

Representation of the LGBT+ community in contemporary Spanish television fiction: (2015-2020)¹

Representación del colectivo LGBT+ en la ficción televisiva española contemporánea (2015-2020)

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The research analyzes the construction of LGBT+ characters and plots in Spanish serial fiction shown on distribution platforms in the last decade. It uses critical discourse analysis, which is divided into macro level and micro level analysis. The microanalysis is composed of topics, lexicalization and propositional framing. The results show, among others, that the majority of characters appear in marginal contexts, that recurring stereotypes continue to be used, and that LGBT+ orientation and identity are presented in a negative or ambiguous manner.

KEYWORDS: Critical discourse analysis, representation, LGBT+, series, Spain.

La investigación examina la construcción de personajes LGBT+ en la ficción seriada española incluida en plataformas de distribución en la última década. Se utiliza un análisis crítico del discurso articulado en un nivel macro, donde se estudian los grandes discursos, y en un nivel micro, donde se presta atención a las temáticas, la lexicalización y las estructuras proposicionales. Los resultados muestran, entre otros, la perpetuación de estereotipos recurrentes, la ubicación marginal de estos personajes y que la construcción de la realidad LGBT+ se presenta de manera negativa o ambigua.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Análisis crítico del discurso, representación, LGBT+, series, España.

A pesquisa examina a construção de personagens LGBT+ na ficção seriada espanhola inserida nas plataformas de distribuição na última década. Utiliza-se uma análise crítica do discurso articulada em nível macro, onde se estudam os principais discursos, e em nível micro, onde se dá atenção aos temas, à lexicalização e às estruturas proposicionais. Os resultados mostram, entre outros, a perpetuação de estereótipos recorrentes, a localização marginal desses personagens e que a construção da realidade LGBT+ se apresenta de forma negativa ou ambígua.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Análise crítica do discurso, representação, LGBT+, série, Espanha.

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INTRODUCTION

Serialized fiction has undergone major changes with the arrival on the global scene of new SVOD (subscription video-on-demand) services, such as Netflix, HBO and Disney+, mainly since 2015 (Cascajosa-Virino, 2018). In this regard, a change of roles and a paradigm shift have been observed, with the consolidation of the fandom phenomenon (González-Neira & Quintas-Froufe, 2020), the multiscreen television experience and viewer engagement through their comments on social networks (Rúas-Araújo & Quintas-Froufe, 2020).

Spain has a considerable amount of its own production, with a progressive increase in the number of fictional series, and also in genres, formats and content (Lacalle & Sánchez-Ares, 2019), especially on local distribution platforms with an international outlook, such as Movistar+, or directly on international distribution platforms with local offices, as is the case with Netflix.

Likewise, there has been an evident increase in the presence of LGBT+ characters at a time when these narratives are being more intensely addressed within the universe of serial fiction (González de Garay & Alfeo-Álvarez, 2017; Ventura, 2014), as the audiovisual sector strives to assimilate the changes happening in society (Lacalle & Hidalgo-Marí, 2016).

The research presented here is based on the assumption that audiovisual discourse and images carry enormous weight in the construction and formation of identities (Grossberg, 1996). This also includes the representation of minorities that have traditionally been excluded in various fields (Hammack & Cohler, 2011) and who are demanding integration in society under equal conditions, as is the case with the LGBT+ community. This takes on even greater importance given the peculiarities of SVOD platforms, which are transnational in nature and hence offer a means for cultural industries to export specific models of LGBT+ representation that thus become globalized (Amaya-Trujillo & Charlois-Allende, 2018; Hidalgo, 2020). This is the case with fictional series like *Elite* (Netflix, 2018-), which was produced locally in Spain and went on to become one of the most-watched Netflix shows in the world (Carro, 2019), and *Veneno* (2020),

one of the most commented and applauded productions in the United States on HBO Max (Mullor, 2020).

