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TRANSGENDER STUDENT BEING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

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Abstract

Students are part of a diverse higher education community. Their attitudes and beliefs are embedded in interaction with lecturers, fellow-students and curricula exposure. It navigates and prepares them for their professional careers. Transgender students do not associate with society's gendered binary norms and have unique identities and associated needs. This integrative review aimed to illuminate 'transgender being' in higher education through thematically analysed literature. The studies were sourced on Medline, PubMed, CINAHL and EBSCO databases. Complementary searches included Google Scholar and Web of Science. The findings of 18 studies were analysed. The participants were conscious of their being-for- themselves and others. They experienced their transgender being as 1) being through 'non-being', 2) being conscious of self and others, 3) being vulnerable, and 4) being and 'to be'. The review results were evidence of the need for gender-inclusive education to affirm dignity, respect and inclusivity for all students pursuing higher education.

Keywords: transgender, students, higher education, being

Introduction and background

Higher education institutions follow different approaches to ensure gender-inclusivity (Banerjee, Walters, Staley, Alexander, & Parker, 2018). Some use compulsory attendance of modules aimed at the preventions of gender discrimination (Lindsay & Kolne, 2020; Sekoni, Gale, Manga-Atangana, Bhadhuri & Jolly, 2017; Siller, Komlenac, Fink, Perkhofer, & Hochleitner, 2018) while others advocate for an integration of ways to ensure gender-inclusivity in all the modules of curricula (Schreitmüller et al., 2018; Seeland et al., 2016). When transgender awareness is only addressed in specific modules, the 'otherness' of transgender people gets emphasized (Van der Meulen, Fluit, Albers, Laan, & Lagro-Janssen, 2017). Gender-inclusive teaching and learning environments are preferred to encourage all university staff and students to affirm their own gender identities and not to discriminate against the gender of others (Kristoffersson, Andersson, Bengs, & Hamberg, 2016; Vance Jr, Deutsch, Rosenthal, & Buckelew, 2017). Notwithstanding the endeavours of university management to encourage gender-inclusivity, the behaviour of students and lecturers often leads to gender discrimination (Böckers et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2020; Ehlinger, Folger & Cronce, 2022; Goldberg, Smith & Beemen, 2020). Humans, and in this particular review, transgender students, are fragile in their existence in a world of 'nothingness' and 'being'. They experience life through their desire to find meaning and peace in relation to themselves and others. According to the Sartrean 'philosophy of being', peace and harmony are not a natural attitude of humans. Instead, they are inclined to hate, conflict, and friction (Cogswell, 2008), which were also evident in the gender discrimination experienced by transgender students. This literature review aimed to explore and describe the experiences of being transgender of higher education students using the Sartrean differentiation between being-in-oneself, being-for-oneself and being-for-others.

Methods

Design

The Whittemore and Knafl's (2005) integrative review approach with the following steps was adopted in the literature review: 1) problem identification, 2) literature search, 3) data evaluation, 4) data analysis, and 5) presentation of the findings.

