. This systematic literature review presents the published peer-reviewed sources covering how beauty filter algorithms require 3D digital garment photorealistic simulations, avatar makeup wearables, and artificial neural network-based neuromorphic computing systems. The research outcomes drawn from the above analyses indicate that neuromorphic and bio-inspired computing systems, 3D virtual try-on and clothing simulation technologies, and spatial imagery processes articulate virtual bodily self-consciousness.

10. Limitations, Implications, and Further Directions of Research

By analyzing only articles published between 2020 and 2022 in journals indexed in the Web of Science, Scopus, and ProQuest databases, relevant sources on digital clothing try-on apps, augmented reality beautification

filters, and artificial intelligence-powered mood detectors in body image disturbance may have been excluded. Limitations of this research comprise particular kinds of publications (original empirical research and review articles) discounting others (conference proceedings articles, books, and editorial materials). The scope of my study also does not move forward the inspection of affective computing and sentiment analysis with regard to physical appearance ideals, body dissatisfaction and shame, and social values and behaviors.

Subsequent analyses should develop on facial cues and expressions, synthetic image data augmentation, and deep-learning-based facial expression and motion-based gesture recognition systems. Future research should thus investigate generative artificial intelligence virtual try-on and realistic makeup simulation tools, eyewear frame digital twins, and 3D body tracking sensors. Attention should be directed to real-time high accuracy voice analytics capabilities, augmented reality face filters, and body data-based generative artificial intelligence and tactile sensory neuromorphic computing technologies.

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Compliance with ethical standards
This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author. Extracting and inspecting publicly accessible files (scholarly sources) as evidence, before the research began no institutional ethics approval was required.

Data availability statement
All data generated or analyzed are included in the published article.

Funding information
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Author contributions
The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and approved it for publication. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy and the integrity of the data analysis.

Conflict of interest statement
The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Disclosure by the editors of record
This paper is part of a collective SLR RT, and thus a somewhat standard structure and a list of reliable data visualization and (reporting and methodological) quality assessment tools have been provided.

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