Hence, the goal of this research is to take a critical look at how the LGBT+ community is represented in contemporary Spanish serial fiction available on global distribution platforms since SVOD was established in 2015. This first involves a review of Spanish serial fiction with LGBT+ content, followed by critical discourse analysis of the pilot episodes of seven shows to understand the modern-day representation of this community and to obtain a transnational overview of such fictional series.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF SPANISH LGBT+ SERIAL FICTION

Studies of LGBT+ representation in Spanish serial fiction date it from the creation in 1956 of the first public Spanish television channel, TVE, under the Franco dictatorship. The goal during this historical period was to denigrate and conceal the LGBT+ community, for which purpose committees were even set up to oversee the prohibition on the representation of such people in the audiovisual realm (Mira, 2008). There were two types of LGBT+ representation in this period: the characters and/or plots were either non-explicit and could only be understood through unspoken references, or they were explicit but based on recurring stereotypes. The outcome had to be of a moralistic nature, through the punishment, death or isolation of such characters, who were characterized in opposition to hegemonic heterosexuality (González de Garay & Alfeo-Álvarez, 2017, p. 64).

During the period of the Spanish transition to democracy, LGBT+ characters in serial fiction continued to be presented in a concealed and stereotyped manner, as was the case with the series *Curro Jiménez* (TVE, 1976-1978), in which an episodic male character dressed up as a woman and harassed another man under the influence of drugs (Alfeo-Álvarez & González de Garay, 2012, pp. 2-3). This moralistic intent would continue through to the eighties with the aim of depicting the supposedly negative consequences of sexual diversity (González de Garay & Alfeo-Álvarez, 2017, p. 65). One such case was *Pepe Carvalho* (TVE, 1986), with its storyline involving a lesbian who trafficked drugs

inside dead babies' corpses (Alfeo-Álvarez & González de Garay, 2012, p. 4).

The nineties brought about a turning point and plots started to revolve around the acceptance of sexual diversity by other characters (Alfeo-Álvarez & González de Garay, 2012, p. 5). One example is Oscar from *Médico de Familia* (Telecinco, 1995-1999), whose narrative was far removed from the prevailing stereotypes until then, although his storylines continued to revolve around defense of his sexual orientation. It was in that same period when the first gay teenage couple appeared in Spanish fiction, Santi and Ruben from *Al Salir de Clase* (Telecinco, 1997-2002), who also challenged the traditional stereotypes, but still suffered as a result of their sexuality (Durán-Manso, 2015, p. 69).

Moving into the 2000s, research observes a quantitative increase in the number of LGBT+ characters appearing in serialized fiction (Alfeo-Álvarez & González de Garay, 2012, p. 7). An important case is that of Mauri and Fernando from *Aquí no Hay Quien Viva* (Antena 3, 2003-2006), one of the first homosexual couples to be shown living together in a prime-time TV show, albeit in yet another comedy context (Durán-Manso, 2015, p. 69) and being characterized with traditional heteronormative roles. However, in the 2000s there was an increase in more integrated portrayals where sexual orientation was just one aspect of the characters, without it being the central storyline, as was the case with Maca and Esther in *Hospital Central* (Telecinco, 2000-2012) (Alfeo-Álvarez & González de Garay, 2012, p. 7).

Finally, in the 2010s, changes were observed in certain models. Since the 2000s, there has been an assimilation by LGBT+ couples of the traits of heterosexual couples in fiction, thus generating a homonormativity (Puar, 2007) that the audience will find socially acceptable. Francisco-Amat et al. (2016) found that series like *Tierra de Lobos* (Telecinco, 2010-2014) maintained heteronormative myths by attributing the traditional male role to one and the female one to the other half of the couple formed by Isabel and Cristina. Authors like Durán-Manso (2015, p. 68) claim that, at present, certain portrayals that are integrated into the narrative in a naturalized manner coexist alongside others that are based on stereotypes that reproduce and maintain distorted views of this group.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the bibliographic review and the theoretical framework, the research hypothesis is that contemporary Spanish serial fiction continues to produce a distorted construction of LGBT+ characters and storylines.

To test this hypothesis, this study uses critical discourse analysis to examine whether the hegemonic discourse of contemporary Spanish fiction broadcast on international distribution platforms presents a distorted, positive or neutral portrayal of the LGBT+ community. The 2015-2020 period is chosen because this was when new subscription platforms like Netflix arrived on the scene and because, due to it being such a recent phenomenon, research on this type of serialized fiction is an area that has yet to be explored.

