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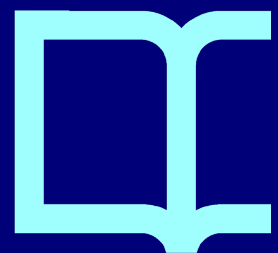
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## LGBT+ characters in original Spanish VoD series

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## Abstract

The present paper analyzes the current state of the representation of LGBT+ characters in Spanish original video on demand television series. A content analysis was performed on 38 television series broadcast in Spain until 2021 with a total of 749 characters, in order to determine the main traits of LGBT+ characters compared to cisheterosexual ones. The main findings indicate that there is an underrepresentation of cis women as well as trans men and non-binary people and an overrepresentation of heterosexual characters. Non-heterosexual characters tend to be younger and less educated than heterosexuals, and they are more frequently single. Transgender women are usually portrayed in the narrative background, they are less educated and more hypersexualized, are of lower socio-economic status and manifest more unhealthy habits. However, no relationship was found between sexual orientation and other variables such as narrative weight, age, nationality and type of job. Neither there was a statistical association between gender identity and nationality or religious practice. The results are consistent with previous literature, but this remains a little-explored research field.

*Keywords:* LGBT+, characters, Spain, VoD, TV, gender, homosexuality

## LGBT+ characters in original Spanish VoD series

In recent times, the Spanish Government has promoted controversial legal initiatives with regard to LGBT+, and especially about trans, people. The draft bill of the Act on real and effective equality for trans people (Anteproyecto de la ley para la igualdad real y efectiva de las personas trans y para la garantía de los derechos de las personas LGTBI) was approved by the Council of Ministers in June 2021 after tense negotiations between the coalition partners, but it has yet to go to Congress.

Especially since the recognition of same sex marriage in Spain in 2005, Spanish television's strategy with respect to the representation of homosexuality has been to make it "positive" and naturalized. Now that society seems to have reached a point of maturity in the representation of LGBT+ people in which, after some initial negative images and other positive and vindicating ones, homosexual characters can be further diversified without this leading to metonymic allegations about homosexuality and without having to respect the limits of what is politically correct.

This assimilationist strategy ("positive images") prevented characters from exhibiting more than one potential exclusion factor. Hence, we could deem this narrative strategy in pursuit of integration one of legitimation or compensation because, in many cases, characters follow the traditional pattern of heterosexuality. This strategy offers arguments to support the social assimilation of sexual diversity, whereby most series tell love stories that appeal to the audience's emotions. It is not about providing logical reasons why non-normative sexuality should be "accepted", but about the viewer connecting on an emotional level with the characters so that the assumption of reality is much more affective and, consequently, effective, which is also in keeping with a postmodern society where rationality, logic and argumentation have been replaced by sentimentality.

There is empirical evidence that supports the suggestion that the consumption of audiovisual messages can positively impact attitudes towards homosexuality (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Lee & Hicks, 2011; Madzarevic & Soto-Sanfiel, 2019; Newman, 2007; Rössler & Brosius, 2001; Schiappa et al., 2006). There is also evidence that exposure of certain groups of people to "positive" representations of gay or lesbian characters decreases prejudice towards the latter (Levina et al., 2000; Madzarevic & Soto-Sanfiel, 2019; Mazur & Emmers-Sommer, 2003; Schiappa et al., 2006), and also to support the affirmation that LGBT+ representations impact the construction of identities (Gomillion & Giuliano,

2011; Meyer, 2003). However, the available information is still considered almost non-existent, so a greater effort is needed to obtain empirical data (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Madzarevic & Soto-Sanfiel, 2019).

The dearth of reception studies on the perception of LGBT+ characters and narratives has been attributed to the traditional lack of visibility of these characters on screens (Gross, 2002; Harrington, 2003; Tropiano, 2002). That presence, however, has grown in recent times in certain cultural contexts (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Fisher et al., 2007; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011; Hart, 2000; Raley & Lucas, 2006) due to a change for the better in attitudes towards LGBT+ people in those cultures (Altemeyer, 2002; Steffens & Wagner, 2004) as a result of demographic, social and educational changes. Consequently, social changes seem to affect the media representation of LGBT+ people and the reception thereof. Studies have shown that educated people tend to be more accepting of gay people because education exposes them to diversity, which breeds tolerance. This effect seems to be largely influenced by the media (Detenber et al., 2013). Therefore, the presence of LGBT+ characters on screens can be related to the degree of respect for the diversity of gender identity and sexual orientation. This research wishes to provide information in that direction.

In terms of the representation of LGBT+ people, research has shown that, despite the growing, diversified and increasingly common presence of gay and lesbian characters in the media in the first decade of the 21st century (Chambers, 2009; Davis & Needham, 2009), many of these representations tend to perpetuate stereotypes of homosexuality (Calzo & Ward, 2009). For example, gay characters have typically been portrayed as sexually or romantically dissatisfied, promiscuous, and HIV-infected (Hart, 2000; Herman, 2005). They have also been exploited as a source of humor in comedies (Cooper, 2003; Fouts & Inch, 2005).

On the other hand, the presence of characters with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations in the media has also taken the form of so-called positive representations. Advocates of these often virtuous and affirming portrayals believe they produce better attitudes among audiences. However, such representations have their detractors as well, who argue that they often convey political ideology and prejudice. For example, they avoid showing the sexual or emotional lives of LGBT+ characters, and only white, middle-class, monogamous characters are presented as being in stable

relationships (González-de-Garay, 2012, p. 64). Furthermore, recent research has proved that “the positive effect of parasocial contact on attitudes was shown, regardless of whether the portrayals of LGBT people were perceived as positive, neutral, or negative” (Lissitsa & Kushnirovich, 2020, p. 127).

In relation to the effects, there are studies that confirm that people, regardless of their gender identity, express more positive attitudes towards homosexuality when they are exposed to positive descriptions of gay people (Schiappa et al., 2005; Bonds-Raacke et al., 2007; Madžarević & Soto-Sanfiel, 2018; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2011; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2014; Wright & Bae, 2013). In the case of university students, it has been reported that viewing positive images of gay people produces more favorable attitudes, when compared to viewing anti-gay images (Levina et al., 2000). Exposure to films featuring non-traditional families with gay characters leads to greater acceptance of homosexuality (Rössler & Brosius, 2001). In the same vein, and after observing the extent to which television allows parasocial relationships to be established with fictional LGBT+ characters, it has been reported that the representation of morally virtuous characters helps reduce negative prejudices (Schiappa et al., 2005; Bonds-Raacke et al., 2007).