Literature search

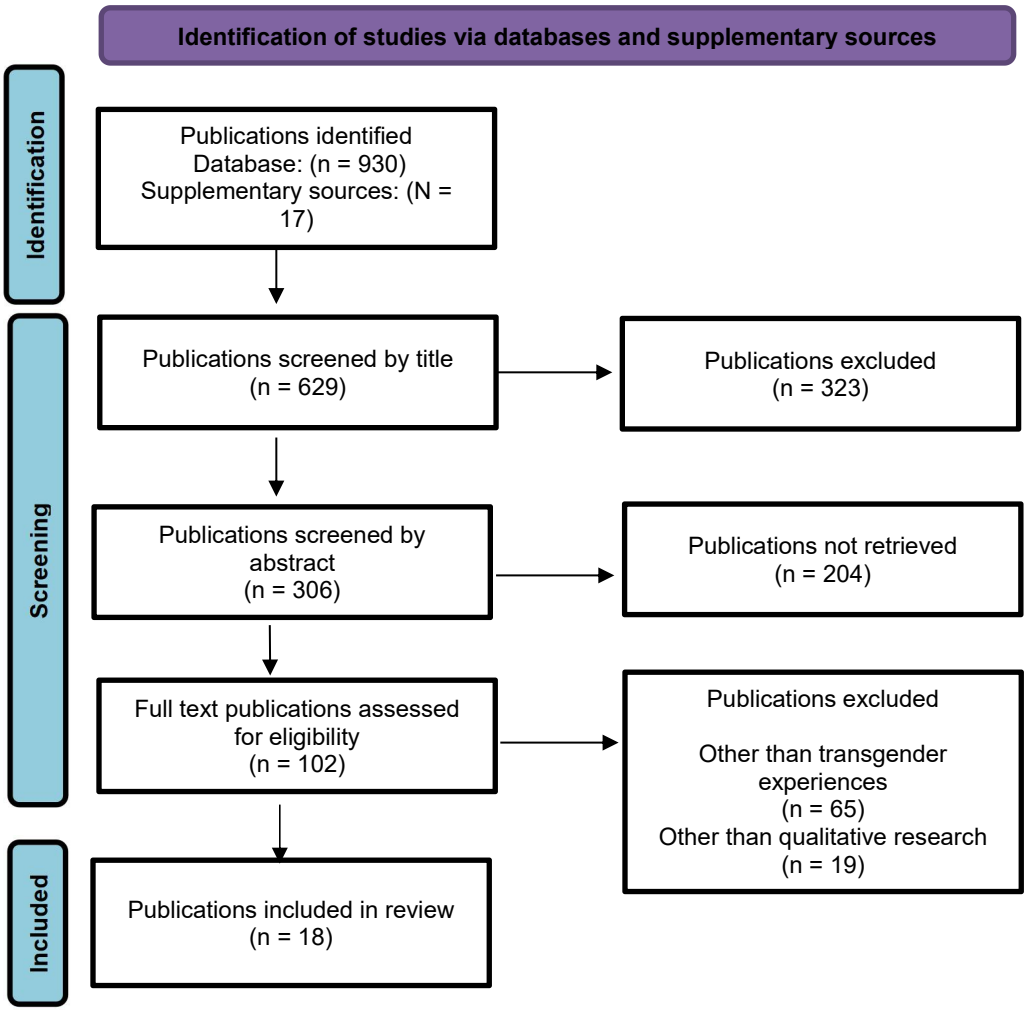
In the search for articles the key terms referred to "transgender", "students", "higher education", "gender-affirming", "transgender person*, "transsexual person*", "experiences", "perceptions", "attitudes", "views", "feelings", "classroom", and "education system". The Boolean operators AND, OR, and NOT included or excluded identified keywords. Broader terms included "LGBTQ-friendly classrooms", "gender-affirming universities", and "gender challenges in higher education". Medline, PubMed and CINAHL were initially utilised as single search entities

followed by a combined data searching through EBSCO in a combination of Academic Search Complete, APA PsycInfo, CINAHL, Humanities Source, MEDLINE, Social Work Abstracts and Teacher Reference Center. Complementary searches included Google Scholar and Web of Science. Referenced literature in sourced articles was also used during the data collection. Publications focused on gender-affirming care were eliminated.

