

## Advances and setbacks in LGBT narratives on television: content analysis of Chilean fiction series (2004-2020)

*Avances y retrocesos de la narrativa LGBT en la televisión: análisis de contenido de series de ficción chilenas (2004-2020)*

*Avanços e retrocessos da narrativa LGBT na televisão: análise de conteúdo de séries de ficção chilenas (2004-2020)*

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The growing presence of LGBT characters on Chilean television does not necessarily indicate more accurate portrayals. This analysis used a historical and quantitative approach to evaluate the representation of LGBT characters in Chilean television shows. It identified a total of 76 characters, although many held minor roles and were not consistently featured in every episode, or their narratives were not fully developed. The research findings suggest that the depiction of LGBT characters in media and entertainment has been erratic and has shown limited qualitative improvement over the course of the twenty-first century. Moreover, disparities and unequal representation exist across various identities.

**KEYWORDS:** LGBT, queer studies, pinkwashing, content analysis, fiction.

*Desde un enfoque histórico y cuantitativo se analiza el proceso de incorporación de personajes LGBT en las series de ficción televisivas chilenas. Si bien se identificaron un total de 76 personajes entre 2004 y 2020, gran parte de estos poseen un rol secundario o figurante, es decir, no aparecen en todos los capítulos y, en general, sus historias no se desarrollan. Los resultados evidencian que los personajes LGBT experimentan un crecimiento fluctuante durante el transcurso del siglo XXI, incluso hay ausencias y desigualdades entre identidades de género. Se concluye que una mayor visibilidad de personajes LGBT en la televisión a lo largo de este siglo no se traduce directamente en una mejor representación de las disidencias sexuales.*

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** LGBT, estudios queer, pinkwashing, análisis de contenido, ficción.

*A partir de uma abordagem histórica e quantitativa, analisa-se o processo de incorporação de personagens LGBT nas séries de ficção televisivas chilenas. Embora tenham sido identificados um total de 76 personagens entre 2004 e 2020, grande parte deles tem um papel secundário ou figurante, ou seja, não aparecem em todos os episódios e, em geral, suas histórias não se desenvolvem. Os resultados evidenciam que os personagens LGBT experimentam um crescimento flutuante ao longo do século XXI, havendo até mesmo ausências e desigualdades entre identidades de gênero. Conclui-se que uma maior visibilidade dos personagens LGBT na televisão ao longo do século XXI não se traduz diretamente em uma melhor representação das dissidências sexuais.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** LGBT, estudos queer, pinkwashing, análise de conteúdo, ficção.

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## INTRODUCTION

Visibility has often been a challenging right for sexual minorities, particularly in mass media (Platero, 2015). However, in recent years, we have witnessed a new era of queer and trans visibility in the media (Halberstam, 2018; Higuera-Ruiz, 2024; McNicholas, 2020; Ng, 2013; Sánchez Soriano, 2024; Valverde Maestre & Pérez Rufi, 2021; Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2020). This global era has contributed to the normalization of LGBT communities (Duggan, 2004) and their integration into political, social, and media institutions (Puar, 2017).

LGBT representations are often framed as embodying a progressive promise of better times and form part of a mass television landscape aimed at a broad audience (Butler, 2002). At the same time, audiences have become accustomed to seeing gay men and lesbian women portrayed in a respectable manner (Ahmed, 2019; Bond & Compton, 2015; Eguskiza, 2018). In the Chilean context, for example, the film *Una mujer fantástica* (*A fantastic woman*) became a national milestone after winning an Academy Award and being led by a trans woman. The film highlighted transgender rights through the Gender Identity Law and demonstrated the powerful impact of audiovisual media in shaping societal attitudes and promoting social justice.

In this way, the affirmative politics that demand greater and more visible recognition of sexual dissidence in public imagery have remained a persistent feature of the twenty-first century (Fraisie, 2016). These struggles for visibility converged with the expansion of the feminist movement in 2018 (Aguilera et al., 2021), especially as feminism in the audiovisual field challenged prevailing gender biases and exposed the forms of violence that manifest both on-screen and behind the camera (Garrido & Zapsi, 2021).

It is often assumed that mere inclusion of LGBT characters in television is sufficient; however, it is necessary to interrogate the audiovisual policies that integrate these representations and seek to normalize them. To examine the politics of LGBT visibility in times of neoliberal progressivism, this study analyzes the specific case of twenty-first-century Chilean television fiction series (TFS), which has created a new space for visibility to large audiences, with both national and international

reach. The study examines a relatively small yet innovative television fiction industry (Olavarría et al., 2021) that has earned global acclaim for its productions, to critically analyze how LGBT storylines have been integrated into the on-screen narrative.