To do so, series with storylines and/or characters related to the LGBT+ community were taken into consideration when they met the following criteria:

- a. Be present in 2020 on transnational SVOD platforms.
- b. Have scored higher than the minimum rating of 7.5 points out of 10 on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) website.
- c. The characters appear in the first, or pilot, episode, because this is the one that presents the general themes that will be used throughout the rest of the series (Sangro-Colón, 2005, p. 1).
- d. It should be recognizable from the pilot episode that these characters belong to the LGBT+ community. This led to the exclusion of such characters as Helsinki from *Money Heist (La Casa de Papel)* (Netflix, 2017-).

The sample was ultimately made up of the following shows:

Fictional series	Platform	Character	Identity
<i>Elite</i>	Netflix	Ander Muñoz Omar Shanaa	Gay
<i>The Ministry of Time (El Ministerio del Tiempo)</i>	Netflix / HBO	Irene Larra	Lesbian
<i>Malaka</i>	RTVE Play	“La Tota”	Lesbian
<i>Merlí: Sapere Aude</i>	Movistar+	Pol Rubio	Bisexual
<i>Veneno</i>	HBO Max / ATRESplayer	Cristina “La Veneno” Valeria Vegas	Trans women
<i>Locked Up (Vis a Vis)</i>	Netflix / Movistar+ / ATRESplayer	“Rizos” Saray Vargas	Lesbian
<i>Unauthorized Living (Vivir Sin Permiso)</i>	Netflix	Alejandro Lamas Carlos Bandeira	Gay

Source: The author.

The critical discourse analysis (CDA) technique is both a theory and a method (Fairclough, 2003, p. 179). It is a type of research that identifies the abuse of social power, domination and inequality (van Dijk, 1999) through the relationship between discourse and symbolic power, in this case, that exercised by multinationals through SVOD platforms, due to their preferential access to public discourse and symbolic resources. Specifically, this research has employed critical analysis of multimodal discourse (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017) since, due its very nature, serialized fiction is not framed in a pure textual analysis. Multimodal discourse analysis takes into account elements such as images, tone of speech, music, colors, looks and silences (Kress, 2003). It is also a mainly qualitative form of critical discourse analysis with quantitative elements.

Doing this involved analysis on two levels:

1. Macro level: Following García-Jiménez et al. (2015, p. 312) and which can be defined as the general ideas or macrostructures that govern the text or topic and which organize the meaning of the discourse. Three differentiated discourses were proposed, and one was selected for each series:
 - a. Naturalized LGBT+ sexual orientation: Diverse sexual orientation is integrated and the characters have healthy relationships.
 - b. Conflictive LGBT+ sexual orientation: Portrayed as problematic (as the “baddie”, being assigned negative actions, sexual diversity is a problem for the character or for others, etc.).
 - c. Ambiguous discourse regarding LGBT+ sexual orientation: Elements of the two previous forms are introduced, including both naturalization and conflict.
2. Micro level: These structures have more specific meanings than macro discourses. This involved the study of:
 - a. Themes: The main themes selected from the pilot episode of the series in relation to LGBT+ characters. The single pilot chapter might share several main themes.
 - b. Lexicalization: Following Pineda et al. (2016, p. 6) the focus is on the lexicon used, including phrases, names, adjectives, etc., by both the LGBT+ characters and the cisheterosexuals who interact with them. This is divided into the following subsections:
 - B1: Lexicalization of characters: The LGBT+ characters are identified (immigrants, prison inmates, etc.) and their ethnoculture is analyzed.
 - B2: Lexicalization of the action: What actions the characters perform (drug trafficking and dealing, caring for other people, etc.).
 - B3: Presence of the characters’ diverse sexual orientation and/ or identity: public (the character is openly LGBT+); restricted (the character is only openly LGBT+ with a certain number of characters); concealed (the character is not openly LGBT+ with the other characters); unknown.

