

Analysis of LGBTQ representation in original American fiction series on Netflix (2013 – 2020)

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/infe.94922>

Recibido: Marzo 2024 • Evaluado: Noviembre 2024 • Aceptado: Diciembre 2024

Abstract: Introduction. Representation of LGBTQ characters in media has become increasingly significant as a critical factor in shaping social perceptions and constructing stereotypes. Within this context, Netflix, as a prominent content producer, positions itself as a highly influential agent. This study aims to examine the portrayal of LGBTQ characters in Netflix series, emphasizing inclusion and the recurrence of harmful narrative tropes. Objectives and methodology. The research evaluates LGBTQ representation, demographic diversity, and narrative patterns across 112 original Netflix series. Through detailed content analysis, the study investigates the frequency of detrimental tropes and identifies trends regarding character roles and demographic characteristics. Results and discussion. The analysis reveals an increase in LGBTQ character inclusion, particularly among gay male characters; however, less than 25% of these characters occupy leading roles. Predominantly white ethnic representation reflects a significant lack of diversity. While instances of violence and death do not conclusively confirm the presence of harmful tropes, their occurrence cannot be dismissed entirely. These findings underscore the need for more diverse and authentic representations in the future. This study highlights the crucial role genuine media representations play in influencing public perceptions, providing a foundation for further research into media diversity.

Keywords: LGBTQ Representation; Netflix; Queer Tropes; Diversity in Media; LGBTQI+ Characters.

[es] Análisis de la representación LGBTQ en series de ficción originales estadounidenses de Netflix (2013-2020)

Resumen: Introducción. Los estudios en comunicación de la ciencia han demostrado la importancia que la cultura científica tiene para la sociedad. Bajo una perspectiva de género, se ha demostrado que el llamado efecto Matilda ha generado una recepción masculinizada de la ciencia, un sesgo visiblemente presente en los medios de comunicación. Este trabajo propone analizar los orígenes de la visión masculinizada de la ciencia a través de las artes visuales. Objetivos y metodología. Vivimos en la era de las imágenes, pero, cuando tales imágenes han sido proyectadas abrumadoramente por actores masculinos, es difícil encontrar otros perfiles representados en posiciones de autoridad y desarrollo de conocimiento, contribuyendo a una imagen sesgada del mundo. Este trabajo se basa en un análisis de diversas obras de arte que legitiman el Efecto Matilda en espacios visuales para el conocimiento, como los museos, donde los grandes referentes de la ciencia siguen siendo, primordialmente masculinos. Resultados y discusión. Entendiendo la cultura científica como una de las cuestiones principales para la educación ciudadana y las artes visuales como uno de los medios más significativos para el aprendizaje significativo y el desarrollo de la capacidad crítica, los resultados subyacentes nos llevan a abogar por un futuro donde la diversidad de perfiles científicos e investigadores es un hecho, siendo necesario revisar el discurso de la representación visual de la ciencia hecha por mujeres y de lo que nuestra cultura ha representado, a lo largo de la historia del arte, como imagen de la autoridad científica.

Palabras clave: Representación LGBTQ, Netflix, Tropos queer, Diversidad en los medios, Personajes LGBTQI+.

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How to cite: Iglesias Gondar, A.; Martínez Rolán, X. (2024). Analysis of LGBTQ representation in original American fiction series on Netflix (2013 – 2020). *Investigaciones Feministas* 15(2), 373-384. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/infe.94922>

1. Introduction

The significance of diverse representation in the media warrants meticulous attention. The inclusion of LGBTQ characters and narratives in television series serves not only as a reflection of sociocultural shifts in our era but also plays an instrumental role in influencing societal attitudes. It contributes to the increased acceptance and understanding of these groups. Media representation possesses the capacity not only to mirror reality but also to shape it, offering enriching perspectives on the experiences and challenges faced by the LGBTQ community.

The representation of LGBTQ individuals in the media, particularly in American television series, has been a subject of scholarly inquiry. It is believed to play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and fostering greater social acceptance of these communities (Monaghan, 2020). However, the impact of LGBTQ representation in media may not be universally positive, as the ways in which resilience is defined and measured in relation to LGBTQ populations remain contested (Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016).

Avila-Saavedra (2009) argues that the presence of homosexual characters in American television may imply an endorsement of tolerance and inclusion, but this could be undermined if television series espouse traditional norms and social relations (Avila-Saavedra). This suggests that the impact of LGBTQ representation in media may be influenced by the specific portrayal and context in which it is presented. The rise of streaming platforms such as Netflix has facilitated a more profound exploration and diversified presentation of themes, including those pertinent to the LGBTQ community (Ng, 2013).

McInroy et al. (2021) emphasize that while LGBTQ narratives in mainstream media are improving, online fandom communities contribute significantly to advancements in LGBTQ+ representation. However, these collectives also pose challenges and limitations, affecting both the quantity and quality of portrayals of diverse LGBTQ+ identities. Building on this, Shabahang et al. (2023) critique media sources for making questionable decisions regarding character traits and narrative arcs, which may negatively influence the depiction of LGBTQ characters. The portrayal of LGBTQ characters and narratives in media is a complex and multifaceted issue, influenced by factors such as the specific context of representation. Furthermore, factors such as the resilience of LGBTQ populations and the influence of online fandom communities play significant roles in shaping contemporary perceptions of LGBTQ representation.

2. Theoretical framework: from distribution to in-house production, minority representation, and LGBTQ questions in Netflix TV Shows

Netflix, established in 1997, embarked on its journey as an innovative DVD rental service via mail. In this business model, users selected movies from the Netflix website and received them directly at their homes. After enjoying the films, they could return them by mail, benefiting from the absence of return deadlines and the elimination of additional charges for delays. This system represents an efficient, hassle-free alternative to traditional movie rental stores, marking a significant shift in the way consumers access cinematic entertainment.

A major transformation for Netflix occurred in 2007, when the company adapted to new technologies and consumption trends by introducing its streaming service (Pucik et al., 2023). This service allows users to watch a wide variety of movies and TV shows on their computers and internet-connected devices, offering instant and on-demand access. This innovation heralded a new era in entertainment and eventually led Netflix to become one of the world's leading providers of digital content.

Since its launch as a streaming service in 2007, Netflix has seen steady growth in its global subscriber numbers. By 2011, the platform had already surpassed 20 million subscribers, and by 2015, this number had increased to approximately 75 million, driven by its international expansion. A significant milestone was reached in 2020, when, during the COVID-19 pandemic and the surge in home entertainment consumption, Netflix reported more than 200 million subscribers. As of early 2023, the company was estimated to have over 220 million subscribers worldwide, reflecting its consolidated position as a leader in the streaming market.