The primary hypothesis of this research is that there has been an increase in LGBT characters throughout the first two decades of the 2000s. The general research question is: How has the visibility of LGBT characters in TFS changed over the course of the twenty-first century? The specific questions guiding this study were: How many LGBT characters appear in twenty-first-century Chilean TFS? What narrative roles do these characters occupy? And, what is the screen time of LGBT characters in each TFS?

In Chile, there is no specific study addressing LGBT representation in television fiction series. This research, therefore, examines in detail the production of TFS in Chile during the twenty-first century, as well as the modalities of LGBT visibility and temporality, to reconstruct an audiovisual history that has often been overlooked. This narrative is deeply embedded within the structures of heterosexual popular entertainment. It presents an important opportunity for further exploration and analysis in Latin American image studies, an area that has not yet received the attention it deserves.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, strong editorial pressures and a conservative context restricted the broadcasting of content or characters associated with sexual dissidence on Chilean television—actions that bear the traces of centuries of taboos surrounding homosexuality and the pathologization of sodomitical practices and trans bodies (Falconí, 2016; Gill-Peterson, 2024; Preciado, 2020). In Chile, controversy arose in 2001 over a kiss between two actresses in the telenovela *Pampa Ilusión* (TVN), in which the character Inés (Claudia Di Girolamo) cross-dressed as a doctor to gain higher social status in a historical fiction. In the first half of 2004, the Chilean telenovela *Machos* (Canal 13) introduced Ariel Mercader, a gay man rejected by his father and brothers who returns to Chile after living in Spain. The production,

developed by the drama division of a Catholic and privately owned channel, was successful in addressing issues that had been barely visible in television fiction of that period (Fuenzalida et al., 2009).

A broader process of normalizing homosexuality in society (Warner, 1999) has produced a more sanitized representation on screen through processes of incorporation that depoliticize these lives and integrate them superficially, giving rise to issues such as the pinkwashing of the audiovisual industry's image (Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020). The history of homosexual visibility is a process of normalization, de-eroticization (Miller, 2007), and depoliticization of these bodies to achieve mass visibility on screen. The depiction of the abject is purified (Warner, 1999), especially in television and mainstream productions that tend to circulate these stories in limited ways. Thus, “a privatized and depoliticized gay culture, anchored in domesticity and consumption” emerges (Duggan, as cited in Puar, 2017, p. 87). All traces of abjection or excess are stripped from these characters; they are simplified (Ramírez, 2023) and sanitized.

A study of non-heterosexual female characters in Spanish streaming TV series demonstrated that they continue to reproduce traditional gender meanings “such as family, caregiving, and the home” (Marcos Ramos et al., 2022). In Latin America, lesbians in Colombian telenovelas are often portrayed with significant sexualization, serving primarily as objects of male pleasure. In general, their storylines don't have happy endings, and they tend to repress their “homosexual behaviors” (Carmargo, 2021). In Chilean telenovelas, the character of the “good gay” emerges –accepted by his social environment, whether he is closeted or not– distancing himself from the stereotypical comic and effeminate gay figure commonly found in broadcast television (Ramírez, 2023).

This new queer visibility (McNicholas, 2020) is related to the hegemony of liberal gay politics, which, through the discourse of equality and with the complicity of the market, establishes a normative politics of gay citizenship (Brown, 2022; Cabello, 2016). In this context, “homonormativity” becomes “a sign of assimilation” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 231) within a heteronormative culture. The temporality of heteronormative progress (Freeman, 2010) imposes a model of successful resolution and a promise of happiness; however, queer and trans stories do

not always move in a straight line (Ahmed, 2019). Instead, they move backward, deviate, and bend.

The politics of LGBT visibility in fictional productions is grounded in a narrative of ongoing progress (Monaghan, 2016), showcasing images of bodies and desires previously marginalized and mistreated by the media (Cabello, 2024). For Gopinath (2020), when the history of sexual dissidence is narrated in progressive terms, it remains perpetually incomplete and waiting to be rescued by the future. Furthermore, countries in the Global North often promote an LGBT progressive narrative to showcase their development and superiority by demonstrating tolerance for sexual diversity. This approach distinguishes them from countries in the Global South, which are often portrayed as having a “repressed sexuality oriented toward premodern acts” (Puar, 2017, p. 157).

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this study is quantitative content analysis, which enables analysis of a large number of images (Rose, 2016) and provides rigorous access to moments in the past (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005). Quantification does not replace qualitative analysis; rather, it enables the identification of patterns that are too subtle for an individual researcher to detect.

The study’s universe encompassed 20 years of audiovisual production in Chile, a period during which more than 100 fiction TV series were produced. The object of analysis constitutes a “minority representation” (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005), as it focuses on identities with lower visibility and less power within social and cultural structures.