- B4: Traditionally common stereotypes in the sociocultural imaginary, following a classification based on the research by Álvarez-Hernández et al. (2015), González de Garay & Alfeo-Álvarez (2017), Guasch (2011), López-López (2017), Mira (2008) and Peña-Zerpa (2013). The following stereotypes are suggested: Effeminate homosexual; LGBT+ character as comic relief; manipulative and seductive LGBT+ character; promiscuous LGBT+ character; hedonistic and narcissistic LGBT+ character; tormented LGBT+ character; LGBT+ based on gender roles; homonormative LGBT+ character; lesbian character as object of desire and hypermasculine lesbian character.
- c. Propositional structures: These are based on the assignment of roles to the characters in a series, which are divided into:
- C1: Conceptual polarization: Whether the existence of an “Us” (dominant group) and “Them” (dominated group) is noted, which stresses the positive aspects of cisheterosexual characters as opposed to LGBT+ ones, who are responsible for negative actions.
- C2: Focus: For Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez (2020, p. 102), this is the privileged point of view in discourse. This first involves identifying who the point of view was based on, i.e. whether it is the actual character, an external narrator, etc., and also whether this is done from a point of view that is heteronormative, homonormative, neutral or based on the diversity of sexual orientations.

MACRO LEVEL RESULTS

More than half (57%) of the seven pilot episodes studied feature a macro discourse in which sexual orientation or LGBT+ identity is presented in a conflictive manner. This is the case with *Malaka*, *Veneno* and *Locked Up (Vis a Vis)*, where sexual diversity is associated with marginal environments, prostitution and violence (Cristina “La Veneno”), drug trafficking and dealing (“La Tota” in *Malaka*, and Omar in *Elite*) or murders and extortion (Saray in *Locked Up*). In *Elite*, sexual orientation is a problem for the characters themselves, who keep it hidden and

secret. Moreover, these characters are emotionally unstable and feature numerous stereotypes, as confirmed by the micro level results.

TABLE 2
MACRO DISCOURSE

Type of discourse	Number of series	Percentage
Naturalized LGBT+ sexual orientation	1	14%
Conflictive LGBT+ sexual orientation	4	57%
Ambiguous discourse regarding LGBT+ sexual orientation	2	29%
Total	7	100%

Source: The author.

In the remaining 29%, the macro discourse is ambiguous, meaning that elements that naturalize LGBT+ orientation are introduced together with others associated to conflict, and it is unclear which of the two is the prominent form. This is the case with *Unauthorized Living* (*Vivir sin Permiso*), where Alejandro's character is presented in a naturalized manner and his narrative is built around positive traits and actions, as opposed to Carlos, a drug addict represented by such negative traits as jealousy. Finally, with 14%, there is the naturalized discourse of *The Ministry of Time* (*El Ministerio del Tiempo*), where Irene is portrayed through such positive traits as bravery and impetuosity, and she fits naturally into the other characters' storylines.

MICRO LEVEL RESULTS

A) Themes

There are two major themes in the analyzed pilot episodes. The first is a focus on a criminal context, such as in *Malaka* with its drug dealer and user "La Tota", the leader and matriarch of the "Cucos" clan that controls the scene in a marginal neighborhood of Malaga; in *Unauthorized Living*, where Carlos is a drug addict and the oldest son of the biggest dealer in Galicia; the criminal context of prostitution

observed in “La Veneno”; and the prison context of *Locked Up*, where Saray and “Rizos” are immersed in a seedy environment of extortion, blackmail and violence. The second major theme is that of conflict with respect to the characters’ sexuality and/or self-acceptance. Omar and Ander from *Elite* exemplify this when they hide their orientation, suffer because of it and lack emotional stability in this regard.

TABLE 3
MAIN THEMES

Themes	Number of series	Percentage
Professional	1	10%
Student	1	10%
Conflict regarding character’s sexuality and/or self-acceptance	3	30%
Criminal context (drug dealing or consumption, prostitution or prison setting)	5	50%
Total	10	100%

Source: The author.

Other observed themes focus on the professional aspect, such as Irene working for the government in *The Ministry of Time*, or on the student lives of Omar and Ander in *Elite*, as well as Pol in *Merli: Sapere Aude*.

B) *Lexicalization*

B1) *Lexicalization of characters*. The results are shown in the following data, where it is borne in mind that the same character can be associated to different attributes or be involved in more than one activity:

TABLE 4
MAIN ACTIVITIES AND ATTRIBUTES

Main activity/ attribute	Number	Characters	Percentage
Government workers	1	Irene Larra	8%
Teachers	1	Alejandro Lamas	8%
Students	4	Pol, Valeria, Ander and Omar	31%
Prostitutes	1	Cristina “La Veneno”	8%
Drug dealers and/or users	4	Omar, Ander, “La Tota” and Carlos	31%
Prison inmates	2	Saray and “Rizos”	14%
Total	13		100%

Source: The author.