Search outcome

The search resulted in 947 publications, of which 629 were screened by title. Duplicates were eliminated, and publications not aligned with the studied concept were removed. It resulted in 306 publications for assessment by abstract. Publications that did not fit the definition were again removed, as well as transgender experiences for learners in junior and high schools. It resulted in 102 publications for reading, followed by re-reading of 49 publications. The focus was on qualitative scholarly journals representative of the experiences of transgender students in higher education. Eighteen studies published between 2005 and 2023 were selected for inclusion in this study (see Figure 1 for the PRISMA flow diagram). The studies were conducted in the United States, South Africa, Spain and Canada. The disciplines included were biological sciences, social sciences, humanities and business studies. Some studies were discipline non-specific. The details of the included research are provided in Table 1.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram for data collection and study selection (Adapted from Page et al. 2020)



From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71
For more information, visit: http://www.prisma-statement.org/

Table 1
Details of included research

Author & Country	Title	Methodology & Discipline	Major Findings
Austin et al. (2019) US	Elucidating transgender students' experiences of microaggressions in social work programs: next steps for creating inclusive educational contexts.	Qualitative study; Survey with open-ended questions; Grounded theory strategy analysis. (Social Sciences)	The study findings of structural oppression, lack of faculty knowledge, gender bias, and social exclusivity are evidence of higher education's lack of embedment of transgender affirming and inclusivity.
Baros, (2022) US	Linguistically Invisible: The Experiences of Transgender Students in Spanish Language Courses	Qualitative study; Semi-structured interviews; Five queer gender participants; Thematic analysis. (Humanities)	Integrating a transgender inclusive curriculum and interaction with persons of transgender nature strengthened understanding and transgender cultural competence.
Beukes et al. (2020) SA	We don't want to stand out, yet some of us do": the experiences and responses of gender counter-normative students at Stellenbosch University.	Qualitative study; Interviews; 2 transgender students and one gender non-binary student; Thematic and cross-case analysis. (Social Sciences)	Counter-normative gender expressions were mainly met with disrespect; Lecturers were perceived to be uncomfortable dealing with transgender students.
Bilodeau, (2005) US	A case study of two transgender students at a Midwestern research university.	Case study (Business and women's studies)	The study findings demonstrate the identity experiences of two transgender students.
Cain et al. (2023) US	Examining trans student narratives of transitioning while in college.	Narrative enquiry; Five participants; In-depth interviews; Thematic analysis. (Discipline non-spesific)	Students found support in peer gender minority friendships; housing placement insensitivities created uncomfortable situations; barriers with gender identification were experienced.
Casper et al. (2022) US	"It's completely erasure": A Qualitative Exploration of Experiences of Transgender, Nonbinary, Gender Nonconforming, and Questioning Students in Biology Courses.	Qualitative study; Semi-structured interviews; Five queer gender participants (Biological Sciences)	Biology curricula lacked gender sensitivity and impacted the students' sense of inclusivity, occupation preparedness and interest in biology; a gender-inclusive curriculum is crucial for gender affirming training.
Cavanaugh et al. (2021) US	Transgender College Student Identity Development: A Narratology of Intermediating Experiences.	Qualitative study; Narratology; six participants; nar- ratological data analysis (Humanities)	Identity development was influenced by gender stereotypes, a spectrum of expression and messages about gender, within-group experiences, environmental influences, knowledge acquisition and identity concealment.
Ehlinger et al. (2022) US	A Qualitative Analysis of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming College Students' Experiences of Gender-Based Discrimination and Intersections With Alcohol Use.	Qualitative study: Interviews and focus group discussions; 16 participants. (Discipline non-specific)	Transgender affirming specific challenges were identified as pronoun misuse, non-affirming interactions, leadership transgender representation, and medical and health concerns.