The methodology adopts a queer perspective that highlights the minor, bringing to light what is often pushed into the shadows (Gopinath, 2020). Accordingly, the sample was narrowed to 24 productions created between 2004 and 2020<sup>2</sup> that included at least one LGBT character in their storyline. The number of fiction TV series made the data more manageable. Although the overall universe was large, many produc-

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<sup>2</sup> During this period, 116 productions were released.

tions excluded non-heterosexual characters and therefore did not meet the sampling criteria that ultimately determined which TV series were included in the final sample.

In narrative and stylistic terms, TFS are characterized by seriality: they combine order and repetition in their storytelling and generate suspense through novelty (Sulimma, 2022). Episodes are not self-contained; instead, plotlines and character arcs unfold across episodes and/or seasons. Television series demonstrate a substantial increase in the use of exterior locations, privilege action over dialogue, and employ temporality as a structuring device for narrative organization (Gómez & García, 2011).

The initial hypothesis suggested that the normalization of dissident sexualities in media was a relatively recent phenomenon, primarily observed in the later years of the sample. In other words, the study began with a progressive, linear understanding of representation that places trust in the future and assumes that, in the early stages of Chilean TFS, these characters were less present and subject to prohibition.

The sample was designed to adequately represent the phenomenon under investigation because it spans the earliest fiction TV series featuring LGBT characters and includes an exhaustive review of productions in two genres: thriller and drama. Productions categorized as comedy were excluded from the corpus of analysis, as they receive different treatment in terms of audiovisual language, narrative structure, and character construction, and would have altered the corpus, which is centered on thriller and drama. Moreover, comedy remains a comparatively underdeveloped genre at the national level. Non-heterosexual characters such as the protagonist of *Fabulosas flores* (La Red, 2016) –which tells the story of a son who dresses as a woman to work as a taxi driver in a family business– were excluded. This instance of transvestism resembles a cross-dresser figure, which acts as a poor parody of gender and demonstrates a rejection of trans identities (Bruzzi, 1997). Other gay characters appeared in the comedy series *Familia moderna* (Mega, 2015), the Chilean adaptation of the successful U.S. sitcom *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009-2020), which was censored and abruptly withdrawn from national broadcast due to its content, including the portrayal of a same-sex parent family.

A sample of TFS featuring LGBT characters was selected across three periods: first, the emergence of the TFS national industry between 2004 and 2010; second, the consolidation of the audiovisual industry between 2011 and 2015, characterized by national productions that explored the country's political memory and the consequences of dictatorship and achieved high ratings and audience success; and third, the period of internationalization through streaming and digital television between 2016 and 2020. The final sample consisted of 24 national TFS (see Table 1).

The sample selection focused on non-heterosexual characters in television fiction and aimed to thoroughly represent anti-normative sexual practices (Muñoz, 2020). The analysis included scenes featuring non-heterosexual characters. It was progressively refined using information collected from fan blogs, thorough viewing of episodes from each series, and interviews with industry professionals. This process helped to solidify the collection of characters and TV shows.

To study the audiovisual productions, a quantitative content analysis (Casetti & Di Chio, 1999) of LGBT characters was conducted, with emphasis on the qualitative interpretation of the data; that is, it relied on numerical data to describe a problem of sexual-dissident visibility. The categories of analysis included: the number of LGBT characters, gender identity, narrative position of the character, screen time in each episode and season, and the number of episodes in which the character appears. The audiovisual content was analyzed by duration (in minutes) and the number of scenes, facilitating the evaluation of LGBT representation on television, including its depth and temporal aspects. Additionally, the frequency of these characters was examined over a two-decade period, which is essential for understanding the overall trends of increase or decrease in LGBT representation within a specific television format.

By viewing each season, characters and their screen time were quantified to understand, in general terms, the extent of their visibility or invisibility. Three subcategories were established to assess the narrative role of these characters in fictional narratives: main characters or protagonists (appearing in all episodes), secondary or supporting characters (appearing in one or more episodes), and extras or episodic characters (those with occasional cameos and no dialogue or appearing in one or only a few episodes with minimal dialogue).

TABLE 1  
LIST OF SAMPLED TV FICTION SERIES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER BY TYPE OF PRODUCTION

SFT title	Release year	Episodes per season	Public national TV	Pay national TV	International TV
<i>Bienvenida realidad</i>	2004-2005	12	TVN		
<i>Geografía del deseo</i>	2004	8	TVN		
<i>Cárcel de mujeres</i>	2007-2008	8	TVN		
<i>Volver a mí</i>	2010	10		Canal 13	
<i>Cumpleaños</i>	2011	7	TVN		
<i>Prófugos</i>	2011	13			HBO Latinoamérica
<i>El reemplazante</i>	2012-2013	12	TVN		
<i>Minero</i>	2013	8	Antofagasta TV		
<i>Sudamerican rockers</i>	2014	18		Chilevisión	
<i>Los 80</i>	Season 7, 2014	12		Canal 13	
<i>Príncipes del Barrio</i>	2015	12		Canal 13	
<i>Bim Bam Bum</i>	2015	11	TVN		
<i>Juana brava.</i>	2015	12	TVN		
<i>Políticamente incorrecta</i>					