In addition, 36% of the characters belong to ethnocultures other than the traditional Caucasian or Western representation. Specifically, these are African (“Rizos”), gypsy (Saray and “La Tota”) and Arabic (Omar).

B2) *Lexicalization of the action.* Regarding the action, the most recurrent acts observed in these seven analyzed pilot episodes are of a negative nature, mainly centered around coercive and possessive actions, such as revenge, manipulation, lying and jealousy, as in the case of Saray in *Locked Up*:

Saray (to Macarena): “Whore”

Macarena (scared): “What’s up with this woman?”

Anabel (inmate): “Well, somebody has stolen someone’s girlfriend”

Second, there are acts of violence and authoritarianism:

“La Veneno” (while addressing Fabela, a reporter, in an aggressive manner):

“Speak up, you little bitch. Fuck the lot of you!”

There is also a prominent presence of impulsive and uninhibited actions, such as Irene from *The Ministry of Time* in the scene where she meets Amelia and kisses her; consumption of drugs and alcohol, as with Ander; and drug dealing by characters like “La Tota” in *Malaka*, and Omar in *Elite*, both in marginal settings.

Finally, to a lesser extent, examples are observed of brave, decided actions, such as Irene from *The Ministry of Time* who is such a fervent advocate of female leadership as shown by her constant insistence that Amelia Folch should be respected as group leader; or friendly, empathetic acts like those by Alejandro of *Unauthorized Living*, who is understanding and constantly supportive of his partner and students.

B3) *Presence of the characters’ sexual orientation and/or diverse identity*

TABLE 5
PRESENCE OF LGBT+ ORIENTATION AND/OR IDENTITY

Presence of LGBT+ identity	Number of characters	Percentage
Public	4	37%
Restricted	1	9%
Concealed	4	37%
Unknown	2	17%
Total	11	100%

Source: The author.

In 37% of the cases, the characters’ sexual orientation is public, as in the case of Carlos and Alejandro from *Unauthorized Living*. Saray and “Rizos” from *Locked Up* are further examples. However, in this latter case, their sexuality is only public within the prison context, where it is viewed as a temporary phase rather than a real sexual orientation, as illustrated by the following extract:

Estefanía “Rizos”: “Hey, you wanna go out with me?”

Macarena (cisheterosexual character): “Er, cheers... I appreciate that but I can’t because I’m heterosexual”

Estefanía “Rizos”: “We’re all heterosexual here, it doesn’t matter”.

The same percentage of 37% of characters keep their sexual orientation or identity hidden, like Pol in *Merli: Sapere Aude*, who denies his bisexuality by saying he “doesn’t want labels”. In 17% of cases, it cannot be observed clearly, like with “La Tota”, who comes across as LGBT+ in a brief scene where she touches a younger girl’s behind and breasts. Finally, in 9% of cases the orientation is restricted, as in the case of “La Veneno”, who says she can’t go to television because “my mother has never seen me as a woman. She doesn’t know the person I am today.”

B4) *Recurring stereotypes in the sociocultural imaginary.* The two most recurrent stereotypes found in the analyzed pilot episodes are:

- a. Homonormative LGBT+ character, who has assimilated the traits considered positive of heteronormativity, namely Caucasian, upper-middle class, adolescent or young adult and physically slender, and lacking characteristics that are viewed as negative such as eccentricity or effeminate mannerisms, hence making it easier to fit in naturally with other characters. This is the case with Irene from *The Ministry of Time* and with Pol from *Merli: Sapere Aude*.
- b. Promiscuous LGBT+ character, who has sex with a large number of characters, sometimes in association with drug use or marginal lives, as in *Veneno* and *Locked Up*.

In second place:

- a. Seductive LGBT+ character, as is the case of Irene from *The Ministry of Time*, who kisses Amelia despite barely knowing her.
- b. Hypermasculinized or *tomboy* LGBT+ character, depicting the sinister side of that. These characters have a typically corporal attitude and perform violent, rude and possessive actions, associated with toxic hypermasculinity, as is the case with the two gypsy characters, “La Tota” and Saray.
- c. LGBT+ characters that apply the gender duality of heterosexual couples, i.e. a male role for one character and a female role for the

other. This is the case with Alejandro (male) and Carlos (female) from *Unauthorized Living*.