Farmer et al. (2020) US	Transgender and Gender-Expansive Students' Experiences of Genderism at Women's Colleges and Universities.	Qualitative; interpretative phenomenological analysis; 10 participants (Discipline non-specific)	The non-gender-affirming campus climate negatively impacted students' emotional well-being and academic outcomes. A small gender affirming peer group where students felt accepted served as support and friendship building.
Forbes, (2022) US	Queer-free majors?: LGBTQ + college students' accounts of chilly and warm academic disciplines.	Qualitative study; In-depth interviews; 20 participants; thematic analysis. (Discipline non-specific)	Students tended to leave 'Chilly' academic environments such as mathematics and natural sciences for perceived 'warm' academic disciplines such as social sciences and humanities; queer competency education training as mandatory for all faculties was recommended.
Gallardo-Nieto et al. (2021) Spain	Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression-based violence in Catalan universities: qualitative findings from university students and staff.	Qualitative study; interviews with university students, heads of equality commissions, professors and administrative staff; thematic analysis. (Discipline non-specific)	Non-affirming gender cultures lead to gender expression-based violence. A lack of commitment and involvement from educators to intervene was identified. Gender affirming policy embracement is necessary.
Goldberg et al. (2019) US	Trans students who leave college: An exploratory study of their experiences of gender minority stress.	Qualitative; 14 participants; thematic analysis. (Discipline non-specific)	Reasons for leaving college included unwelcoming, insensitive campus and classroom climates, lack of social support structures and gender minority stress.
Gutzwa, (2021) US	"It's Not Worth Me Being Who I Am": Exploring How Trans* Collegians Navigate Classroom Experiences through a Funds of Identity Lens.	Qualitative study; In-depth interviews; written and visual texts; three participants; analysis through coding. (Humanities)	Understanding trans* students' funds of identity leads to a deeper understanding of creating gender affirming education for students.
Hill et al. (2021) US	How LGBTQ+ Students Thrive in College	Qualitative study: 60 LGBTQ+ students; data analysis software (coding). (Discipline non-specific)	LGBTQ+ resilience experiences included identity management, meaningful interpersonal relations and engaging with LGBTQ+-Specific Curriculums.
Johnston, (2016) Canada	'Until that magical day… no campus is safe': Reflections on how transgender students experience gender and stigma on campus.	Qualitative: 2 students; reflective narrative analysis (Discipline non-specific)	Transgender discrimination, hostility and stigmatisation were revealed by the participants and a lack of supportive social organisations and counselling services.
Kinney et al. (2023) US	"An Institution Can Have Good Intentions and Still Be Atrocious": Transgender and Gender Expansive Experiences in Social Work Education "	Qualitative; Interviews; 21 participants; NVivo for data coding analysis. (Social Sciences)	Affirming and disaffirming transgender experiences were revealed, such as educator transgender affirming role modelling, including respectful pronoun use and peer affirmation.
McKinney, (2005)	On the margins: A study of the experiences of transgender	Qualitative; 75 online surveys; phenomenological	A hostile campus climate and a lack of transgender affirmative

US	college students.	analysis (Discipline non-specific)	support were reported.
Santos et al. (2021) US	Are university health services meeting the needs of transgender college students? A qualitative assessment of a public university.	Qualitative study; semi-structured interviews; 11 participants; thematic narrative analysis. (Discipline non-specific)	Explored experiences of transgender students of health services on campus; Challenges of misgendering, incorrect naming, and inappropriate questions were revealed.

Data evaluation for quality appraisal

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) UK (n.d) was used to systematically assess the published papers' trustworthiness, relevance and results. The quality appraisal was performed by both authors independently. A discussion of the results followed for mutual agreement on the final inclusion of the selected publications.

Data analysis

The data was thematically analysed with the aim to organise, describe and interpret to present a rich description of the new meaning and understanding that emerged through an inductive approach. We applied the principles of Braun and Clarke (2006) for the thematic analysis. The publications were read to become familiar with the data. Initial ideas were recorded in the notes section of each journal on a reference management software tool, Mendelay. These were condensed into a summary of initial ideas for an overview. The analysis of the data proceeded to the generation of codes while reading and working through the data line by line. The coding was done on hard copies with side notes of all featured items with a potential for repeated patterns and relevance to transgender being. The related items were grouped into a thematic map of possible themes. These were read and considered for their relevance to the studied phenomenon. Four themes were identified and accepted in their essence, scope and content as presented in the review's findings.

Results

The student participants in the studies were conscious of their 'being in the world' (Cox, 2020). Being-for-themselves was not always at peace with their being-for-others. Four themes are discussed relating to transgender being in higher education.