SFT title	Release year	Episodes per season	Public national TV	Pay national TV	International TV
<i>Zamudio. Perdidos en la noche</i>	2015	4	TVN		
<i>Bala loca</i>	2016	10		Chilevisión	
<i>Ramona</i>	2017	12	TVN		
<i>La cacería: las niñas de Alto Hospicio</i>	2018	8		MEGA	
<i>Mary &amp; Mike</i>	2018	6		Chilevisión	TNT
<i>Bichos raros</i>	2018	12	TVN/ Televisión Pública Argentina		
<i>Casa de Angelis</i>	2018	10	TVN		
<i>Berko: el arte de callar</i>	2019	4	TVN		FOX
<i>Tira</i>	2019	8		La Red	
<i>El presidente</i>	2020	8			Prime Video
<i>La jauría</i>	2020	8	TVN		Prime Video

Source: The author.

For the quantitative analysis of screen time, all episodes of the first season of each of the 24 TFS included in the study were considered. A table recorded the starting and ending minutes and seconds of each scene in which non-heterosexual characters appeared. This enabled the calculation of total LGBT screen time for each episode. The measurement included the episode runtime, excluding end credits and program introductions. Episodes generally ranged from 40 to 58 minutes. In total, 1 326 scenes featuring LGBT characters were recorded, totaling 9 hours and 32 minutes of screen time.

The final stage of the analysis focused on the figurations or tropisms of sexual dissidence (flores, 2017) that group these audiovisual narratives. For the analysis of minority group representation, modalities of representation were identified (Ramos et al., 2020): the hidden modality, which suggests homosexuality in veiled or ambiguous ways, full of euphemisms and often associated with tragic endings; the marginalizing modality, linked to delinquency and social marginality; the integrative reivindicatory modality, which promotes discourses of tolerance, acceptance, and heteronormative life patterns; and the differentiating reivindicatory modality, which enables non-assimilationist lifestyles. In the latter two modalities, the story's weight doesn't depend on the character's sexual orientation.

A narrative character analysis model was employed, based on the study of audiovisual texts and their global interpretation of themes articulated within television discourse. Narrative structures were analyzed (Casetti & Di Chio, 1999), that is, the actions and events in which characters are involved, understood as behaviors of individuals from a phenomenological perspective. Characters may be flat or rounded, linear or contrasted, and static or dynamic (Casetti & Di Chio, 1999).

## RESULTS

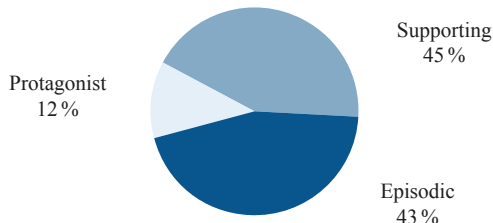
Fewer than 25% of national TFS productions featured LGBT characters during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, a period marked by the internationalization and transnationalization of Chilean audiovisual creative industries. This figure reveals the restricted circulation of sexually dissident visibility within national audiovisual

production. Between 2004 and 2020, various characters emerged, with notable increases in their numbers occurring in 2015 and 2018. Nevertheless, these representations still embody fleeting sexualities that occasionally create tension in dramatic narratives and often remain marginalized or overlooked.

A total of 76 LGBT characters have been identified in the history of Chilean television fiction. Among these characters, the largest proportion belongs to gay men, who represent 51% of all appearances. This is followed by lesbian characters at 24%, bisexual characters at 16%, and trans characters at 9%. When combined, the percentages for lesbian, bisexual, and trans characters are nearly equal to the total percentage of gay characters.

An examination of narrative weight –specifically, the importance of a character’s role within a story– reveals that many storylines featuring LGBT characters lack depth, and most of them are relegated to supporting or background roles, accounting for 88% of all identified characters (see Figure 1). The largest groups are episodic or background roles (34 characters) and supporting characters (33 characters). Protagonists are markedly underrepresented, with only nine characters (12%) occupying central narrative roles. These results highlight the challenges faced by sexual dissidence in gaining a prominent role during this period of audiovisual production. Notable

FIGURE 1  
PERCENTAGE OF LGBT CHARACTERS IN NATIONAL TFS (2004-2020)  
BY NARRATIVE ROLE



Source: The author.

LGBT protagonists include the teenager Gloria from *Bienvenida realidad* (2004), the drug trafficker Vicente Ferragut from *Prófugos* (2011), and the young Daniel Zamudio from *Zamudio* (2015).