Regarding the positive representation of LGBT+ people, Madžarević and Soto-Sanfiel (2018) conclude that viewing films that present a favorable image of gay men is directly related to the reduction of homophobia. The study reveals that identification with the characters and contact with LGBT+ people is related negatively with homophobia (the greater the identification and contact, the greater the reduction of prejudice and, consequently, the less homophobia). The study also found that the religiosity of the participants is positively related to homophobia (the greater the religiosity, the greater the homophobia). In fact, the researchers found that greater religiosity was associated with less reduction in homophobia after viewing positive portrayals of gay people. In their study, conducted with university students in Serbia, the researchers also found that men express a higher level of homophobia than women.

When observing the processes by which the lesbian protagonists of serialized fiction are perceived, Soto-Sanfiel et al. (2014) found that identification with morally virtuous lesbian characters (e.g., consistent, decent, committed) is similar among heteronormative and non-normative audiences.

They described how the sexual orientation of audiences does not affect their appreciation of films depicting lesbian characters in stories about lesbian communities.

Research is scarce regarding the audiovisual representation of the LGBT+ community in Spain. The earliest portrayals of non-normative sexual orientations were stereotyped, with constant reference to such characters' guilt and marginalization. The Franco regime prohibited the representation of homosexuality, although on some occasions Spanish cinema was able to overcome those restrictions. In fact, the regime often endorsed these exceptions because it considered visibility of these characters' shame to be punishment enough (Melero, 2014). There were also comic representations in which homosexual characters were mocked and used as a source of hilarity, reflecting the traditional function of such characters, which was also the case on television. Alfeo (1997) and González de Garay (2012) distinguish four modalities of homosexual representation in Spanish fiction: 1) hidden; 2) marginalized; 3) vindicating (integrating and differentiating) and, finally, 4) integrated. In the first form, a character's homosexuality is veiled and ambiguous, so the fiction uses euphemisms and stereotypes. The second form is a variation on the first and occurs when other characters are called upon to reveal the character's homosexuality. This type of expression is frequently associated with delinquency and marginality, which is why it offers a negative image of homosexuality, typically with tragic plots and disastrous endings. The third implies the beginning of discourse fostering tolerance and acceptance to facilitate social inclusion. Here, behavioral patterns that are traditionally associated with heterosexuality are typically promoted, particularly as part of a campaign for integration. Finally, the fourth form involves a total change in such representations, whereby the narrative weight of homosexual characters is no longer exclusively focused on their sexual orientation, but rather this is one among many other characteristics.

There are authors who maintain that the complete elimination of stereotypes traditionally associated with female and male homosexuality might also imply their invisibility and disappearance and that media products aimed at gay or lesbian people benefit the processes of identification and normalization (Ventura, 2016).

Likewise, in terms of LGBTphobia and queer pedagogy, it must be recognized that numerous studies have indicated that educational institutions are the social spaces that present the highest rates

of LGBTphobia. Schools and universities are considered hostile locations where heteronormativity prevails (Scandurra et al., 2017; Palladino & Giesler, 2014). According to Swanson and Gettinger (2016), the school environment is perhaps the most critical of LGBT+ youth due to the large amount of time they spend in it. If schools do not provide a safe and supportive environment, these students face a high risk of socio-emotional and academic problems (Espelage et al., 2008; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Shibley & Delamater, 2006). These discriminations translate into LGBTphobia, which implies the rejection of all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) people, or those who are presumed to be so, as well as people who do not fit traditionally assigned roles (Borrillo, 2001).

Despite global efforts to foster respect for sexual-affective diversity and educational legislation on the matter, young LGBT+ people continue to be the targets of attacks from their peers and teachers in the school environment (Guasp, 2012; Jones, 2015; O'Higgins-Norman, 2009). In Europe, research has shown that LGBT+ schoolchildren experience significantly higher levels of verbal, physical and sexual discrimination and violence than their heterosexual peers (Magić & Maljevac, 2016; Pichardo et al, 2016; Platero, 2014). Because of this, schools need to address LGBTphobia in all areas of their work (Warwick & Aggleton, 2013). It is important to work together on sexuality and gender identity, as research has identified a clear connection between gender, misogyny, and homophobic attitudes (Generelo & Pichardo, 2005; Prati, 2012; Jones, 2014). Otherwise, homophobic behaviors, together with the lack of teacher training (Brant, 2014), lead to isolation of and violence against LGBT+ students, a situation with serious consequences for physical and mental health, both in the short and long term, and throughout life (Penna & Sánchez, 2015).

Queer pedagogies can offer a framework in which to readdress education. Their goal is not limited to or focused exclusively on issues related to the experience of LGBT+ identities, but instead seeks to destabilize the normal/abnormal dichotomy (Aguirre et al., 2021). Queer pedagogies go beyond the mere challenge of understanding gender and sexual identity to deconstruct the categories and languages that support them (Meyer, 2007).

In view of the above, the main objective of this study is to understand the characteristics of the representation of LGBT+ characters in serial fiction broadcast on payment platforms (video on demand) in the Spanish context.



## Methods

In order to explore LGBT+ representation on contemporary Spanish VoD TV series and to determine whether they portray an unequal image of cishetero and non-cishetero characters, a quantitative methodology was proposed that used content analysis by means of human coding.

### *Sample*

The analyzed sample was composed of 38 programs and 749 characters (Table 1) that were obtained from an analysis of original Spanish fictional series broadcast in 2020 and 2021 on the following platforms: Movistar, HBO, Amazon Prime, AtresPlayer Premium, Netflix and Disney+. These series were sourced from an analysis of the television catalogue. Once the original fictional Spanish series had been selected, one episode was randomly selected for coding.