Netflix began producing original content with the release of *House of Cards* on February 1, 2013. This marked a turning point, as the company shifted from solely streaming third-party content to becoming a creator of its own programming.

Since then, Netflix has significantly expanded its catalogue of original productions, spanning genres such as drama, comedy, documentary, and film. It has become one of the most prolific and influential content producers in the global entertainment industry.

2.1. Representation of Minorities in Netflix TV Shows

Numerous studies have analysed the representation of minorities in Netflix series, focusing on aspects such as ethnicity, religion, gender, and LGBTQ+ identity. Alborno and Leiva (2021) discuss the importance of diversity in Netflix Originals, emphasizing the relevance of their conclusions to researchers studying Netflix's offerings. Similarly, Valverde Maestre & Pérez Rufi (2021) concluded that although the popular Netflix series *Sex Education* aims to represent diversity in identities, some of its presentations rely on stereotypes. Butler (2023) analyses the representation of gender in that TV show promoting a feminist narrative. These studies highlight the significance of gender representation in Netflix content and its impact on societal perceptions.

Another significant study investigated the construction of adolescent characters in Netflix's original series. Ferrera (2020) analysed 23 original Netflix series, categorizing 132 characters based on 18 analytical variables. The findings highlight the importance of peer groups for adolescent characters and the existence of behaviours that occasionally seem incongruent with the characters' portrayed ages.

Barrios-Rodríguez et al. (2021), in their study of Spanish series on streaming platforms including Netflix, found an underrepresentation of women and non-heterosexual orientations. It also noted the persistence of gender stereotypes in terms of personal goals and personality traits and the continued portrayal of women in certain roles. Furthermore, Asmar et al. (2022) emphasized Netflix's emphasis on diversity in content representation, reflecting the platform's commitment to inclusivity.

In addition, Sangra (2021) examined the changing portrayal of masculinity in Indian content on OTT platforms, including Netflix, indicating a shift toward more diverse representations of masculinity. Similarly, Modugno and Krijnen (2021) highlight Netflix's contribution to LGBTQ+ representation in mainstream television through shows like *Sense8*. This aligns with the findings of Khoo (2022), who explores diversity from the perspective of Netflix's American and Australian catalogs, shedding light on the platform's inclusion strategy and recommender algorithm.

Altogether, this body of research underscores Netflix's dual role in promoting diversity and confronting persistent representational challenges, especially regarding stereotypes and equitable inclusion.

2.2. Questions about LGBTQ Representation in Fiction

To address the topic of LGBTQ characters in fiction, it is essential to understand several concepts related to the subject of study, as these are practices frequently employed by producers and directors in their movies and/or series. These four practices include Queer Coding, Queerbaiting, Burying Your Gays, and Dead Lesbian Syndrome. It is important to keep these concepts in mind when analysing the representation of LGBTQ characters in fiction, as their use can have negative implications for the perception and acceptance of sexual diversity.

"Queer coding," a prevalent concept in media studies and cultural discourse, refers to the implicit depiction of characters with LGBTQ+ attributes (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc.), without direct acknowledgment of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This phenomenon primarily emerged under the constraints of the Hays Code, which was enforced from 1934 to 1968 by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, led by William H. Hay. The Code functioned as self-regulatory censorship in response to conservative societal pressures, compelling filmmakers to subtly suggest LGBTQ+ identities.

Queer coding is often observed in the portrayal of villains, where characteristics associated with LGBTQ+ identities are employed. Not to signify that the character's malevolence is due to their LGBTQ+ status, but rather to create an association between the character's evil attributes and their queer-coded traits. In contemporary times, with the growing acceptance and representation of sexual and gender diversity, the prevalence of queer coding has diminished, giving way to more explicit and affirming depictions of LGBTQ+ characters.

Simultaneously, the practice of "queerbaiting" has garnered critical attention in media analysis. This strategy involves creators or marketers insinuating non-heteronormative relationships or identities yet refraining from explicit confirmation within the narrative. Such tactics, often employed to pique the interest of LGBTQ+ audiences and allies, have been criticized for exploiting the community's desire for representation. This criticism stems from the perception that queerbaiting leverages the struggle for LGBTQ+ visibility and rights without a commitment to authentic and respectful representation.

Fathallah (2014) defines queerbaiting as a strategy in which scriptwriters and producers attempt to attract queer audiences through hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism that imply a queer relationship between characters—only to later deny and mock that possibility. Unlike queer coding, which frequently attributes negative traits to characters perceived as queer, leading to associations between queerness and villainy, queerbaiting does not portray queerness as inherently negative. Instead, it capitalizes on queer-coded signals without genuine representation or narrative fulfillment.

As a derivative form of queerbaiting, pink washing can be categorized. This practice involves a company, organization, or even a country, using support for LGBTQ+ rights (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc.) to divert attention from their negative actions or to enhance their image without genuine commitment to the LGBTQ+ cause. The term is a variant of "whitewashing," adapted to the use of pink, which is often associated with the LGBTQ+ community.

In this context, LGBTQ+ characters, once largely absent, are now explicitly included as a means to attract and retain queer audiences. What was once done subtly now becomes an explicit incentive to attract queer audiences and capitalize on them.

Queerbaiting can be either implicit or explicit. When it becomes explicit, it frequently leads to tragic endings. As explicit queerbaiting often results in tragic outcomes, LGBTQ+ audiences have identified two recurring and harmful tropes:

1. “Bury your gays,” the tendency to kill off or prematurely eliminate LGBTQ+ characters in the plot, can reinforce negative stereotypes and perpetuate the idea that non-heterosexual relationships are doomed to failure or tragedy.
2. “Dead lesbian syndrome,” referring to the death of lesbian characters in fiction, typically in a tragic or violent manner, reinforces the notion that non-heterosexual relationships between women are destined for a tragic end.

Hulan (2017, p.17) articulates that within narrative works featuring same-gender romantic partnerships, a recurring motif emerges in which one of the partners is invariably fated to perish or meet a catastrophic end as the narrative concludes. Hulan’s analysis reveals a conspicuous pattern: the demise of a character frequently coincides with pivotal moments in the relationship, such as the confession of feelings, the initiation of physical intimacy, or the acknowledgment of the relationship to the audience. These events often precipitate the character’s death, occurring shortly after such relational milestones are depicted.

This trope, although perhaps intended as a dramatic element, problematically intertwines LGBTQ characters’ suffering with their sexual identity. This suffering is frequently portrayed as stemming from homophobia, mental health struggles, or illness. Such narrative choices can have deleterious effects on queer audiences, particularly in contrast to heterosexual characters, who rarely face lethal consequences as a direct result of their sexual orientation. This disparity not only reinforces harmful stereotypes but also embeds a narrative framework that inextricably associates non-heteronormative relationships with tragedy and adversity.