A closer examination of the data presented in Table 2 reveals the distribution of characters based on their narrative roles. Lesbian characters represented the largest group of protagonists, with four, followed by bisexual characters with three, and gay characters with two. However, in the context of supporting and background roles, the number of gay characters increases significantly. Among the 33 supporting characters, 19 are gay, seven are bisexual, six are lesbian, and one is trans. When looking at background characters, there are 18 who are gay, eight who are lesbian, six who are trans, and two who are bisexual. From this quantitative perspective, trans characters are the least visible within TFS, and there is a tendency to privilege male homosexuality through secondary and background roles. It should also be noted that most bisexual characters are women.

Figure 2 shows the frequency of appearances of LGBT characters in Chilean TFS over a 16-year period, beginning in 2004. From a historical perspective, it can be observed that in the first decade of the 2000s, there was a greater presence of lesbian and bisexual characters. However, in the second decade, there was a noticeable increase in gay characters, peaking in 2015 with nine characters. This surge can largely be attributed to the release of the TV series *Zamudio*, which focused on a homophobic crime. LGBT representation increased over the analyzed period, peaking at 12 characters in 2018. This phenomenon is better

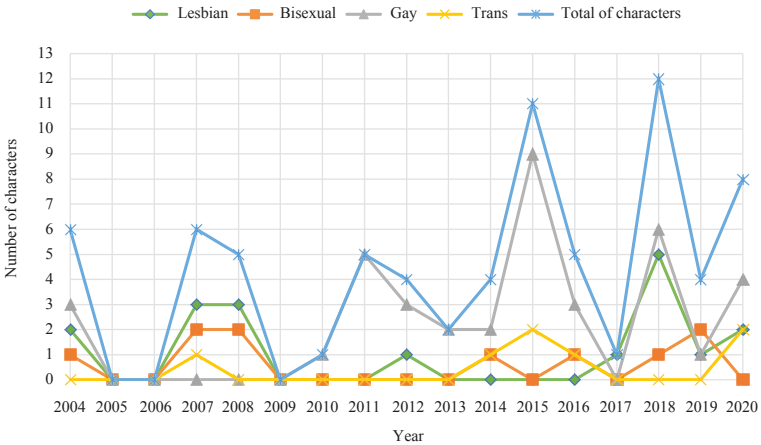
TABLE 2  
LGBT CHARACTERS BY NARRATIVE ROLE IN CHILEAN TFS PRODUCTIONS  
(2004-2020)

	Lesbian	Bisexual	Gay	Trans	Total
Protagonists	4	3	2	0	9
Supporting	6	7	19	1	33
Episodics & backgrounds	8	2	18	6	34
Total by identity	18	12	39	7	76

Source: The author.

understood as fluctuating and at times nonexistent. For example, in 2009, there were no queer or trans characters in any Chilean TFS (television series). By 2017, only one such character was recorded. In the final five years of the analyzed period, there were three peaks in the representation of LGBT characters: 11 characters in 2015, a maximum of 12 characters in 2018, and 8 characters in 2020.

FIGURE 2  
 APPEARANCES OF LGBT CHARACTERS IN CHILEAN TV SERIES  
 BY YEAR (2004-2020)



Source: The author.

From a historical perspective, the representation of lesbian and bisexual female characters seems to focus on two distinct periods: the first period aligns with the rise of the TFS industry from 2004 to 2008, and the second period spans from 2016 to 2020. In each of these phases, 13 characters appeared on screen.

The visibility of female homosexuality appears primarily at the beginning and the end of the analyzed period, indicating a significant gap in representation between 2009 and 2015. During these seven years, only two lesbian and bisexual female characters were featured. This finding underscores the stark inequalities in how female and male LGBT

identities are represented, reflecting the gender biases that persist within the audiovisual industry.

TABLE 3  
RANKING OF CHILEAN TELEVISION FICTION SERIES WITH THE HIGHEST  
SCREEN TIME FOR LGBT CHARACTERS

	Title (release year)	Total screen time of LGBT characters (h:m:s)	Number of scenes in which LGBT character(s) appear	Percentage of screen time of LGBT characters
1	<i>Cárcel de mujeres</i> T1 (2007)	4:58:35	126	66%
2	<i>Prófugos</i> T1 (2011)	4:10:14	186	42%
3	<i>Bienvenida realidad</i> (2004)	2:38:02	130	13%
4	<i>Bichos raros</i> (2018)	2:14:15	101	25%
5	<i>Bala loca</i> (2016)	1:48:57	79	20%
6	<i>Zamudio</i> (2015)	1:44:30	49	53%
7	<i>Príncipes del barrio</i> (2015)	1:31:54	66	13%
8	<i>Casa de Angelis</i> (2018)	1:30:01	41	20%

Source: The author.