- d. Sexualized LGBT+ character as an object of desire, shown in the behaviors and physical traits of people like “La Veneno”.

To a minor extent, other observed stereotypes are:

- a. Tormented and unhappy LGBT+ character, present in characters such as Omar and Ander in *Elite*, who are portrayed as unstable due to their sexual orientation.
- b. Hedonistic and narcissistic LGBT+ character, as in the case of Cristina “La Veneno”, who is continually talking about her body and appearance.
- c. LGBT+ character as comic relief, as is the case of the secondary character called Paca “La Piraña”, a trans friend of “La Veneno”.
- d. Effeminate LGBT+ character, as represented by Carlos in *Unauthorized Living*, whose actions, speech and behavior are socioculturally regarded as feminine, including hand gestures, a slow, gentle tone of voice, and so on.

C) Propositional structures

C1) *Conceptual polarization*. In most of the pilot episodes there is a conceptual polarization based on an “Us”, namely the dominant cisheterosexual group, as opposed to a “Them”, who are the subordinate LGBT+ group. This is the case with “La Tota” in *Malaka*, who is portrayed in a negative light. She is a violent, authoritarian and vindictive character, and also a drug dealer. In contrast, there is the cisheterosexual policewoman Blanca Gámez, who is responsible and hard-working, and is seen to help others. There is also an otherness to be observed among characters belonging to the “Them” group in series like *Veneno*, with its cisheterosexual reporters looking for extravagant, outlandish stories and comparing LGBT+ to satanic rituals and abductions in Cabo de Gata.

Secondly, there are series in which a conceptual polarization is observed between cisheterosexual characters and other groups, including the LGBT+ community. This happens in *Elite*, where the “Us”

is made up of rich people of high social class and cultural level, who are Caucasian or Hispanic, physically slender, cisheterosexual and successful. Meanwhile, the others, the “Them”, are people of middle to lower social and economic class, who tend to be religious, Arabs or LGBT+, and are depicted as dangerous:

Guzmán (cisheterosexual character, to his sister): “These people are poison, Marina. How come every time I turn my back it feels like you are on their side?”

This is also the case with *Locked Up*, where there is an “Us” made up of people from the outside or that work in the prison, who are cisheterosexual, and are usually attributed positive, human values and actions. This “Us” includes the lead character, Macarena, who thinks she is in there with “Them” by mistake. Meanwhile, the “Them” is made up of women, LGBT+, gypsies, Afro-Americans, drug addicts, and so on.

This prison context also causes an association between uninhibited lesbianism and the danger of the place, as opposed to heterosexual relationships that are depicted as healthy, such as, for example, those between Macarena’s parents and her brother and sister-in-law.

Finally, there are series in which this polarization is not observed, such as *Merlí: Sapere Aude*, in which numerous characters are immigrants, of low social class, homosexuals or have Down syndrome, but they are also assigned positive actions.

C2) Focus

In 72% of the pilot episodes studied, the focus is from a heteronormative prism, i.e. from heterosexuality as the privileged point of view of the discourse. This occurs in cases such as *Elite*, where the narrative focus is centered on the characters’ heterosexuality, while the LGBT+ storylines are presented in isolation from the rest, in secret places like bridges or with faces hidden under hoods. In this same vein, sexual and romantic relationships are shown between the cisheterosexual characters, such as between Lucrecia and Guzmán, but are omitted when they involve LGBT+ characters.

TABLE 6
MAIN FOCUS

Focus	Number of series	Percentage
Heteronormative	5	72%
Homonormative	1	14%
Neutral	1	14%
Total	7	100%

Source: The author.

In this regard, in series like *The Ministry of Time*, heterosexuality is the naturalized orientation from which all other storylines are narratively based, and there is a presumption of heterosexuality (Rich, 1996) among the characters:

Patient (to Julian): “I’m having a little party at home, nice, nice. The kids are going to the in-laws and we thought we’d have a few guys round. And girls... (emphatically and changing his tone of voice) You should come”.

In 14% of cases, the focus is from the homonormative point of view, as in *Merlí: Sapere Aude*, where the story is told from the point of view of the main bisexual character, Pol. There is criticism of the heteronormative system here, as shown by the following extract:

María Bolaño (Pol’s teacher): “We spend our lives trying to be happy and relaxed, when all we need to do so nobody gets us pissed with their little jokes is to be born male, white, rich and heterosexual”.