3. Objectives, materials, and methods

This section aims to critically analyse how Netflix has addressed LGBTQI+ representation in its original series. The outlined objectives focus on identifying LGBTQI+ characters, examining narrative tropes, and assessing the portrayal of stereotypes:

1. Content Analysis in Netflix Series: Conduct an evaluation of 112 original Netflix series produced between 2013 and 2020 to identify the presence and representation of LGBTQI+ characters.
2. Examination of LGBTQI+ Narrative Tropes: Investigate the existence of practices such as queerbaiting, pinkwashing, Bury Your Gays, and Dead Lesbian Syndrome in these series, assessing their frequency and contextual usage.
3. Evaluation of Representation and Stereotypes: Analyse whether the series perpetuate negative stereotypes or contribute to a positive and authentic representation of the LGBTQI+ community.

To achieve these objectives, a selection of 112 original Netflix series was analysed. The study focuses on productions from 2013 to 2020—a period chosen for its historical relevance, beginning with the release of Netflix’s first original series and ending before the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have altered subsequent production trends. By emphasizing American productions, the analysis captures content with broad global reach, ensuring that the findings reflect Netflix’s international impact and relevance to diverse audiences.

These series were part of the selection: *Por qué no te vas?*, *Con Tim Robinson*, *13 Reasons Why*, *After Life*, *Más allá de mi mujer*, *AJ and The Queen*, *Alexa and Katie*, *All About The Washingtons*, *Altered Carbon*, *American Vandal*, *Amigos de la Universidad*, *Así nos ven*, *Astronomy Club: The Sketch Show*, *Atypical*, *Black Summer*, *Bloodline*, *Bonding*, *Chambers*, *Como criar a un superhéroe*, *Como vivir contigo mismo*, *Creedme*, *Daredevil*, *Daybreak*, *Dear White People*, *Dilema*, *Dolly Parton: acordes del corazón*, *Easy*, *El método Kominsky*, *El mundo oculto de Sabrina*, *Everything Sucks*, *Feliz lo que quieras*, *Flaked*, *Fuller House*, *Fumados*, *Girlboss*, *Girlmore Girl: un año nuevo*, *Glow*, *Godless*, *Grace y Frankie*, *Greenhouse Academy*, *Gypsy*, *Haters Back Off*, *Hemlock Grove*, *House of Cards*, *Huge in France*, *Insatiable*, *Iron Fist*, *Jessica Jones*, *La maldición de Hill House*, *La orden secreta*, *Lady Dynamite*, *Los paseos de Bruno*, *Love*, *Luke Cage*, *Lunatics*, *Malibu Rescue*, *Maniac*, *Marco Polo*, *Master of None*, *Medical Police*, *Mesías*, *Mindhunter*, *Muertos para mí*, *Muñeca rusa*, *Narcos*, *Narcos: México*, *Netflix Presents: The Characters*, *No Good Nick*, *Nola Darling*, *October Faction*, *On my Block*, *One Day at a Time*, *Orange is The New Black*, *Otra vida*, *Ozark*, *Perdidos en el espacio*, *Prince of Peoria*, *Project MC2*, *Reunión familiar*, *Richie Rich*, *Santa Clarita Diet*, *Sense8*, *Seven Seconds*, *Sex Education*, *Soundtrack*, *Special*, *Spinning Out*, *Sr. Iglesias*, *Stranger Things*, *Team Kylie*, *The Crown*, *The Defenders*, *The Get Down*, *The Good Cop*, *The Healing Powers of Dude*, *The I-Land*, *The OA*, *The Politician*, *The Punisher*, *The Ranch*, *The Society*, *The Umbrella Academy*, *The Witcher*, *Trinkets*, *Turn up Charlie*, *Un lugar para soñar*, *Una serie de catastróficas desdichas*, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, *V Wars*, *W/Bob and David*, *Wet Hot American Summer*, *Wet Hot American Summer: 10 Years Later*, *Worst. Best. Weekend. Ever.*, *Wu Assassins*.

All seasons of every series were watched to compile a profile for each series.

3.1 Development of the Analysis Sheet

An analysis sheet was designed and implemented across all seasons of each selected series (see Table 1). The sheet encompasses the following:

- Generic Information: Series title, audiovisual genre, and release year

- **LGBTQI+ Presence Analysis:** The presence of LGBTQI+ characters, kisses, and sexual scenes involving LGBTQI+ characters.
- **Character Analysis:** detailing gender, ethnicity, age group, character role, and LGBTQI+ subgroup. It also tracked character arcs related to coming out, remaining closeted, experiences of sexuality-based aggression, and character deaths.

Table 1.- Analysis sheet

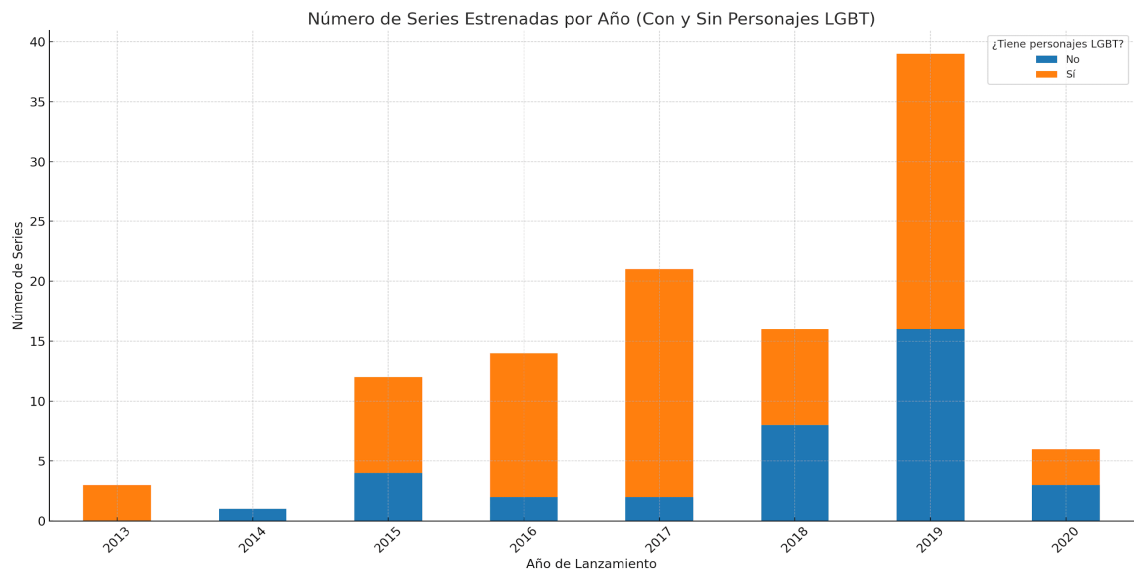
Analysis Item	Description	Values
TV Series Name	Name of the TV series.	Title
Year	The year of the series.	Numeric value from 2013 to 2020
AV Genre	The genre of the series (such as drama, comedy, etc.).	Action, Anthology, Science Fiction, Comedy, Drama, Mockumentary, Mystery, Thriller, Satire, Horror, Western
Character name	The character's name.	Name/First and Last Name
Genre PR	The gender of the character (male, female, etc.).	Gender-fluid, male, female, non-binary
Ethnic Group	The ethnicity of the character.	African, Afro-American, Asian, Caucasian, Indian, Latin American, and Arabic
Age Group	The character's age group (such as teen, adult, etc.).	Teen, Adult, Child, Senior
LGBTQ Collective	If the character belongs to the LGBTQ community (lesbian, gay, etc.).	Bisexual, Gay, Straight, Lesbian, Non-binary, Don't Know, Queer, Transgender
Character Type	Whether the character is primary, secondary, etc.	Episodic, Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary
Explicit Coming Out	If the character has had an explicit coming out.	Yes, No
Still in the closet	If the character is still in the closet regarding their sexual orientation.	Yes, No
Are you being assaulted because of your sexuality?	If the character has suffered any aggression due to sexuality.	Yes, No
Does the character die during the series?	If the character dies during the series.	Yes, No