The screen time of LGBT characters on Chilean television is closely tied to the narrative significance and complexity of queer storylines in fiction. The TV series that provided the most screen time for LGBT characters were *Cárcel de mujeres* (TVN, 2007, eight episodes) and *Prófugos* (HBO, 2011, 13 episodes). Both of these thrillers feature queer criminal protagonists and allocate over four hours of screen time to non-heterosexual characters. In second and third place in the ranking were the youth-oriented series *Bienvenida realidad* (TVN, 2004,

13 episodes) and *Bichos raros* (TVN, 2018, 12 episodes), each with more than two hours of LGBT characters on screen (see Table 3). Generally, extended screen time for LGBT characters in Chilean TFS corresponds with increased visibility of these narratives within central storylines.

In terms of the percentage of total screen time dedicated to LGBT characters, only two TFS—*Zamudio* and *Cárcel de mujeres*—offered over 50% of their total screen time to these sexualities. Notably, these productions, which featured the highest proportions of LGBT representation, were released during the early development phase of the TFS industry in Chile, prior to the advent of streaming platforms. To put it differently, these works originated in the early 2000s, a time when formats and visual styles were still being refined and tested, coinciding with the professionalization of the television industry. Another reason for the less time on screen in LGBT representation in serialized fiction could be the growing trend toward shorter seasons, including miniseries, influenced by budget constraints and changing narrative needs.

By contrast, *Prófugos* and *Bienvenida realidad* each had seasons of 13 episodes, representing relatively longer narrative formats. This stands in contrast to more recent TFS, such as *Berko: el arte de callar*, a four-episode miniseries.

#### *More screen time and more developed queer storylines*

Table 3 lists the eight Chilean productions that featured over one hour of screen time dedicated to LGBTQ+ characters; overall, these productions featured three or more in the same series, resulting in a more substantial on-screen presence and greater narrative complexity for queer characters. Several of these productions included at least one protagonist who was non-heterosexual. This was evident in *Cárcel de mujeres*, *Bienvenida realidad*, *Bichos raros*, and *Bala loca*, which all stood out for featuring multiple LGBT characters in their casts. These works portrayed more complex relationships among queer characters, showing that they are not isolated individuals but are part of interconnected networks of queer relationships.

It is important to recognize the significance of the coming-of-age genre, as it has enabled the inclusion of storylines about young people exploring their sexuality (Mateos-Pérez, 2021; McNicholas, 2020).

This is especially evident in the case of teenage characters, who are often temporary figures –passing entities ultimately forgotten within the plot– and who depict queerness as a transitional phase (Monaghan, 2016). These queer figures appear in the narrative only to vanish.

### *Clearly seen, still hidden*

In this context, the TFS that devoted the most screen time to sexually dissident characters was *Cárcel de Mujeres*. This series also featured the highest number of LBT characters in a single production, earning the record for the largest representation of sexually dissident characters in the history of Chilean TFS. However, it reinforces the association between lesbianism and criminality and marginalization.

One noteworthy example is the series *Prófugos*, which ranks second for screen time dedicated to a gay character, Vicente Ferragut, the heir of a drug-trafficking family. However, this significant screen presence does not lead to a deeper exploration of the queer storyline. Instead, the narrative prioritizes action sequences and scenes related to drug trafficking over the development of Vicente's homosexual narrative. The character embodies a hidden modality (Ramos et al., 2020), living out his desires in secrecy and intermittently. More screen time for an LGBT character does not necessarily ensure a more meaningful representation of a sexually dissident life. Although Vicente Ferragut appears in over one hundred scenes, he does not consistently appear in an explicitly homosexual manner. This reflects a common narrative strategy that confines homosexuality to the closet (Miller, 2007). In HBO Latin America's series *Prófugos*, the character Vicente Ferragut, a drug trafficker who lives in the closet, represents a new form of homosexual representation. This portrayal tends toward integration, as the narrative conflict does not center solely on the character's sexual orientation.

### *Less screen time, lower visibility*

Some productions featured only a single queer character throughout the entire season, without any interaction with other non-heterosexual characters. These are solitary, fleeting characters who merely serve as background decoration to the narrative. As shown in Table 4, the productions with the least amount of queer screen time and the least sig-

nificant representations of LGBT communities include *Bim Bam Bum* (12 minutes), *Mary & Mike* (13 minutes), *Minero* (14 minutes), and *Volver a mí* (17 minutes). While these productions featured LGBT characters, their screen time was minimal, indicating a limited approach to incorporating themes of sexual diversity on television. The sexual orientation of these characters is often rendered nearly invisible, receiving little acknowledgment within the plot. This is exemplified by the gestures of an effeminate cook in *Volver a mí*, as well as a brief lesbian encounter between two nightclub sex workers in *Minero*. The storylines in these productions are underdeveloped and often feature flat, anecdotal characters. They reflect a television culture that tends to omit, conceal, and exclude certain themes. In most cases, non-heterosexual characters appear alone and lack connections with other LGBT characters, which results in episodic storylines that fail to fully explore their experiences.