Being through 'non-being'

Some student participants experienced a sense of 'non-being' through nonacceptance of their gender being different from most binary-gendered lecturers, administrators, counsellors and students. Incorrect pronoun use and the absence of transgender study content and discussion led to them being invisible, silent and absent (Farmer, Robbins, Keith, & Mabry, 2020).

Transgender disregard was evident in the student participants' classroom experiences and was particularly a reality in biology courses. A student participant reflected on a sense of 'not being' when a biology professor denied transgender existence, resulting in her wanting "*to stay silent*" (Casper, Rebolledo, Lane, Jude, & Eddy, 2022, p. 7). Another student experienced a lack of belonging as a result of a professor's insensitivity to non-binary identity when "*the professor* [said,] *'Let's divide into groups … just like all the boys go over here and the girls over here'… and there isn't a category for me*" (Casper et al., 2022, p. 7). The student participants in another study reflected on the lack of gender vocabulary in specific languages other than English. Expressing themselves was difficult and led to them being detached from languages such as Spanish and French. Using the term 'madam' in French violated their transgender being (Baros, 2022).

Student participants reflected on the presence of gender silence and neutrality in classrooms. Discussing gender beyond binary was either a taboo or a boundary of silence. The avoidance of non-binary discussions left the transgender students with a sense of non-existence and dissonance with their lecturers, fellow students and subject content (Casper et al., 2022): "[Exclusion] *makes me feel less connected at a human level with my peers and my professors. I'm not in the position to create very connecting relationships. I'm there to get the job done and then get out, you know? I feel like I'm not included in the community. They didn't make a space* [for me]" (Casper et al., 2022, p. 9).

The student participants reflected on experiences of 'non-being' through their perceived identity deadening encounters with others. Their desire for a preferred identity was disrespected and, at times, purposely ignored. While they were

'becoming' in their being to themselves, their being for others led to the opposite. One student participant described an experience of being 'othered'. The gender classification options were male, female and other. They felt they were not an 'other' (Casper et al., 2022). Misgendering through incorrect pronoun use and a lack of effort to acknowledge or correct the latter led to feelings of invisibility, loneliness and a need to stay closeted (Austin, Craig, Dentato, Roseman, & McInroy, 2019). A student participant described an experience of the mandatory use of his birth identification: "*I was not happy because I knew it—I'm like, these are wrong, these clothes are wrong. How people are seeing me is wrong*" (Cain, Denton, Alvarez, & Smith, 2023, p. 10). Another student complained about not being viewed as a unique person: *"I'm not seen as being really a person*." (Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Black, 2019, p. 389).

Some student participants reflected on their 'non-being' through the subtle actions of self-erasure and unbecoming. They chose not to be spotlighted and showcased. Through unbecoming by choice they were able to blend in over them being 'othered' (Beukes & Francis, 2020). Chameleoning was a way of being through 'non-being': *"Something that confused me for a long time growing up is I just like noticed that I had a real strong tendency to kind of like, I always felt it like chameleoning. I'd do it from everything from accents to like physical mannerisms. Like I would just observe what other people were doing and then just repeat it back. Um, and that really felt like, "Okay, this is how you don't get noticed*" (Cavanaugh & Luke, 2021, p. 147).

A student participant explained that he chose to hide his transgender identity in the presence of his family. He did not want to turn a family at peace upside-down. Weighing the consequences of being 'out', was not worth it (Gutzwa, 2021; Bilodeau, 2005).

Being conscious of self and others

The student participants were conscious of themselves and others during classroom encounters and social interactions on campus. They were observant of the social norms, continuously sensing transgender-affirming signals from lecturers, students, administrators and significant others. Their first socially inclined impulse was to blanket themselves, being cautious and suspicious of others' receptivity towards them (Casper et al., 2022). Non-affirming cues such as eye-rolling, whispering and visible vibes of disgust led to them cautiously not participating or speaking up (Austin et al., 2019).