Source: Prepared by the authors

4. Results

This study examines the evolution of LGBTQ character representation in television series over time, using a dataset spanning from 2013 to 2020. The findings unveil significant trends in LGBTQ character inclusion, as suggested in Figure 1, reflecting broader shifts in societal attitudes and norms toward the LGBTQ community.

Figure 1.- Number of Series Released by Year (With and Without LGBTQ Characters)



Source: Prepared by the authors

A substantial increase in the number of series with LGBTQ characters has been observed over the years studied. While in 2013, only three series with LGBTQ characters were recorded, this number increased to 23 in 2019. This increase submits greater openness and social acceptance towards the LGBTQ community, as well as a conscious effort on the part of content creators to represent the diversity of human experiences. The annual analysis shows fluctuations in the representation of LGBTQ characters. While the overall increase is clear, year-over-year variations were also observed. The increasing presence of LGBTQ characters in television signals a significant shift in popular culture. Such representation plays a key role in shaping public perceptions, helping to normalize and promote acceptance of diverse sexual identities and orientations.

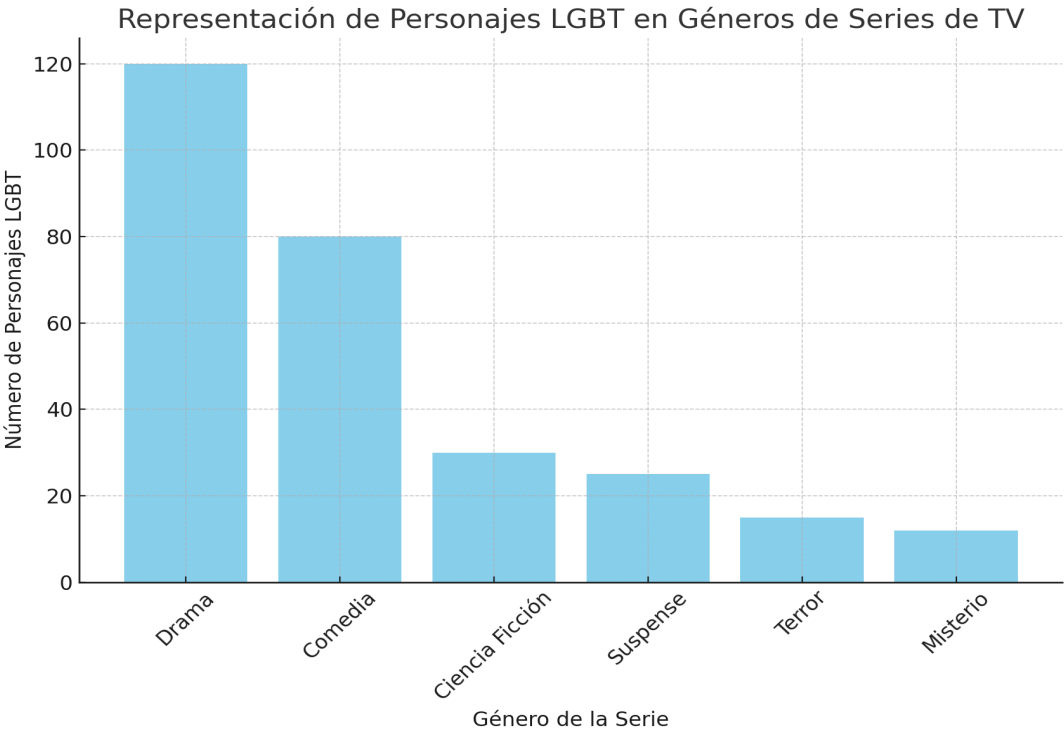
Table 2. Number of Series Released by Year (With and Without LGBTQ Characters)

Release year	Series without LGBTQ characters	Series with LGBTQ characters
2013	0	3
2014	1	0
2015	4	8
2016	2	12
2017	2	19
2018	8	8
2019	16	23
2020	3	3
Total	36	76

Source: Prepared by the authors

The number of LGBTQ characters varies markedly by television genre. As shown in Figure 2, only genres with more than ten LGBTQ characters were considered. The Drama genre leads with a significantly higher representation, totalling 120 characters. This may suggest that drama series are more inclined to explore complex and personal themes, including LGBTQ identities and experiences.