The productions mentioned are among the seven national TV shows that dedicated the least screen time to LGBT characters. In these fictions, LGBT characters did not play leading roles; instead, they were typically cast in supporting or episodic roles. Examples include the historical series about a couple of secret agents during the dictatorship, *Mary & Mike* (2018), the drama set in a rehabilitation center, *Volver a mí* (2010), and the police thriller *Tira* (2019). This group includes marginal characters, such as a Cuban choreographer in *Bim Bam Bum*. Within this group of TFS with lower LGBT visibility, more stereotypical representations of the feminine homosexual are concentrated figures inserted into the narrative as comic relief or to reinforce the hidden modality of their sexual orientation. It should be noted that a significant portion of these productions' dates to the second decade of the 2000s, indicating that advances in visibility remain limited and exceptional.

### *Narrative trajectories*

Beyond the analysis of screen time and the number of characters, the richness of LGBT dramatic arcs can be observed through the number of episodes in which the characters participate. A storyline featuring LGBT themes that is restricted to limited screen time or is presented in a single episode is unlikely to provide a meaningful exploration of non-heterosexual experiences and desires. In contrast, LGBT characters who

TABLE 4  
RANKING OF CHILEAN TELEVISION FICTION SERIES WITH THE LEAST  
SCREEN TIME FOR LGBT CHARACTERS

Title (release year)	Total screen time of LGBT characters (h:m:s)	Number of scenes in which LGBT character(s) appear
<i>Bim Bam Bum</i> (2013)	0:12:41	14
<i>Mary &amp; Mike</i> (2018)	0:13:52	7
<i>Minero</i> (2013)	0:14:41	10
<i>Volver a mí</i> (2010)	0:17:54	17
<i>Tira</i> (2019)	0:29:37	21
<i>Geografía del deseo</i> (2004)	0:33:34	29
<i>Los 80</i> (T7, 2014)	0:35:18	19

Source: The author.

appear in every episode of a season show more significant development in their dramatic arcs and narrative paths. These characters must evolve and change through serial storytelling, which depends on continuity. The frequency of a character's appearances throughout a season is an indicator of their narrative development.

Accordingly, Chilean LGBT characters who appear in all episodes generally exhibit greater narrative complexity. This analysis presents a range of notable characters from various television series, each illustrating distinct societal challenges and personal struggles. Memo, a working-class resident of *Ramona* (2018), faces a tragic fate when he is incarcerated. In *Berko* (2019), Divina Day, a VIP escort, navigates a dangerous world as she is pursued by organized crime. *El presidente* (2020) features Jashir Jalabi, a fraudster in the sports industry who hides his romantic feelings for his superior. Ariel Santana, a student in *El reemplazante* (2012), rises to leadership within his institution, confronting homophobic hostility along the way. The character Raco, representing a masculine lesbian villain in *Cárcel de mujeres* (2007), further enriches the portrayal of diverse identities. Finally, Freddy Neira, depicted in *Príncipes del barrio* (2015) as a national football team player, initially hides his sexual orientation, only to ultimately embrace his identity publicly by the season's conclu-

sion. Together, these characters represent a diverse array of experiences. They include individuals from working-class backgrounds, those involved in criminal activities, and economically privileged gay men who frequently hide their sexual orientation due to worries about job security (Newton, 2016; Sedgwick, 1990).

#### DISCUSSION: BETWEEN THE ANECDOTAL AND THE PROMISE OF VISIBILITY

The future has not necessarily proven more favorable for LGBT characters in Chilean TFS. This assumption cannot be confirmed by the results obtained, as it is during the emergence stage –especially in the first decade of the 2000s– that a significant number of lesbian characters is concentrated. Indeed, this first phase saw the release of *Cárcel de mujeres* (TVN, 2007-2008), the TV series with the highest number of lesbian, bisexual, and trans characters, and which simultaneously devoted the most screen time to non-heterosexual characters in the history of national TFS. This moment of visibility stands unparalleled, even in today's streaming era.

Despite a gradual and notable increase in LGBT characters in twenty-first-century TFS –particularly reaching significant peaks during the second decade of the 2000s– many of these characters, essential to the internationalization phase of TFS production, are often relegated to supporting or background roles. Consequently, they often receive considerably less screen time than their counterparts from the earlier phase of the industry's emergence, highlighting a persistent imbalance that warrants attention and change. The higher number of LGBT characters recorded during the second decade is linked to the development of local TFS within the context of the transnationalization of the television format and the growing interest in this genre.

A decline in the amount of screen time allocated to LGBT characters in national television programs has been observed over time. Between 2004 and 2011, the three Chilean SFTs that featured the most screen time for LGBT lead characters were aired at the beginning of the 2000s. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, there was a notable increase in the number of lesbian and bisexual female characters in national

scripted television shows. However, in the following decade, the trend shifted toward a gradual rise in the portrayal of gay male characters. This change led to a growing focus on establishing the visibility of the “normal gay” (Warner, 1999).