Table 1. Sample Description

<b>Number</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>TV Series</b>	<b>Episode</b>
1	Movistar	Antidisturbios	S01E05
2	Movistar	La unidad	S01E03
3	Movistar	La línea invisible	S01E04
4	Movistar	Nasdrovia	S01E03
5	Movistar	Dime quién soy	S01E01
6	Movistar	Vergüenza	S01E02
7	Movistar	Hierro	S01E03
8	Movistar	Los espabilados	S01E02
9	Movistar	Libertad	S01E03
10	Movistar	Merlí sespere aude	S02E01
11	HBO	Patria	S01E08
12	HBO	30 monedas	S01E05
13	HBO	En casa	S01E04
14	HBO	Por h o por b	S01E04
15	Amazon Prime	Relatos con-fi-na-dos	S01E03
16	Amazon Prime	Madres	S01E12
17	Amazon Prime	3 caminos	S01E08
18	Amazon Prime	El internado: las cumbres	S01E05
19	Amazon Prime	La templanza	S01E04
20	Amazon Prime	El cid	S01E04
21	AtresPlayer Premium	Mentiras	S01E01
22	AtresPlayer Premium	Veneno	S01E05

23	AtresPlayer Premium	La valla	S01E09
24	AtresPlayer Premium	Física y química	S01E01
25	AtresPlayer Premium	By ana milán	S01E07
26	AtresPlayer Premium	Deudas	S01E02
27	AtresPlayer Premium	Alba	S01E01
28	AtresPlayer Premium	#Luimelia	S02E02
29	AtresPlayer Premium	El nudo	S01E11
30	AtresPlayer Premium	Caronte	S01E10
31	Netflix	Valeria	S01E06
32	Netflix	White lines	S01E02
33	Netflix	Alguien tiene que morir	S01E01
34	Netflix	El desorden que dejas	S01E01
35	Netflix	Los favoritos de midas	S01E05
36	Netflix	Sky rojo	S01E06
37	Netflix	Hache	S01E02
38	Disney+	Besos al aire	S01E01

Note. S = Season, E = episode

### ***Unit of Analysis***

The present codebook establishes the individual characters as the unit of analysis. The analysis of the characters focuses on those who are human, discounting animals, aliens, fantasy or science fiction beings and cartoon characters. Only human characters that are shown visually in the program and have a line of dialogue in interaction with other characters (talking individuals) (Koeman et al., 2007) are included in the analysis.

### ***Codebook and Coding form***

For analysis of the selected sample, a coding form and a nineteen-page codebook were compiled for each character to collect data on the categories offered as possible responses and which were created from certain variables taken from Álvarez-Hernández et al. (2015), Marcos-Ramos (2014) and Neuendorf (2002), to which specific modifications and variables in relation to this study were added.

Each character was first coded based on general data (1.1) gender (Cismale, Cisfemale, Trans (FTM), Trans (MTF), Intersex, and Others (Non-binary, fluid gender, queer...)) and (1.2) sexual orientation (Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, Plurisexuality (bisexual, pansexual), Other –such as Asexuality, Demisexuality, Akiosexuality, etc.) and Unidentifiable.

Another group of variables was used in an attempt to quantify matters related to the characters' narrative level. The coders were asked to determine (2.1) the *type of character* (Main,

Secondary or Background), based on the Mastro and Greenberg (2000) typology with readapted definitions; (2.2) whether the character had *definite goals* to achieve in the episode and if these were (2.2.1) related to their *personal environment* or (2.2.2) related to their *work*; (2.3) their *personality traits*, based on the study by Igartua et al. (1998) with which we sought to verify, on a three-point scale, how relevant a series of traits were in each character (Good, Disloyal or Treacherous, Aggressive, Intelligent, Intolerant, to which we added Charismatic, Irresponsible, Maternal / Paternal, Brave, Weak, Fraternal and Wicked); and (2.4) *whether the character was hypersexualized*, based on the observation of at least three of the concepts found by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2014): (a) sexually suggestive clothing, (b) nudity (partial or total) if it is gratuitous, (c) thinness in females / musculature in males, and (d) attractiveness, to which we added (e) the fragmentation of some erotic part of the body with camera shots.

Likewise, the *interaction of the character with other characters* was coded (3.1) to learn whether that interaction was related mainly to men, (b) to women, (c) to non-binary characters or (d) to a character who could not be clearly identified; and, based on criteria adapted from the Bechdel-Wallace Test (Bechdel, 1986), (3.2) *whether the character spoke with other characters of the same gender identity*. Furthermore, the coders had to find in characters who talked to others of the same gender whether (3.2.1) *female characters talked to other women about something other than men*, and (3.2.2) *whether male characters talked to other men about a woman*, to establish the importance of the opposite sex in their conversations.

### ***Coder Training and Pilot Research***

The units of analysis were coded by nine coders who were trained in the use of the instruments, which led to certain modifications to the codebook and the coding form so that the coders could deal better with the different variables being considered in this study.

### ***Reliability of the Analysis Model***

Another coder acted as inter-judge to analyze the inter-coder reliability of the variables. This process was performed with 32.57% (n = 244) of the sample, following the recommendations of Igartua (2006,

p. 218) to include “a sample composed of 10% - 20% of the units of analysis to be analyzed independently, based on the same material, by two or more coders”.

We used different coefficients to study the intercoder reliability. First, we computed Krippendorff's alpha, which is typically used in content analysis. We also computed the observed percentage of agreement. As these measures are biased in the presence of skewed distributions (Lovejoy, et al. 2016) we also obtained the bias-adjusted and prevalence adjusted kappa (PABAK, Byrt, et al., 1993). All studied variables except age obtained adequate reliability. For an extended overview of all the obtained coefficients, see the Supplementary material (Table S1).

### ***Hypotheses***

H1: The proportion of characters with non-heterosexual orientations (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, demisexual) and with trans or non-binary gender identities on video-on-demand screens will be lower than their prevalence in the general Spanish population (González-de-Garay, et al., 2019).

H2: The characters in Spanish serial fiction broadcast on video-on-demand platforms will have stereotyped traits (González de Garay, 2012; Soto-Sanfiel & Madzarevic, 2018, 2019; Soto-Sanfiel, Ibiti, & Palencia, 2014; Ventura, 2018).