Figure 2.- Representation of LGBTQ Characters in TV Series Genres



Source: Prepared by the authors

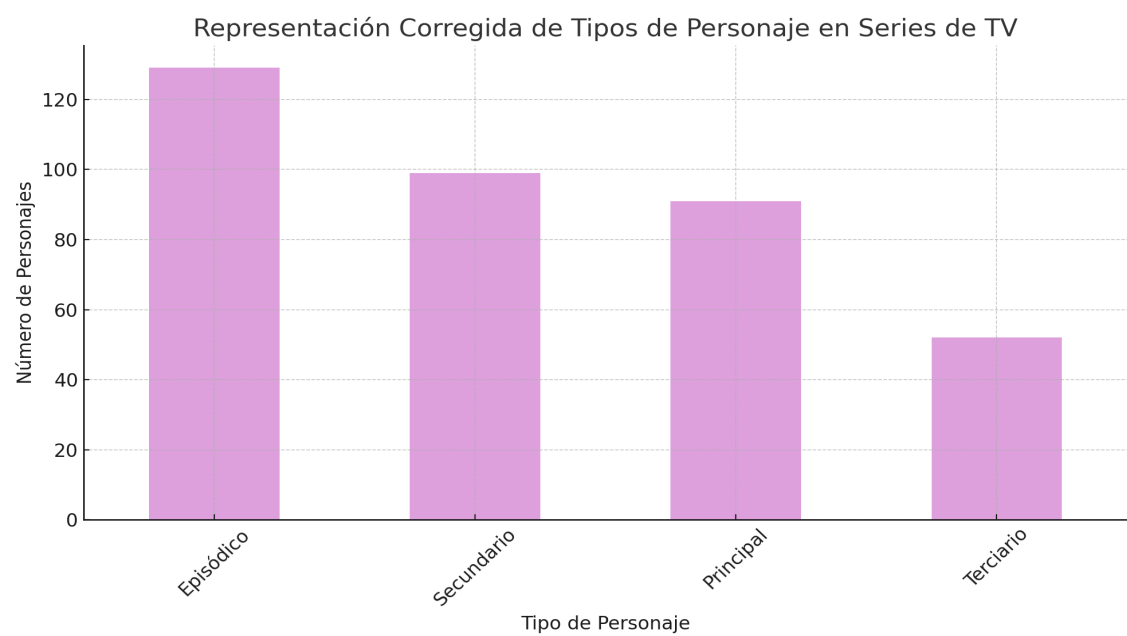
The Comedy genre follows Drama with 80 LGBTQ characters, indicating that such representation is also being integrated into more lighthearted, entertainment-focused formats. Science Fiction and Thriller genres show moderate inclusion, with 30 and 25 characters respectively. This suggests a growing presence of LGBTQ characters in genres traditionally centred on plot and action. In contrast, Horror and Mystery display

lower representation, with 15 and 12 characters, possibly reflecting a more recent or cautious incorporation of LGBTQ identities into narratives driven by tension and suspense.

On average, each Netflix series in the dataset includes approximately 4.77 LGBTQ characters. However, the analysis does not reveal a consistent trend of increasing or decreasing character counts when comparing older and more recent series.

In the representation of character types in TV series, the data (figure 3) reveals an interesting distribution.

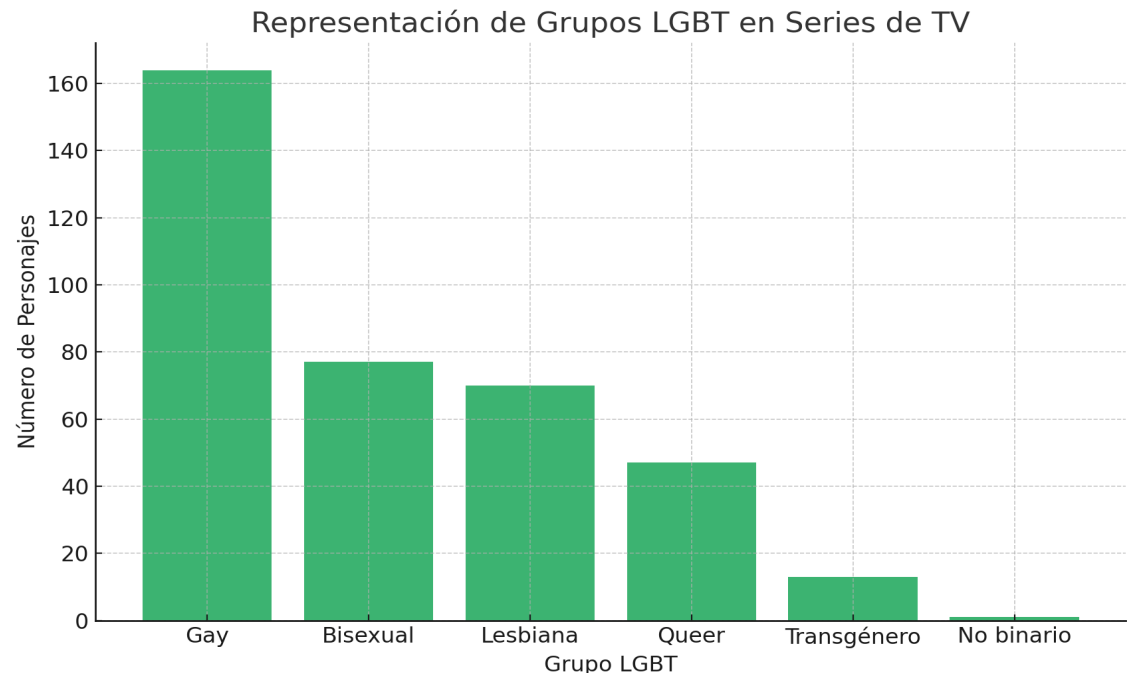
Figure 3.- Representation of Character Types in TV Series



Source: Prepared by the authors

Episodic characters topped the list with 129 characters, suggesting a high turnover or temporary presence of characters in plots. This is followed by secondary characters, with 99 characters who play important but not central roles in the stories. The main characters, who are crucial to the development of the narrative, number 91. Finally, the number of tertiary characters, who usually serve to supplement stories or provide additional context, is 52. These figures provide insight into the narrative approach of the series, which often prioritizes episodic and secondary characters over more central or tertiary roles, in what, a priori, could be symptomatic of pink washing.

Figure 4.- Representation of LGBTQ groups in TV series



Source: Prepared by the authors

With regard to the representation of LGBTI groups, characters identified as gay (male) lead with a total of 164, indicating a strong presence and visibility of this group in television narratives, as figure 4 shows. This could be a reflection of greater social acceptance and a deeper understanding of this identity in popular culture.

There are 77 bisexual characters and 70 lesbian characters represented in the dataset, suggesting that while still less numerous than gay characters, these identities are gaining meaningful visibility in television narratives.

Characters identified as queer number 47, indicating a notable—though comparatively limited—level of inclusion. This may reflect a growing awareness of the broader diversity within the LGBTQ spectrum, while also pointing to the need for more expansive representation.

Transgender characters, though only 13 in total, mark an important step forward in visibility for a group that has long been underrepresented or misrepresented in media. In stark contrast, just one non-binary character was identified, underscoring the significant lack of representation for gender identities that fall outside the binary framework.

Overall, the graph reveals both the variety and the imbalance in LGBTQ character representation. While progress is evident, the data also raises whether gay characters occupy a more established and accepted space in Netflix fiction compared to other identities within the LGBTQ spectrum.