The student participants were mindful of their emotional safety and identity as transgender. They were conscious not to be seen as the 'freak' in the classroom. They did not want to showcase themselves like a fish in a bowl because of the potentially hurtful reactions of others (Austin et al., 2019). They consciously adjust their behaviour and self-expectations to make things softer and simpler for themselves. When they did not expect inclusivity, it was easier to endure experiences of exclusivity (Casper et al., 2022). Adopting their pronoun preferences according to others' expectations made things easier for themselves and others (Baros, 2022).

The student participants were conscious of themselves and the deeply rooted experiences from their upbringing during childhood (Bilodeau, 2005) being engrained in their perception of themselves. Gender-rigid comments on childbearing capacity and reactions to non-binary childhood behaviour impacted their self-concept and fluid identity (Cavanaugh & Luke, 2021): *"I'd ask her why I didn't look like other boys…I used to pee standing up and she walked in one time and shoved me to the floor. I was like, "Why can't I do that?" She was like, "Girls sit down." Dresses, hair, were all forced as a child. I think it helped that I played sports so I could wear more masculine clothes, but they definitely forced a lot of gender roles on me"* (Cavanaugh & Luke, 2021, p. 146).

Some student participants were self-conscious of their perceived 'otherness' and their appearance being different. They reflected on experiences of prejudice for how they look and dress. Others' curiosity led to unasked and uneasy questions (Farmer et al., 2020; Johnston, 2016). Being exposed to prolonged psychological harm and anxiety led to body dysphoria at times: *"I seriously dislike my body and how I look, and it feels like I'm looking at a stranger in the mirror sometimes and that kind of sucks"* (Ehlinger et al., 2022, p. 201). The student participants were self-conscious about their unique bodily changes during their transgender transition. They were conscious of their bodies smelling differently and felt hypervisible to others. Feeling othered left them with a sense of self and other consciousness: *"…I did notice suspicion and misunderstanding and a feeling of being something weird…"* (Gallardo-Nieto, Gómez, Gairal-Casadó, & del Mar Ramis-Salas, 2021, p. 6).

The student participants in one of the studies reflected on being conscious of the power imbalance in their being for their educators. Their experiences were evidence of the oppressive exposure endured during their education: *"We have the perfect storm of you have all the power, and you're deeply oppressive, and you can't even see it"* (Kinney, Cosgrove, Swafford, & Brandon-Friedman, 2023, p. 89).

Being vulnerable

The student participants were vulnerable in being transgender, navigating their many challenges. They did not feel they belonged, and experiences of not being accepted by the majority binary academic community were demoralising. They regretted the lack of transgender curricula content and guidance in classrooms, which affected the outcome of their grades (Casper et al., 2022; McKinney, 2005). A student participant described the hurtful comment of a professor referring to a transgender person as a 'non-op' (Ehlinger et al., 2022).The expectation for the participants to step into the role of transgender educator led to them being exposed to uneasy visibility and enquiries: *"questions about my junk, and who I had sex with"* (Goldberg et al., 2019, p. 390). It was a role that they did not want to fulfil. They were particularly financially vulnerable. A student participant reflected on his financial burden, resulting in him working nights and simultaneously attending class during the day. He eventually took a break from his studies to recover financially (Goldberg et al., 2019).