### **Data analysis**

Fisher's exact test was used to inferentially study the association between the study variables, and Monte Carlo simulation was used to obtain the p-value that we used. This approach is preferable when the conditions for application of Chi-square are not met.

## **Results**

First of all, a total of 749 characters were identified from the 38 series in the coded sample. Of these characters, 59.7% (n = 447) were cismale, 38.9% (n = 291) were cisfemale, and the remaining 1.3% (n = 10) were identified as trans women (MTF). 41.3% (n = 308) were coded as heterosexual and 4% as non-heterosexual (n = 30), while the remainder (54.7%) were unknown. Of the 30 characters coded as non-heterosexuals, 19 were gay cismen, nine were lesbian cis women, one was a man categorized as

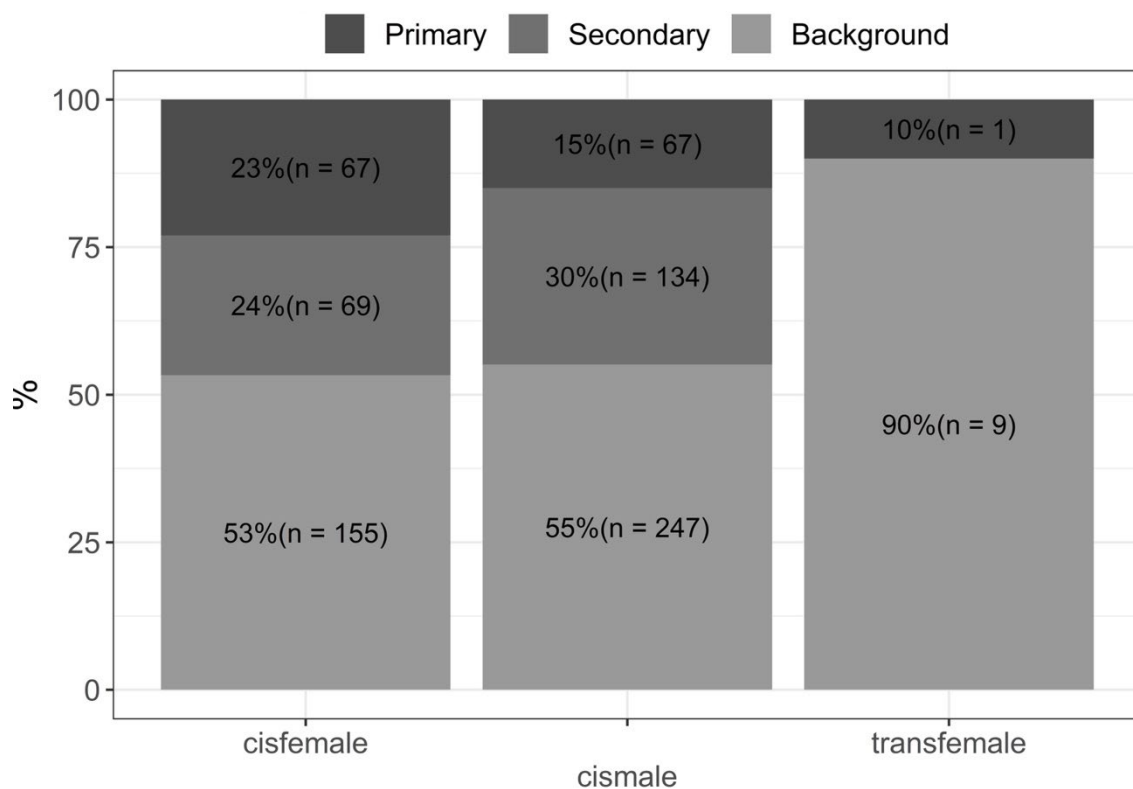
plurisexual and the other was catalogued as “other orientation”, namely the priest Don Amaro in *3 Caminos* (Amazon Prime: 2021).

### Gender Identity

The extended results, including the number of unknown categories, can be found in Table S1. As shown in Figure 1, there is a statistically significant association between the type of role and the gender of the character ( $p = .006$ ). There is no underrepresentation of female characters in leading roles, but trans characters are usually in the background.

