

# Engaging with Diversity: Audiences, Identities, and Intersectionalities in Media Culture

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Audiences are shaped by positions crossed by multiple axes of identity and inequality, such as gender, sexuality, social class, disability, or ethnic origin, which condition the ways in which they interpret and relate to media content. Within this framework, the research lines of this special issue focus on the study of reception from an intersectional perspective, with the aim of analyzing how these social groups interpret and negotiate representations constructed across different media formats, including television series, feature films, social networks, content creation platforms, or video games. Likewise, it is also relevant to examine how mainstream audiences interpret media discourses around these intersectionalities. In this way, the special issue proposes to explore both the mirror effect, understood as audiences' ability to recognize themselves and see themselves reflected in media representations, and the window effect, that is, the possibility of accessing other realities and experiences, within audience experiences.

On the one hand, we understand audiences in a broad sense, that is, as all those people who view and interact with the media contents of their time (Ha, 1998). Furthermore, we conceive audiences not merely as passive consumers of cultural and media content, but as active agents who play a crucial role in the interpretation of these messages (Livingstone, 2015). For this reason, it is relevant to understand

and explore how audiences engage with and make use of media content, as recent research has done, for example, in studies on how trans people interpret their own representation in television series (Villegas-Simón et al., 2024).

On the other hand, like the society in which it develops, the audience is diverse and heterogeneous (Kristensen & From, 2015). Thus, we find ourselves in a context in which historically the representation of minority social groups has been underrepresented or commonly constructed through stigma and negative prejudice (Sánchez-Soriano, 2023), as is the case for people with disabilities (Page et al., 2024) or people with body diversity (Collins et al., 2024). For this reason, numerous studies have focused on discursive analyses of old and emerging representations (Ventura et al., 2024). However, we believe that the relevance of this special issue lies in shifting the focus to the final stage of the entire media circuit, namely, how audiences interact with these representations, analyzing how they engage with and respond to such content.

At the same time, social networks have enabled the emergence of new content and representations that generate seemingly more diverse discourses, while also competing with the spread of hate speech (Miranda et al., 2024). For this reason, it is valuable to develop new research such as that presented here which, under an intersectional framework, focuses on analyzing the reception of content across any media and format, while centering attention on the current cultural and media context.

In this way, this special issue offers valuable reflections and research carried out from diverse perspectives. First, the study conducted by Laura Fernández, Vitor Blanco-Fernández, and María-José Masanet, **“Interseccionalidad a través de historias de vida: cuidado, temporalidad y reflexividad en los estudios de audiencias”** presents a methodological proposal that highlights the value of life stories as a tool for addressing the complexity of identities. Through a reflexive approach, the authors argue that audience research, especially when focused on youth, sexualities, and experiences traversed by multiple inequalities, requires methodologies capable of capturing nuances that traditional approaches often fail to provide.

The article begins with a critical review of intersectional research in audience studies and shows how life stories make it possible to understand life trajectories in which gender, social class, ethnicity, migration, or sexualities are intertwined over time. Based on this, the authors outline lessons learned from various fieldwork experiences in formal and non-formal educational contexts, where they encountered significant limitations when attempting to capture lived experiences

through interviews or workshops. Drawing on these experiences, they argue that biographical narratives open up more caring spaces, capable of generating trust, enabling the reconstruction of invisibilized experiences, and bringing forward youth voices that are often marginalized by adultcentrism.

The contribution places particular emphasis on the need to build safe environments, recognize the implicit hierarchies between researchers and participants, and embrace reflexivity as part of the research process. It also highlights the challenges inherent to life stories, including the significant time commitment required, the emotional intensity of the work, and the need for teams trained in active listening and ethical care. Thus, the study concludes that life stories represent a useful path for gaining deeper insight into how media experiences are constructed at the intersection of structural inequalities, and it underscores the importance of continuing to strengthen methodologies that place youth voices at the center of analysis.