Some student participants were deeply affected by experiences of humiliation and shame. One of them was told to change a hairstyle and dress appropriately, while the absence of gender-neutral restrooms humiliated and shamed other participants (Johnston 2016). They were fearful of using the toilets and needing to deal with others' reactions towards them: *"I didn't have access to a gender neutral bathroom at my practicum so I was often mistaken for a man and had to deal with people's reactions because of that"* (Austin et al., 2019, p. 913). The student participants faced demeaning and belittling behaviour towards them during their residence placement. They felt unsafe and uncomfortable not being accepted as a respected human being (Cain et al., 2023). An undeserved remark from a roommate that the student participant *"was going to "prey" on him"* (Beukes & Francis, 2020, p. 20) threatened transgender dignity and worthiness. The student participants were vulnerable in classroom settings. Exposure to transphobic remarks placed the students in a most unsettling position in their transgender being: "[One] *professor would make a transphobic joke and everyone in the room would laugh, and I* [felt] *very deeply unsafe*" (Goldberg et al., 2019, p. 389). The student participants faced many trans-antagonistic encounters of discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, hostility, bullying, violence, and death threats (Beukes & Francis, 2020; Cain et al., 2023; Goldberg et al., 2019; Johnston, 2016). They were targeted in social media. Hate speech and being treated as outcasts left them vulnerable (Farmer et al., 2020).
The student participants were fragile in their romantic encounters with others. A student participant described being *"terrified of everyone"* (Cain et al., 2023, p. 8). Another one thought that dating would be easier after transitioning and surgery, but experiences of rejection were no different (Ehlinger et al., 2022). Dating overall remained complex and potentially hurtful: *"Relationships end up complicated, especially of a sexual nature, because lesbians will say things like, "I'll date women and trans men" and you know they only think of gender as genitals and do not see you as a "real man" since they keep the lesbian label"* (Farmer et al., 2020, p. 5).

The student participants experienced difficulties in seeking student counselling and medical services. The service providers on campus were not skilled and equipped for transgender being (McKinney, 2005), resulting in the student participants seeking much more expensive off-campus help. They were especially vulnerable in seeking gynaecological medical care because of the gendered nature of the consultation (Santos, Mann, & Pfeffer, 2021). One of the participants described an experience with mental health professionals as a young adolescent being exposed to misinformation: *"The doctors told [my parents] misinformation, the therapists told them misinformation. I wasn't categorised as transgender when I was younger. I was categorized as a sexual deviant who needed correction when I was younger . . . that the deviance was something to correct. That there was something wrong with me that needed to be fixed"* (Cavanaugh & Luke, 2021, p. 150).

Being and 'to be'

The ultimate accolade for transgender being in higher education was imbedded in being at peace with oneself and others. Safe spaces, supportive families and a network of friends (Hill et al., 2021; Beukes, & Francis, 2020; Bilodeau, 2005) contributed to their thriving as respected human beings: *"I feel seen by them"* (Casper et al., 2022, p. 11). The student participants described the value of transgender advocacy groups and activities in realising their transgender being (Bilodeau, 2005; Johnston, 2016). They felt acknowledged as counter-normative individuals, and the camaraderie led to them feeling loved, supported, safe and validated in their identity (Beukes & Francis, 2020). Peers played an essential role in navigating transgender being positively. Some would be role models for transitioning (Cain et al., 2023). Others were instrumental in a culture of support and belonging, attributing to transgender students' joy of being part of a group and simply being "*one of the guys*" (Kinney et al., 2023, p. 84).

The study participants reflected on gender-inclusive curriculums and classrooms in their being and 'to be' (Forbes, 2022). Their professors played a significant role in them feeling inclusive through using their pronouns respectfully and being open for discussion and debate of transgender content. It had a ripple effect on students and the presence of a gender-friendly campus culture free from harm (Kinney et al., 2023). Gender studies were particularly affirming, relating to other queer identities in a space where they felt welcome. Co-gender queer professors were valued and perceived for teaching with the autonomy of experience (Casper et al., 2022).

Being and 'to be' validated transgender 'outness'. When the participants descended to being their authentic selves (Johnston, 2016), they could perceive the societal prescriptive ideas that kept them '*in prison'*, pretending not to be as if they were nothing but an imaginary person. Being and 'to be' released their true selves. They dressed up with joy and affirmed their preferred pronoun use with confidence. They experienced life's gift of being to the full: *"For a long time, I was trying to analyze myself, trying to figure out why I feel this way, and the best thing and the healthiest. . . . The best way I can respect myself is to not do that, and just say, "Hey, this is who I am, and whatever the reason for it doesn't really matter because this is how I'm happy"* (Cavanaugh & Luke, 2021, p. 147).