**Fig. 1**

Association between Gender and Type of Role

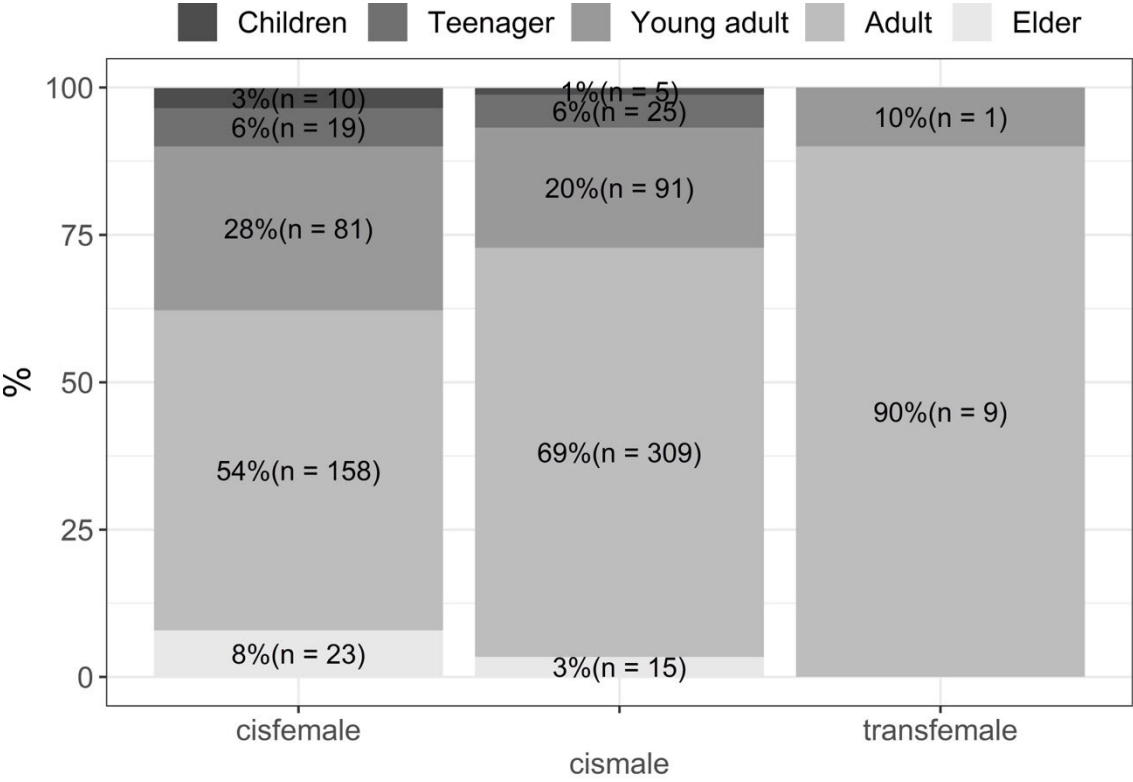


Regarding when the TV series is set, there was a statistically significant association between gender and historical series ( $p < .001$ ). Trans women are more likely to appear in historical series than those set in contemporary times. Gender identity is found to be related to the subscription streaming service ( $p = .001$ ), for only two companies (AtresPlayer Premium and Netflix) had trans characters. However,

Disney+ had the most cisfemale characters in its narratives (60%) and HBO had the fewest (30%). Although results referring to age need to be treated with caution because of the low interjudge agreement on this variable, it is important to note that no trans characters were young children, adolescents or elderly. The two variables were statistically related ( $p = .005$ ) showing that cisfemales tend to be younger than cismales (Figure 2).

**Fig. 2**

Association between Gender and Age Group

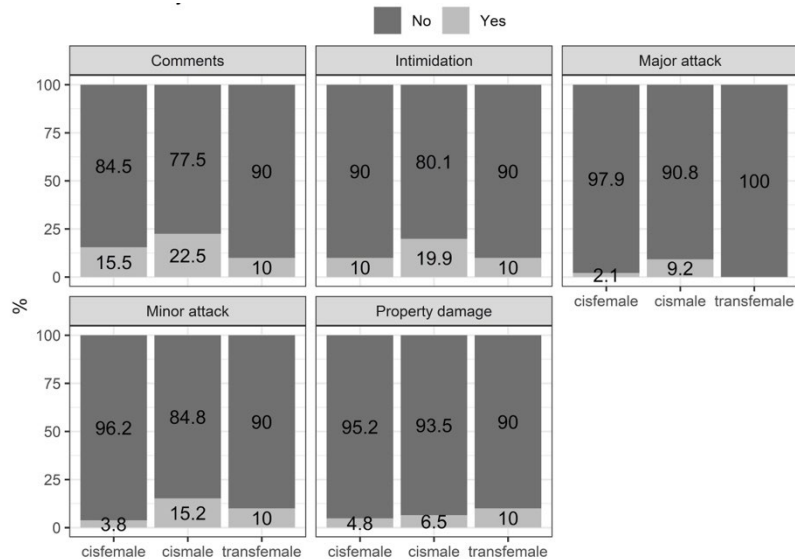


On the other hand, there was a statistically significant association between gender and level of education ( $p < .001$ ), with all the trans characters being catalogued in the lowest level, with no formal education. There were no differences in this regard between cismale and cisfemale people. Concordantly, there is a statistically significant association ( $p < .001$ ) between the characters' socio-economic status and gender, with fewer ciswomen in the highest level (19%) than cismen (24%) and no representation in this category of trans women, whose predominant socio-economic status is low (75%). Consistently, trans women tend to be more hypersexualized than cis women, and the latter are more so than cis men ( $p = .005$ ). Another statistically relevant relationship is the one between gender and main

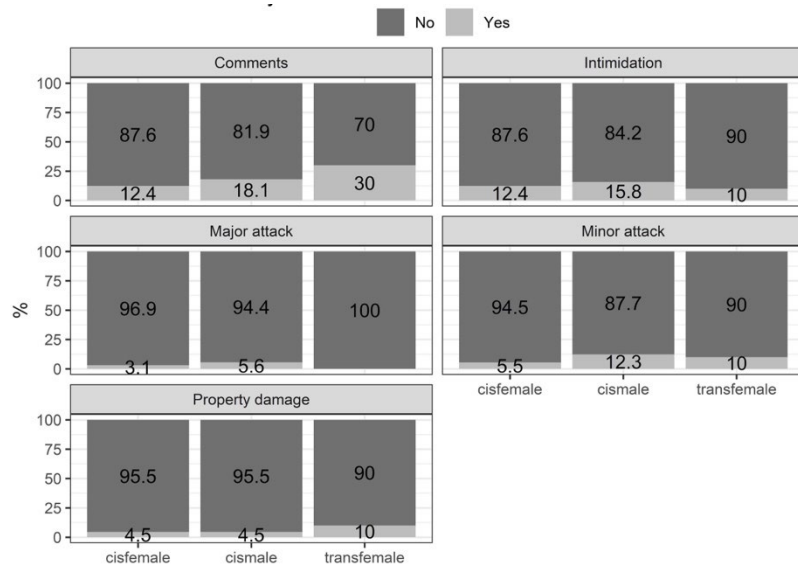
social interactions ( $p < .001$ ), whereby cis men usually (62%) interact with males, but cis women (52%) and especially trans women (100%) interact more with women than with men.

The results show that the circle of violence concerns cismale characters more than any other gender identities, as shown in Figure 3. However, trans women are victims of violence in more situations. They receive more insults and verbal attacks and minor attacks than cis men or cis women (Figure 4). Individual crossing variables for violence were all statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) in terms of the gender of the aggressor, except for “property damage”. As for being a victim of violence, we only found statistically significant differences between gender and being a victim of comments ( $p = .05$ ) and being a victim of minor attacks ( $p = .007$ ).