Second, the research conducted by Emerson Vicente-Cruz, Vanesa Montes López, and Ariadna Angulo-Brunet, **“Adolescencia, estereotipos y visibilidad de mujeres bisexuales en la ficción seriada”**, examines how groups of adolescents interpret representations of bisexual women in various television series. Through six focus groups, the authors analyze how serialized fiction influences the construction of imaginaries about bisexuality, particularly during a life stage in which identity and affective relationships are in the process of formation.

The study reveals that a large proportion of participating adolescents perceive bisexual characters as scarce in television productions and, when present, as often reproducing persistent stereotypes, such as promiscuity, confusion, or emotional instability. These images not only generate a distorted view of female bisexuality but also contribute to its social invisibility and may foster biphobic attitudes in youth environments. These dynamics are compounded by family, cultural, or religious factors that increase silence and the lack of positive role models.

At the same time, the findings reveal that adolescents recognize the transformative potential of serialized fiction when it offers more diverse representations that move away from traditional clichés. In this regard, participants propose using excerpts from TV series in educational settings as a tool for debate, reflection, and awareness-raising, especially in small groups where safer communication is encouraged.

The article concludes by emphasizing the need for educational institutions to incorporate policies and programs that address sexual diversity from inclusive and critical perspectives. It also highlights the value of audiovisual narratives in building role models and promoting

more egalitarian relationships. Ultimately, this contribution invites reflection on the educational and cultural responsibility surrounding the representation of female bisexuality in contemporary fiction.

The study by Mitzzy Arciniega-Cáceres and Silvia Escobar-Fuentes, **“La lactancia como eje de la “buena maternidad”: Discursos y tensiones en los comentarios de instamamis españolas”** addresses discourses around breastfeeding on Instagram. To this end, the authors focus on user-generated comments on the posts of so-called Spanish “instamoms,” content creators who act as motherhood influencers. In total, they analyze 592 comments expressing experiences, doubts, and debates that negotiate ideals of “good motherhood” through breastfeeding.

The authors identify four axes structuring this negotiation. The first refers to the centrality of guilt and sacrifice as determining factors in breastfeeding experiences and the fear of being considered “bad mothers.” The second highlights the social pressure expressed by users from their social and medical environments regarding decisions about ceasing or prolonging breastfeeding. The third identifies loneliness as a transversal axis, linked to the absence or limited involvement of other caregivers and the lack of non-judgmental references. Finally, the fourth axis reveals the emergence and professional consolidation of instamoms as figures of authority, sources of information, and providers of emotional validation.

In conclusion, the authors identify how, in the digital environment, breastfeeding becomes a symbolic marker of “good motherhood,” debated, negotiated, and re-signified by audiences. However, the study notes that tensions and critiques tend to be articulated from individualized and personal perspectives, which makes it difficult to develop a structural, collective, and politicized critique. The authors argue that this is an effect of platform logics themselves, whose policies and architectures actively shape the ways in which such tensions are communicated and interpreted. In this way, they propose understanding digital motherhood as a “platformized” practice in which social discourses and technological architectures shape norms, values, and expectations around ideals of motherhood.

Regarding the article **“Visibility Without Agency: How Gaming Audiences Read Intersectional Characters in Assassin’s Creed,”** Cátia Ferreira and Carla Ganito explore how video games, specifically the Assassin’s Creed franchise, construct and negotiate racialized and gendered identities within historically situated narratives. Their study combines semiotic and narrative analysis of three installments (*Assassin’s Creed III*, *Origins*, and *Liberation*) with thematic analysis of

90 player comments from Reddit and YouTube addressing issues of race, gender, identity, and historical representation. Through this approach, the authors integrate textual and reception dimensions from a critical, postcolonial, and intersectional perspective, demonstrating that meaning is constructed through design structures, historical imaginaries, and player interactions.

The main findings show that although video games are evolving toward greater diversity through the inclusion of protagonists from marginalized groups, their representations remain anchored in gender conventions, commercial constraints, and hegemonic historical narratives. Moreover, reception analysis reveals that audiences actively question and critique these representations through affective and discursive practices. Ultimately, the article argues that video games are not merely entertainment products, but cultural texts that participate in the symbolic negotiation of history and identity through the interaction between design decisions, franchise conventions, and audience interpretations. At the same time, the authors stress the imperative for intersectionality to function not only as a theoretical framework but also as a methodological one when seeking to understand representation and reception dialogically.