Discussion

Humans are free, but responsible for their choices (Poellner, 2012). Their freedom and responsibilities relate according to Sartre's well-known description of the 'being' of humans. Being-in-oneself is the actual reality that inter alia refers to sex and age, but humans are more than just their bodies. They are capable of transcendence and consciousness of surrounding objects and subjects that Sartre describes as being-for-oneself (Leung, 2022). It enables them to be free and in control of their surroundings through the way they interpret it, and the choices they make (Assefa, 2020). Humans are aware of others and interact with them and thereby experience being-for-others. These 'others' are also transcendental beings with the freedom to consciously interpret their surrounding and under the gaze of the others, humans experience being-for-others (Işik & Tok, 2022). The 'gaze of others' reduces their freedom as they become objects in the surrounding of others. They no longer are the sole interpreters of it (Stoll, 2021).

Transgender students' being-in-themselves refer to their age and sex, but their being-for-themselves is associated with the development of own transgender identities and the way they perceive the world of higher education. As human beings, they are conscious of other students and the staff of the university who are also conscious of them. Transgender students are therefore aware of the 'gaze of others' and it influences the way that they perceive themselves and interact with others. The 'gaze of others' forces humans to see themselves as others see them and may even cause them to feel that they have lost control of their own lives and the meaning that they have attached to previous precious experiences (Assefa, 2020). Feelings of shame is experienced when people have to restructure their own worlds when they began to see themselves as others do, namely objects in the others' perspectives (Assesfa, 2020). Some of the transgender students tried to blend in into the student community in an attempt not to be noticed as they could not bear to be judged by others. They feared the 'gaze of others' as it could have caused humiliation. By not being true to themselves, they excluded themselves from activities that could have contributed to their personal growth. Others experienced shame that according to Sartre happens when humans are forced to change themselves and the way they prefer to live and to start seeing themselves as others see them (Assesfa, 2020). It made the transgender students feel so vulnerable that they avoided seeking help and support from student services. The students experienced intense mistrust of others, including the people who honestly wanted to help them. When situations that humans endure become extremely traumatic, desperate choice are made of which one is to become passive. Some of the transgender students preferred to use passive responses to survive humiliation and they therefore became non-beings. It is, unfortunately, an unproductive way of surviving when humans objectify themselves to accomplish an imaginary survival (Edwards, 2021).

Transgender students are often confronted with stigmatization from either their fellow students or from the university staff or at times from both. Sartre refers to such situations as a component of human reality and he calls it facticity. It refers to a real situation that humans experience (Ball & Giombini, 2023). Sartre also emphasized that humans are always free and for him transcendence could be used to react to the facticity of situations. Transcendence is the process that humans use to make sense of facticity, and according to Sartre, humans have choices regarding whether and how they address the encountered challenges (Ball & Giombini, 2023). Being transgender and stigmatized may be considered as these students' facticity, but they are more than that. It is not all that they are. Should they just focus on it, they emphasize their being-in-themselves, should they try to deny it, they choose delusional transcendence, but when they decide to view it as a facticity and to manage it to their benefit, they concentrate on being-for-themselves (Ball & Giombini, 2023). Being-for-themselves may help transgender students to overcome stigmatization and humiliation.

Conclusion

Transgender disregard, identity deadening and self-erasure transpired in experiences of being through 'non-being'. Encounters of discrimination, hostility, humiliation and shame led to transgender vulnerability in all spheres of student life. It included complex romantic encounters, financial insecurity and a poor use of support structures. Being conscious of self and others resulted in a cautiousness for the affirming/disaffirming actions of others. Safe spaces for being and 'to be' finally released transgender students to live life to the fullest. The imprisonment of societal prescriptive ideas was no longer the master of transgender being in higher education.

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