**Fig. 3**  
Association between Multiple Forms of Violence and Gender



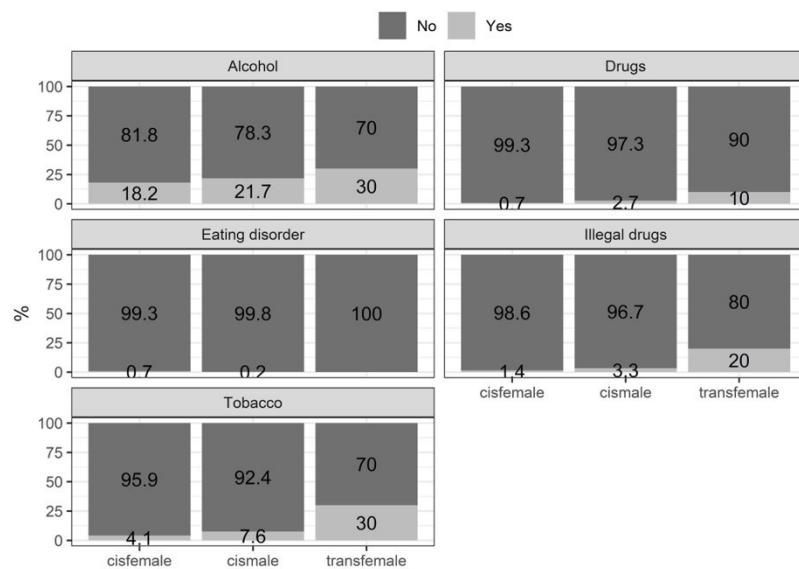
**Fig. 4**  
Association between Multiple Forms of Being a Victim of Violence and Gender



As for health (Figure 5), transfemales tend to manifest much more unhealthy behavior than cis characters (tobacco, alcohol, illegal and legal drugs). Only the crossing of gender with “eating disorders” and “alcohol” were not statistically significant.

**Fig. 5**

Association between Health Behaviors and Gender



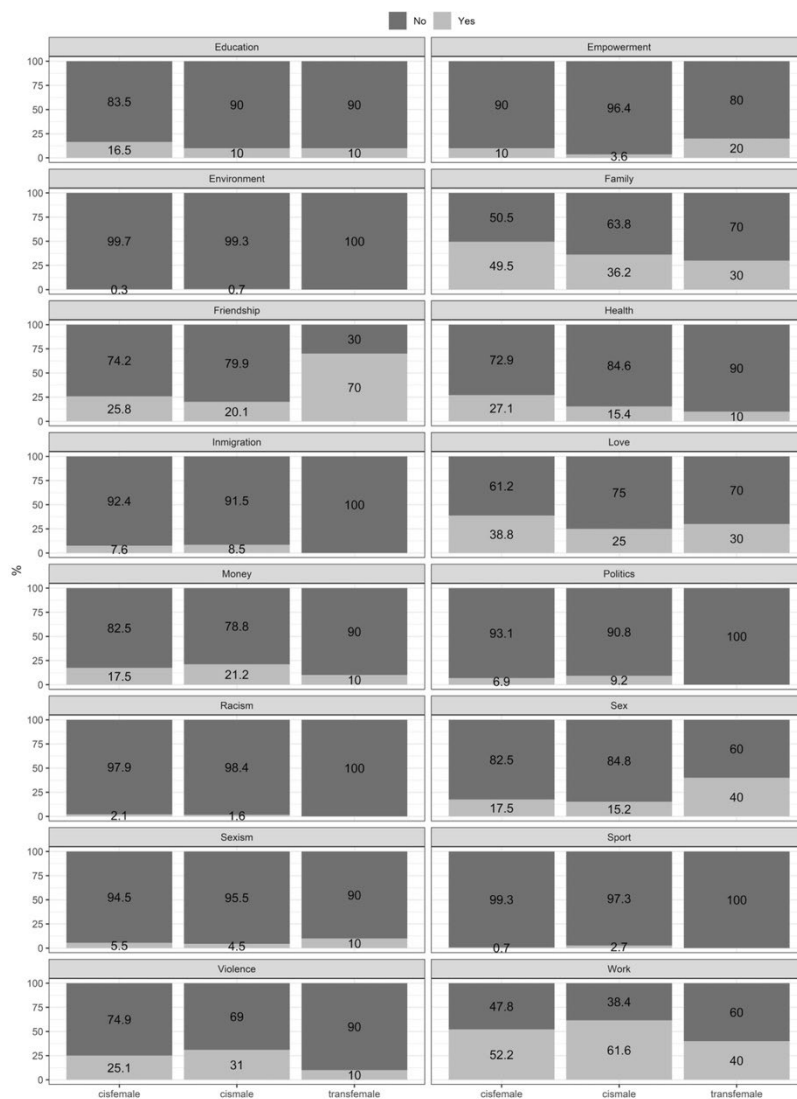
The topics of the conversations between characters also show some bias. Cis women tend to talk more about “love”, “family”, “health” or “education”, whereas cis men’s conversations revolve more around



“money”, “work” or “violence”. Trans women talk more about “friendship”, “sex” and “sexism” than cis characters (Figure 6). Fisher’s exact test showed statistically significant associations with education ( $p = .03$ ), empowerment ( $p = .003$ ), family ( $p = .002$ ), friendship ( $p < .001$ ), health ( $p < .001$ ), love ( $p < .001$ ) and work ( $p = .02$ ).

**Fig. 6**

Association between Conversation Topics and Gender



### ***Sexual Orientation***

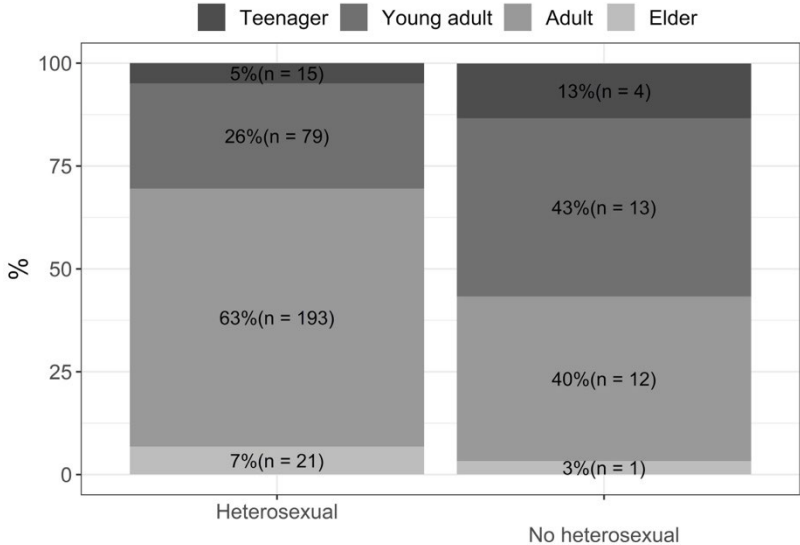
Table S2 shows the complete results of cross-tables for sexual orientation with the studied variables.