Following this, an analysis was conducted to cross-reference character gender with LGBTQ identity in order to explore potential correlations (see Table 3).

Table 3.- Gender of the character and LGBTQ community

Character Gender	Bisexual	Gay	Heterosexual	Lesbian	Non-binary	Not known	Queer	Transgender
Gender-fluid	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Man	34	163	0	1	0	0	19	3
Woman	42	1	0	64	0	0	28	10
Non-binary	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0

Source: Prepared by the authors

The chi-square test resulted in a chi-square value of approximately 454.52 and an extremely low p-value (approximately $4.49 \times 10^{-834.49 \times 10^{-83}}$). Because the p-value is much lower than the common threshold of 0.05, this indicates a statistically significant association between the gender of the character and their LGBTQ collective in the data analysed.

The distribution of characters across different LGBTQ groups does not appear to be random when considering gender. Instead, clear patterns emerge: male characters are predominantly identified as gay, while female characters are more frequently portrayed as lesbian. This trend likely reflects greater visibility and social acceptance of these identities in popular culture—an encouraging sign of progress in LGBTQ representation. However, it also points to a lack of diversity, suggesting that many other identities within the spectrum still struggle to achieve similar levels of representation.

A particularly notable pattern is the higher number of bisexual female characters compared to bisexual male characters. This suggests that female bisexuality may be more visible—or perhaps more socially acceptable—in television narratives. The disparity could be shaped by cultural perceptions and gender-based stereotypes, which influence how bisexuality is portrayed and received depending on gender.

While queer and transgender characters are present in a number of series, their overall representation remains limited in comparison to gay and lesbian characters. This imbalance proposes that despite growing visibility for the LGBTQ community as a whole, some identities are still underrepresented or depicted in narrow, stereotypical ways. In particular, the relatively low number of transgender characters points to a significant gap in authentic and inclusive representation in mainstream television.

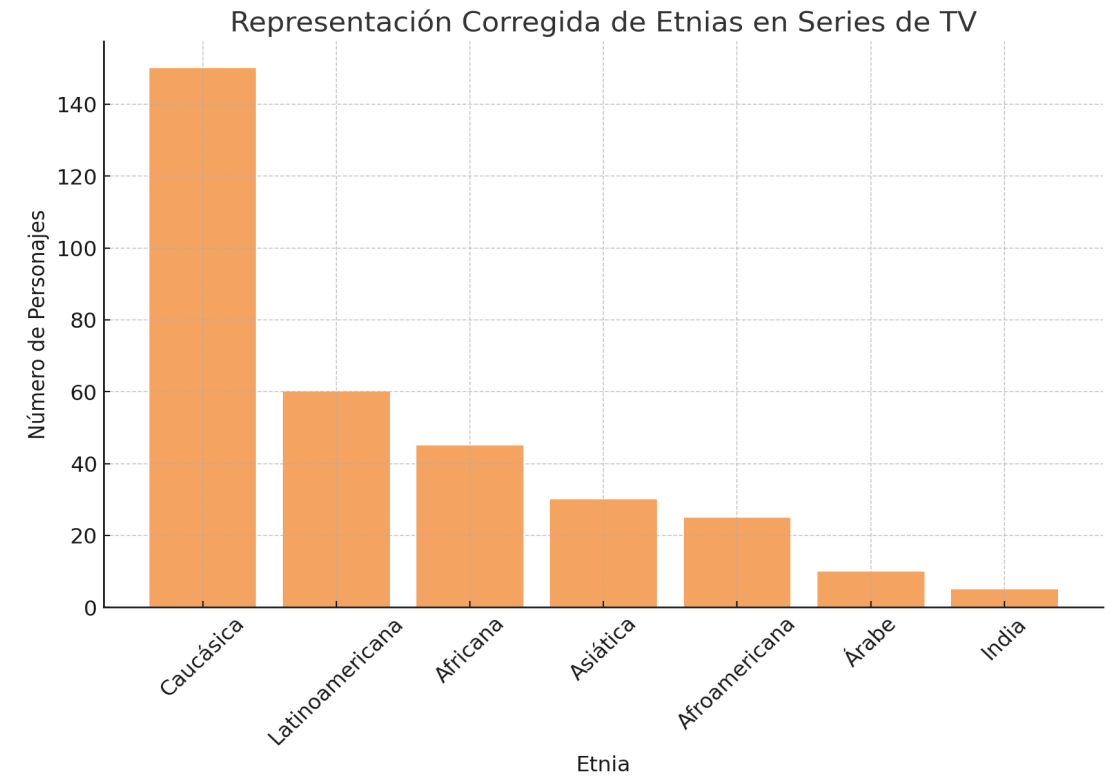
Another important variable analysed was character ethnicity (see Figure 5). The data shows that white characters remain predominant, with 150 out of the total, highlighting a continued imbalance in ethnic representation within LGBTQ portrayals on television.

Characters of Latin American and African origin are present in notable numbers—60 and 45, respectively—indicating a degree of ethnic inclusion, though still considerably lower than the representation of white characters. Asian and African-American characters follow with 30 and 25, respectively, suggesting incremental progress toward more diverse ethnic portrayals in television series.

Characters of Arab origin are represented to a lesser extent, with only 10 recorded, which may reflect a limited engagement with this ethnicity in mainstream narratives. Similarly, Indian characters appear in just 5 instances, underscoring a marked underrepresentation that warrants further critical attention.