In addition, Paula Rodríguez-Lorenzo's research, "**Ha sufrido mucho y ese sufrimiento te lo va a reproducir a ti: percepción de las personas trans como parejas en audiencias cis**", examines how media representations influence the construction of sex-affective imaginaries about trans people. Based on a reception study using semi-structured interviews with cis participants, the author analyzes how accumulated exposure to trans narratives, especially those organized around the tragic trope, conditions how these audiences interpret the viability of trans-cis relationships.

The results identify the emergence of a relational model structured around three axes: *burden*, associated with the perception of trans partners as emotionally demanding; *renunciation*, linked to the idea that these relationships imply the loss of hegemonic romantic ideals; and *judgment*, related to the social stigma attached to such relationships. Thus, although contemporary media narratives have contributed to more empathetic and humanized representations, they remain anchored in frameworks of suffering that hinder their translation into intimate contexts. Consequently, the article highlights that visibility does not always equate to inclusion, particularly in affective domains where subtler yet deeply entrenched forms of resistance persist.

Finally, the article by Marta Lopera-Mármol, María-José Establés, and Mar Guerrero-Pico, "**From Autism to Queerness: The Shifting**

**Politics of Representation in *Atypical* (Netflix, 2017–2021),”** examines the evolution of representational politics in the series *Atypical* through a combined content and social media reception analysis. The study explores how the fiction shifts from a narrative centered on autism toward increasing visibility of queer identities, a process reinforced by extratextual dynamics such as the public identities of part of the cast.

Through analysis of the series and more than two thousand fan comments on X (Twitter), the authors show that this transformation responds both to a desire for representational diversification and to the logics of streaming platforms, where inclusion functions simultaneously as a cultural and commercial strategy. They also demonstrate how audiences actively participate in negotiating these meanings, celebrating certain advances (such as the normalization of bisexual relationships) while also criticizing the persistence of stereotypes or the displacement of other forms of diversity, such as neurodivergence. The article concludes by noting that *Atypical*'s evolution reflects the inherent tensions of intersectional representation in contemporary fiction, where different identities do not always coexist in balanced ways, but may compete for visibility. In this sense, the authors advocate for advancing toward models of representation that do not replace one axis of difference with another, but rather integrate multiple dimensions of identity in complex and simultaneous ways.

Overall, this issue provides a necessary space for thinking about audiences in terms of their complexity and diversity, placing at its center the experiences and interpretations that different social groups generate in response to media representations. The studies presented here demonstrate that diagnosing stereotypes is insufficient; it is essential to understand how such images are received and negotiated by those who consume them, particularly when their identities intersect with historical inequalities.

By focusing on reception, this special issue contributes to expanding the field of audience studies toward more inclusive and ethically committed perspectives. The works presented show that the voices of young people, bisexual women, racialized individuals, people with disabilities, or those with trajectories marked by multiple axes of inequality not only provide indispensable nuance, but also propose new ways of engaging with cultural and media content. In doing so, this special issue not only invites closer examination of the relationship between intersectionality and audiences, but also opens pathways for future research that continues to explore how media experiences are constructed, inhabited, and transformed in an increasingly complex communicative environment.

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Os autores declaram não ter conflitos de interesses a declarar.

### **Authors Contributions** Contribuições dos Autores

Juan-José Sánchez-Soriano: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing — Original Draft, Writing — Review & Editing, Project administration. Rafael Ventura: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing — Original Draft, Writing — Review & Editing. Isabel Villegas-Simón: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing — Original Draft, Writing — Review & Editing.

### **Data Availability Statement** Declaração de Disponibilidade de Dados

The data that support the findings of this article are openly available.

### **AI Tools** Ferramentas de IA

AI tools were used to assist with proofreading the translation of the text into other languages.

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