However, despite the criticism, the series is presented from a homonormative prism, with Pol being Caucasian, slender and having all the attributes that are traditionally associated with heterosexuality, which is why his character fits so snugly into his surroundings. What’s more, he denies his bisexuality.

Third, with the same percentage of 14% there are series from a neutral point of view, like *Veneno*, where the narration comes from two different time periods. The first is the past, where the point of view is

centered on cisheterosexual reporters who are looking for weird stories and try to entice “La Veneno” to go on television. The second is the present, where the LGBT+ character, Valeria, seeks out “La Veneno” to hear her story, which unleashes the rest of the plot. Therefore, there is a balance between the heteronormative viewpoint and another based on the diversity of sexual orientations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Spanish serial fiction with the presence of LGBT+ storylines has undergone various changes since its appearance, going from initial invisibility and stigmatization on traditional television, in which the characters had to be presented as the opposite of what is morally acceptable in society (Mira, 2008), to a quantitative increase in these characters accentuated by the appearance of subscription video on-demand platforms (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2021).

However, and considering the limitations of only analyzing the pilot episodes of fiction series, the application of CDA and the analysis of discourse on a macro and micro level has made it possible to infer, on the one hand, that these examined episodes from SVOD platforms from 2015 to 2020 mostly contain discourse in which the LGBT+ orientation or identity is constructed in an ambiguous or negative way, and is associated with marginal elements (prison settings, prostitution, etc.).

On the other hand, it is inferred that the themes continue to be linked mainly to conflicts associated to the characters’ sexuality and criminal actions (drug dealing and use, extortion, etc.). Hence, negative patterns continue to appear in these pilot episodes, just like back in the early decades of Spanish LGBT+ portrayals (González de Garay & Alfeo-Álvarez, 2017). The studied LGBT+ characters recurrently perform negative or directly inconsequential or comic actions, while there are very few cases where they are shown in a positive light.

Likewise, a large percentage of these characters still hide their sexual orientation or identity, or it is somehow restricted, as was also the case with the earliest such representations in Spanish TV series (Alfeo-Álvarez & González de Garay, 2012), thus promoting a discursive

focus in which the privileged point of view is the heterosexual one, as opposed to a diversity of sexual orientations. This implies the presence of major conceptual polarization in most series, in which positive actions are associated with cisheterosexual characters and negative ones with other groups such as LGBT+, immigrants and people of low social class. Hence, the initial hypothesis is confirmed.

On the other hand, although they have decreased in number, traditional and recurring stereotypes are still employed, such as the LGBT+ character who is effeminate, evil or tormented by their condition, which coincides with other similar research, such as that by McLaughlin and Rodríguez (2017). There has also been an increase in other more recent stereotypes, such as the homonormative LGBT+ character, as also found in other Spanish fiction of the last decade (Francisco-Amat et al., 2016). There is evidence of a tendency towards the portrayal of more positive qualities associated with homonormative characters, such as Alejandro in *Unauthorized Living* (Netflix), as opposed to a negative representation in all of the analyzed cases of ethnocultures other than Caucasian, such as “La Tota”, the gypsy from *Malaka* (RTVE Play). This is a main theoretical contribution of this research.

A greater presence and diversity of LGBT+ characters is observed than in the past, due to the inclusion of other ethnocultures –Arab in *Elite* (Netflix) or gypsy and African in *Locked Up* (Netflix)– and identities –such as trans in *Veneno* (HBO Max)–, which has led to a positive increase in the visibility of these diverse sexual orientations and identities on these subscription platforms.

However, this increase is revealed to be inefficient, since a poor symbolic construction based on stereotypes reinforces not only the distorted social image of this minority, but also the identity of the community itself, as research on identification with LGBT+ characters and its effects has shown (Madžarević & Soto-Sanfiel, 2018). This is even more important when considering that the cultural industries have such huge potential for socialization, as well as the capacity for transnationalization that SVOD has endowed upon such series as *Elite*, which were produced in Spain by platforms like Netflix but have gone on to enjoy success in other countries like the United States, thereby fostering what has become a globalized but distorted vision of the LGBT+ community.

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