According to the results, there is a statistically significant association between the sexual orientation of

the characters and their age, level of education and marital status. Specifically, non-heterosexual characters tend to be younger ( $p = .03$ ) than heterosexuals (see Figure 7).

**Fig. 7**

Association between Age Group and Sexual Orientation

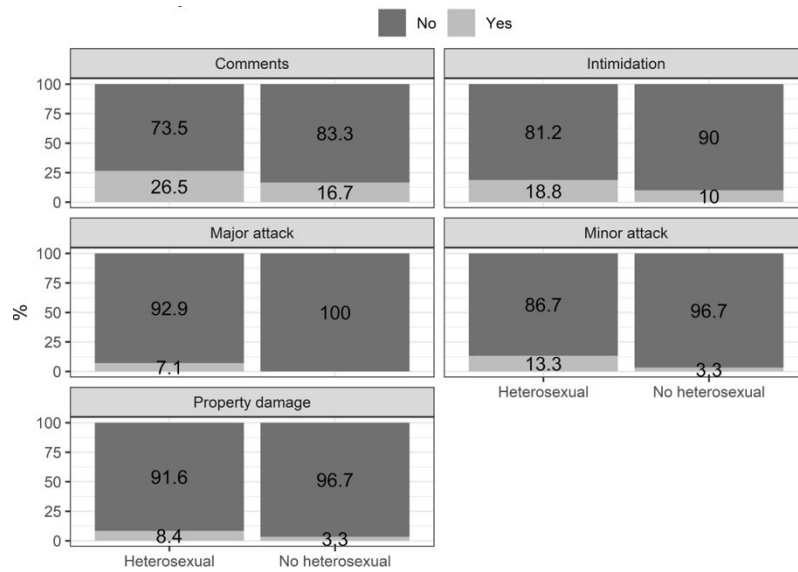


Regarding the level of education ( $p = .03$ ), although there is no representation of the lowest level among non-heterosexual characters, the percentage of these with a higher education is much lower than that for heterosexuals (23% vs. 55%). A statistically significant association was also found between the characters’ sexual orientation and their marital status ( $p = .001$ ). Single non-heterosexuals exceed the percentage of single heterosexuals (82% vs. 39%), whereas more heterosexuals are married (or live with a partner) (51%) than non-heterosexuals (18%). There were no widowed or divorced characters among the non-heterosexual group.

The results indicate that in this sample there is no statistically significant association between sexual orientation and violence (Figure 8) or being a victim (Figure 9).

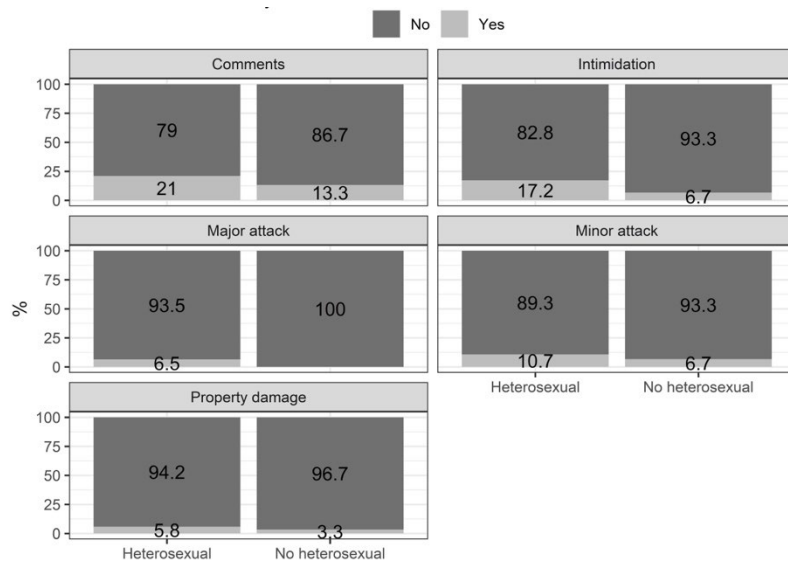
**Fig. 8**

Association between Violence and Sexual Orientation



**Fig. 9**

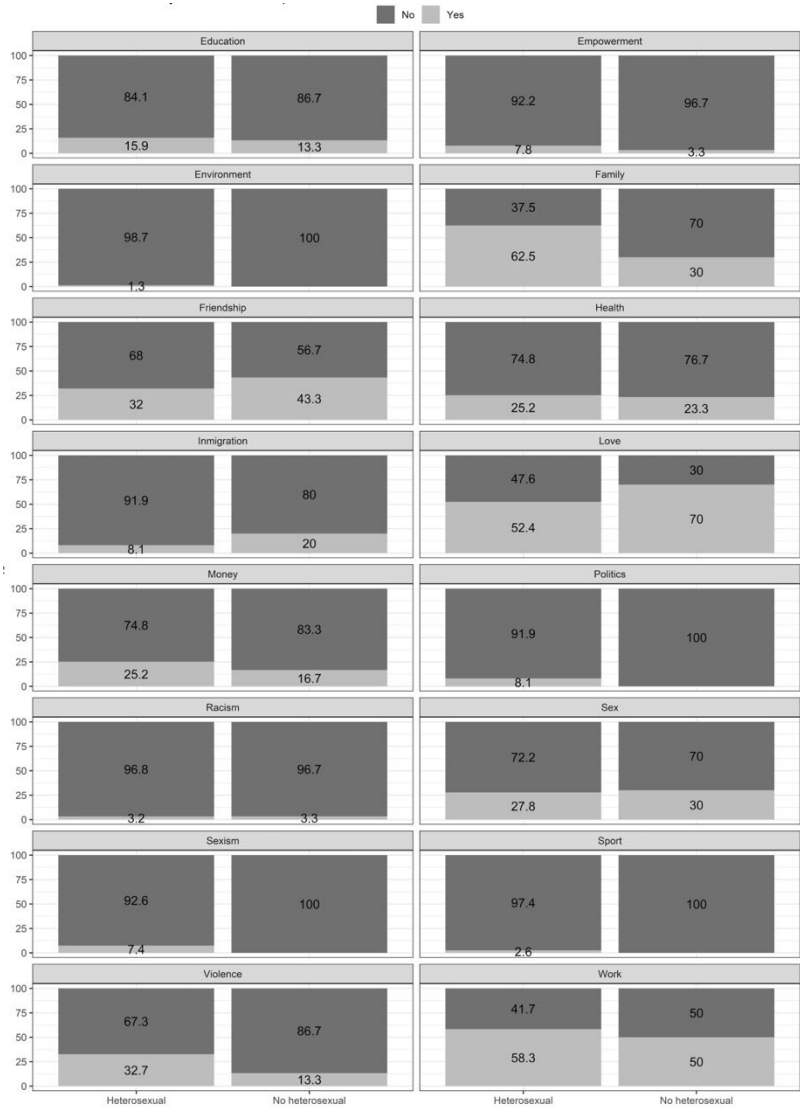
Association between being a Victim of Violence and Sexual Orientation