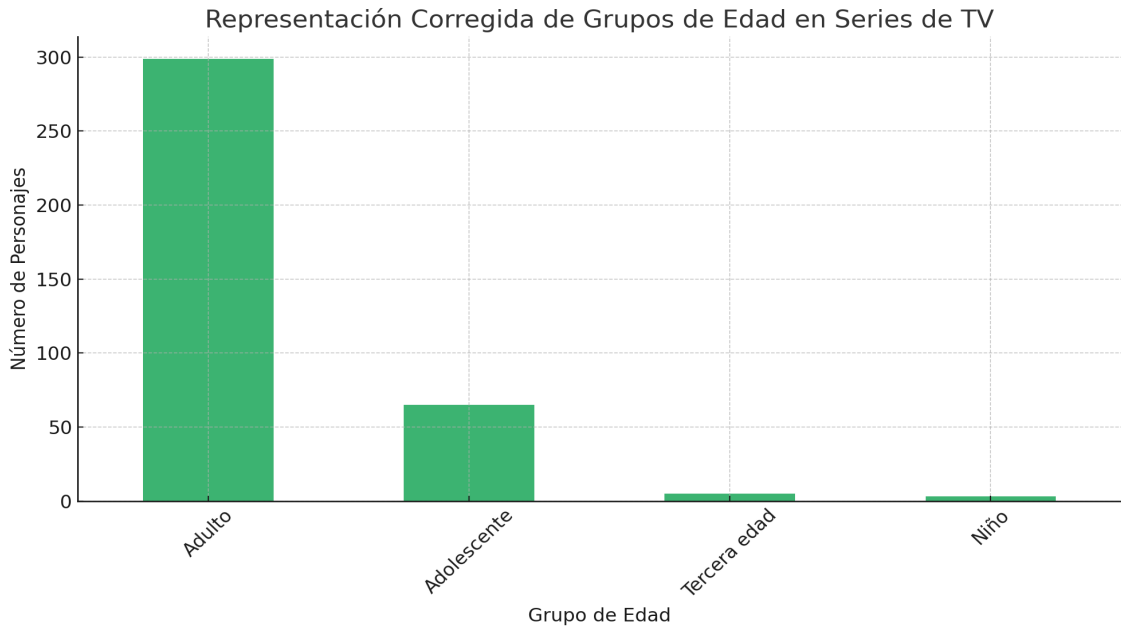
With regard to age distribution, adult characters overwhelmingly predominate. As shown in Figure 6, the “Adult” category encompasses 299 characters, indicating a strong preference for adult protagonists in television narratives. This pattern may be attributed to the thematic focus of most series, which tend to explore issues and experiences aligned with adult life stages, as well as the narrative complexity often associated with adult characters.

Figure 5.- Representation of ethnicities in TV series



Source: Prepared by the authors

Figure 6.- Representation of age groups in TV series



Source: Prepared by the authors

The “Teen” group follows with 64 characters, showing significant, but much lower representation compared to adults. This may be because teen-centric plots are often more specific and geared toward particular genres or themes, such as personal growth, identity discovery, or issues related to school or family. The “Senior” and “Child” groups have minimal representation, with only 5 and 3 characters, respectively. This underrepresentation suggests that stories focused on these age groups are less common in TV series. There may be fewer opportunities or interest in exploring plots involving very young or older people characters, or these characters are frequently used as supporting roles rather than the protagonists of their own stories. Once the characters were analysed, the study focused on the number of times these characters transitioned from a state of concealment or secrecy of their sexual identity to one of openness or honesty about their own identity. This action is known as “coming out of the closet”.

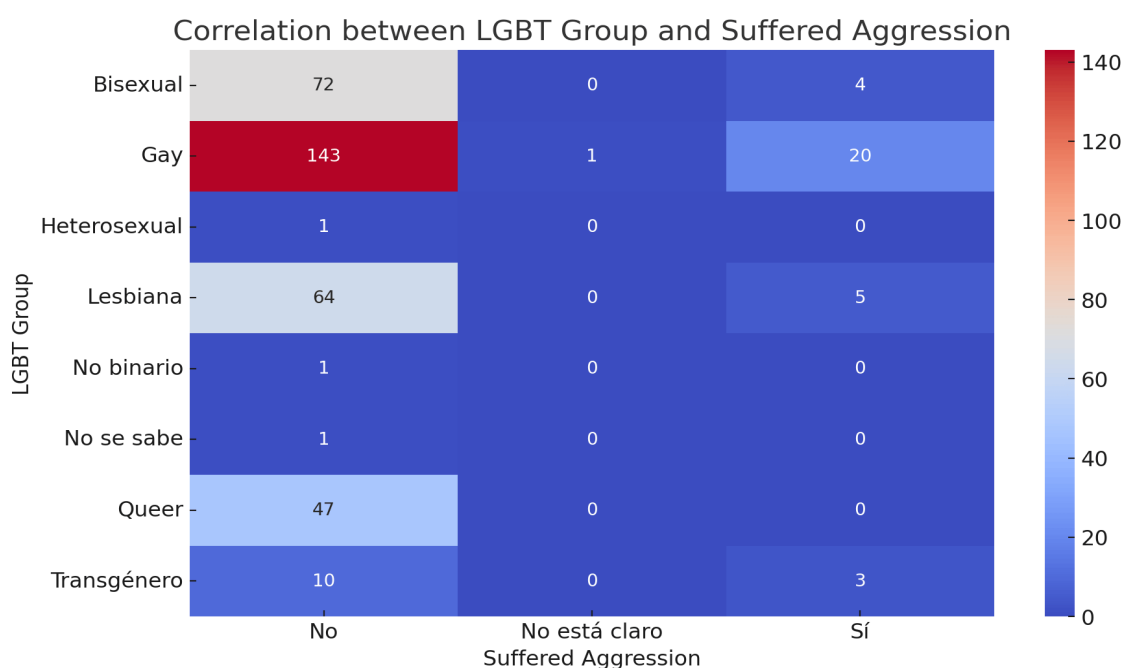
In the analysis of the representation of coming out of the closet in television series, a notable discrepancy is observed. Out of 372 characters, 342 (91.94%) have not experienced an explicit coming out in their respective narratives, proposing a trend toward underrepresentation or implicit handling of the characters' sexual orientation. On the other hand, only 30 characters have had an explicit coming out.

Within this smaller group, the majority, with 28 characters representing 91.94%, are no longer in the closet, suggesting a representation of acceptance or transition. However, there are 2 characters, 8.06% of the group, who, despite having had an explicit coming out, are still in the closet in terms of their public or personal narrative in the series. These numbers reflect not only narrative decisions around the representation of sexual orientation in television series, but also potential implications for how LGBTQ issues are addressed in entertainment media.

Another of the variables analysed is the presence of sexual aggression in which the sexual condition is a trigger or accelerator of the aggression itself, even leading to death. The data provided sheds light on these two important aspects of the representation of LGBTQ characters in television series.

Regarding sexual assaults, out of 371 characters, 339, representing 91.13%, did not suffer any aggression related to their sexuality. On the other hand, 32 characters, equivalent to 8.60%, experienced aggression due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Although relatively small, this figure highlights the presence of conflicts related to discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ community in television narratives.