The disparity between screen time and the rising representation of LGBT characters underscores a complex dynamic of visibility and invisibility, marked by significant internal inequalities, silences, and erasures. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced for female characters, especially lesbians, who largely vanished and were notably absent between 2009 and 2015. This trend highlights persistent gendered asymmetries in audiovisual representation.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities, while all reflecting a cisheterosexist model of representation, have been portrayed on screen in distinct ways. In quantitative terms, gay characters make up the largest proportion of representations in the analyzed sample, accounting for 51 % of all characters.

The findings highlight the lack of visibility of trans stories in television fiction. Trans identities are the least represented, with limited character development and a declining presence over time. This trend is connected to the cultural and social transphobia that is perpetuated in fictional productions.

Can we truly affirm significant progress in LGBT representation in Chile if, for instance, gay characters account for more than half of televised appearances, yet are characterized by limited narrative weight and predominantly decorative roles? The results reinforce the minority status of LGBT characters in Chilean serialized television fiction—an inclusion that remains constrained by industry barriers that prevent deeper exploration of these stories. The prevalence of supporting and background roles leads to superficial storylines that sporadically appear within the audiovisual industry, projecting a progressive image to its audience.

LGBT representation has gradually become normalized, particularly through the portrayal of male gay characters. This identity is often seen as appealing in teen dramas and crime narratives. LGBT characters are especially engaging in the thriller genre, where they create narrative suspense, as well as in social and youth dramas. Police and crime genres often depict homosexuality in a hidden manner, frequently as-

sociating it with illegal economies. This phenomenon is associated with the emergence of new roles for sexual dissidence –not only as victims, but also as villains or heroes (Smith, 2016). Simultaneously, extreme violence, which is often sensationalized by the audiovisual industry, manifests as violence against women and sexual minorities. This can be seen in the hate crime against Daniel Zamudio and the victims of the Alto Hospicio femicide.

The results indicate that non-heterosexual protagonists enhance the visibility of other LGBT characters within fictional narratives. This is because these protagonists tend to be part of more complex emotional networks, leading to more diverse casts. In other words, when characters are connected to other LGBT characters, there is a higher likelihood of strong and meaningful representation.

## CONCLUSION

This study critiques LGBT visibility politics and the narratives about the perceived progress of LGBT representation in mainstream audiovisual culture. The increasing representation of LGBT characters in Chilean TFS during the twenty-first century –while their numbers have grown over time– does not necessarily lead to better representation, as television fiction still places these stories in secondary or marginal roles. Despite being part of the TFS field’s development in Chile, the representation of female LGBT identities has not improved qualitatively, reflecting their limited presence on television. As a result, LGBT representation often remains superficial; it does not genuinely progress or improve, even though it may show certain peaks that align with times of social unrest, such as the feminist mobilizations of 2018.

What emerges is a process of normalization and strategic inclusion, that is, a form of restricted visibility confined to decorative or background roles that do not significantly shape the narrative, as if fulfilling a quota or engaging in what has been termed queerbaiting (Sánchez-Soriano & García-Jiménez, 2020), where the development of queer characters remains superficial. This reaffirms that “television drama is seen as mainstream, maintaining the status quo despite potentially more progressive values among producers” (Newcomb, 1991).

LGBT progressivism functions as an affirmative policy of visibility for gender and sexual diversity in the media, linked to processes of normalizing gays and lesbians that tend toward the depoliticization and desexualization of sexual dissidence in pursuit of broader social acceptance (Miller, 2007; Warner, 1999). Initially, representations of LGBT characters were seen as more disruptive within television culture. However, over time, this conflictual aspect has become less pronounced, as queer characters integrate into other dramatic tensions that extend beyond their sexual orientation.

From a macro perspective attentive to the temporality of LGBT representations –their “advances” and setbacks– this study concludes that there has been limited progression in female LGBT representations. It also shows how promises of advancement for sexual diversity modulate representation toward a new masculine normativity that often finds expression in police and criminal narratives.

It is unclear whether LGBT progressivism has established itself permanently. Neoconservative backlashes remind us that more diverse and respectful symbolic representation can be undermined under political administrations that promote traditional anti-gender values (Butler, 2024).

Queer and trans temporality is non-linear; it does not always move forward and may also regress. The sexually dissident characters identified here constitute a fictional archive that contributes to situating a memory of non-heterosexuality within the mass culture of heterosexual entertainment. The images and production of LGBT characters across the 24 productions analyzed illustrate how visibility policies surrounding sexual dissidence have shifted and form an audiovisual trace of transformations in discourses and aesthetics linked to these characters. This content-based study of characters serves as a starting point for future research that deepens qualitative narrative analyses of LGBT representation in TFS.

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