The topics of the conversations between characters grouped by their sexual orientation also show some bias (as shown in Figure 10). Heterosexual characters tend to talk more about family ( $p < .001$ ) and violence ( $p = .04$ ), whereas non-heterosexual characters' conversations revolve more around love ( $.08$ ) or immigration ( $p = .04$ ).

**Fig. 10**

# Association between Conversation Topics and Sexual Orientation



## Discussion

The big picture shows an underrepresentation of cis women (38.9%) compared to the general population in Spain, where 51% (n = 24,137,787) of the population are women (INE, 1st July 2021). There is no underrepresentation of trans characters (1.3%) since the World Health Organization estimates that around 0.3% and 0.5% of the world population are trans. However, they all identified as trans women (MTF), so there is a lack of representation of trans men (FTM) and non-binary people. This fits the lack of representation of trans and intersex realities, as well as non-binary identities, and the lower prevalence or visibility of such orientations as asexuality, bisexuality and demisexuality,

even in LGBT+ oriented media (Bond, 2015). This is consistent with previous research (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017).

Apparently, the fact that only 4% of the characters were non-heterosexual (n = 30) suggests a huge underrepresentation, but the percentage has to be compared with that for heterosexuals (41.3%), so a more accurate percentage of non-heterosexuals would be 8.6%, a number closer to the 10% of the population that self-identifies as LGBT. This is somewhat lower (8.62% non-heterosexuals plus 1.3% non-cisgender making a total of 9.9%) than the 11.9% (n = 92) of LGBT characters that GLAAD found on scripted broadcast primetime programming in the study titled “Where We Are on TV. 2020-21”. And it is slightly higher than the 8.2% of LGBT+ characters that the Spanish Observatory of Diversity in Audiovisual Media found on Spanish TV series (ODA, 2020). However, the figure is consistent with the increase in LGBT+ characters reported by researchers in recent years (Cook, 2018; GLAAD, 2021; Kerrigan & Vanlee, 2022; Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2021; Thomson, 2021). Within the non-heterosexual group, gay cis men represent 63.3% of the sample (19 out of 30). Hence, the data supports the statement that gay cis men are the most visible and privileged group within the LGBT+ collective.

As Vanlee (2021, p.1) pointed out, “Queer TV studies have until now focused predominantly on U.S. TV culture, and research into representations of sexual and gender diversity in Western European, Asian, and Latin American programming has only recently found traction”. This research follows this path from Anglo-Saxon countries towards other latitudes. In Spain, most of the academic work on LGBT+ representation on TV has used either a culturalist, socio-historical or simply descriptive qualitative methodology, as was the case with Gimeno (2008), Platero (2008), Calvo and Escudero (2009), Zurian (2018), Gálvez et al. (2017) and Vizcaíno, Contreras and Guzmán-Franco (2020). This research has instead taken a quantitative approach in order to broaden the field of Spanish LGBT+ TV studies. As Paul Julian Smith (2017) said, Spanish TV represents a remarkably influential and vibrant cultural industry, whose products are now watched worldwide following the expansion of VoD platforms.

The analyzed characters were to some extent stereotyped, especially transgender women who were associated with hypersexualization, prostitution and health problems, in part because many of

them appeared in the series *Veneno* (Atresplayer Premium, 2020), a biopic of Cristina Ortiz, also known as “La Veneno”, a Spanish singer, actress and sex worker. Previous literature (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017; Lester, 2015; Miller, 2015; Serano, 2007) has indeed supported the fact that depictions of transgender characters are often based on negative stereotypes such as mockery, disgust, fear, alienation, and anger. However, apparently “negative” portrayals also foster a reduction in negative attitudes among viewers. Lissitsa and Kushnirovich (2020, p. 125) express this as follows: “We found that some parasocial contact theory conditions for effective parasocial contact (Schiappa et al., 2005) such as “likability” and “diversity” are, in fact, not necessary. We found that frequent exposure to identifiable LGBT portrayals, even if perceived as neutral or negative, may increase compassion, recognition and decrease prejudice”.

Although we found that violence in original VoD programs on Spanish TV was mostly cismale, and that trans women suffer more insults and verbal attacks than cis men or cis women. These findings are consistent with both the predominance of masculine violence (Ellis, 2015), and the high frequency with which trans women suffer verbal attacks (Grant et al., 2011; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Lombardi, et al., 2002). Indeed, in an article on the harassment of Spanish trans persons, Devís-Devís et al. (2017) note that “59% of trans people suffer verbal harassment, which represents the highest percentage among the participants in this study” (p.14) and that “harassment is more prevalent in trans women than men” (p. 15).

In conclusion, the results of this content analysis of LGBT+ characters in Spanish original VoD series corroborate previous studies that have observed general underrepresentation of this community, the preponderance of gay cismales, absence of trans men and non-binary identities, and stereotypical traits. However, the number of trans female characters and the total percentage of LGBT+ characters, close to ten percent, leave room for optimism with regard to future portrayals of this sector of the population.

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