Figure 7. Correlation between the LGBT Group and characters that suffered aggression



Source: Prepared by the authors

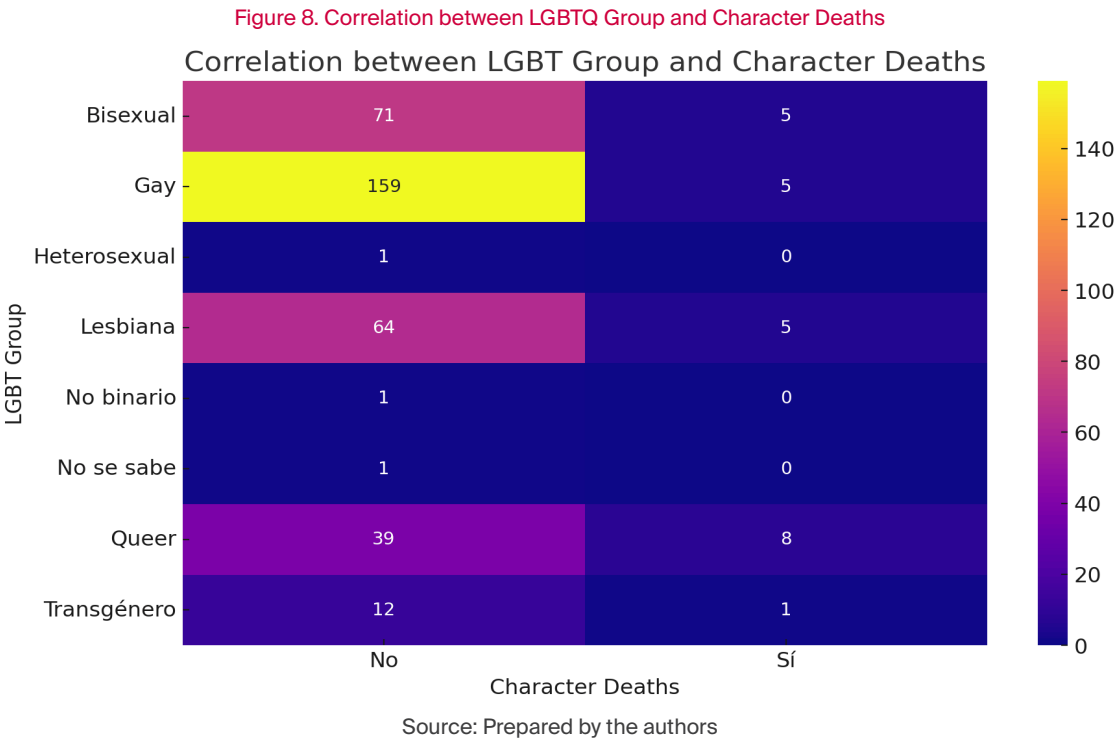
On the basis of these data, we looked for possible correlations between the different LGBTI groups and the aggressions suffered (figure 7). Gay-identified characters had the highest incidence of aggression in the series, followed by lesbian and bisexual characters. Queer and transgender characters also show some incidence, although it is minor in comparison. The lack of representation of aggression in certain groups could reflect diverse narratives and approaches in television series in terms of the representation of violence and discrimination faced by LGBTQ people.

Regarding the death of characters during the series, of the 372 characters analysed, 348, which constitute 93.55%, do not die during the series. However, 24 characters, or 6.45%, die during the narrative. This data may be indicative of the way the series handles the narrative arcs of LGBTQ characters, possibly reflecting a narrative trope where some LGBTQ characters are more likely to have tragic endings.

Although there is a significant presence of LGBTQ characters in TV series, most do not have an explicit representation of their coming out. Specifically, characters identified as gay and lesbian have more representation than other groups, but still, most do not show an explicit coming out. This could reflect a trend in media representation where certain LGBTQ identities are more visible than others, and where coming out is not always a central theme in the narrative of these characters.

In the analysis of the depiction of the deaths of LGBTQ characters in television series, it is observed that most characters do not die, although there are notable variations between different groups.

In the search for possible correlations between deaths and groups (figure 8), within the characters identified as gay, 159 did not die and 5 did. Among lesbians, 64 characters did not face death, while 5 did. The situation is similar for bisexual characters, with 71 not dying and 5 dying. However, the queer group stands out for a higher proportion of deaths, with 39 characters who survive and 8 who do not. Regarding transgender characters, 12 don't die and 1 does.



These results indicate that while most LGBTQ characters do not die in the series, there is a significant representation of deaths in certain groups, especially the queer group. This could reflect a trend in the portrayal of LGBTQ characters in media, where certain identities may be more subject to tragic narratives or dramatic endings.

The depiction of the deaths of LGBTQ characters has been a topic of discussion in the community and media, often related to the idea of “Bury Your Gays”. This trope suggests a disproportionate representation of the deaths of LGBTQ characters compared to heterosexual characters.

5. Conclusions and discussion

A comprehensive examination of Netflix’s in-house production of American fiction from 2010 to 2020 reveals a discernible trend towards the inclusion of LGBTQ characters in television series. This trend reflects a shift in societal norms and attitudes, as documented by scholars such as Vanlee et al. (2018), who observed the growing visibility of LGBTQ characters in mainstream media and its reflection of evolving social perspectives on sexual and gender diversity.

The diversification of LGBTQ representation across television genres proposes meaningful progress in the integration of these identities into contemporary entertainment. This growing visibility appears to correspond with wider cultural and legal recognition of LGBTQ rights. Consistent with studies such as Kelso (2015), which examines media portrayals of gender-variant, pre-adolescent children, the findings underscore the continued need for nuanced, authentic depictions that move beyond superficial or stereotypical portrayals.

However, a more critical analysis reveals the ongoing need for deeper and more comprehensive representation to achieve true media inclusivity. While the increase in the number of LGBTQ characters is notable, it does not necessarily equate to representational quality. The findings call for portrayals that are multidimensional, stereotype-free, and capable of reflecting the diversity and complexity within the LGBTQ community. Evidence of practices such as pink washing, as discussed by Sterbenk et al. (2021), raises concerns about whether this inclusion stems from genuine commitment or is merely a strategic branding tool.

The study reveals a marked prevalence of gay characters compared with other groups within the LGBTQ community, such as bisexuals and lesbians, doubling their representation. Also, noteworthy is the predominant presence of adult characters, which is five times higher than that of other age groups, including teenagers, seniors, and children. In terms of the relevance of characters within narratives, LGBTQ main characters constitute the third-largest group, behind secondary and episodic characters, and represent less than 25% of the total LGBTQ characters. In addition, in terms of ethnic representation, the LGBTQ community portrayed shows a notorious dominance of White ethnicity, which accounts for almost half of the total representation, in contrast to a much smaller presence of other ethnicities.

Although the frequency of on-screen violence and death involving LGBTQ characters does not conclusively confirm the presence of tropes such as “Bury Your Gays” or “Dead Lesbian Syndrome,” the data are insufficient to entirely dismiss these patterns. Thus, the possibility of their continued influence in narrative structures remains open.

These findings highlight key areas for further research on the representation of gender and sexual diversity in media. The way LGBTQ characters are portrayed plays a critical role in shaping public perception, contributing either to increased empathy and social inclusion or, conversely, to the reinforcement of prejudice and marginalization. As such, fostering diverse, nuanced, and respectful portrayals remains an essential objective in the pursuit of equitable media representation.

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