

Immigrant Characters in Spanish Audiovisual Broadcast on Platforms

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Recently, society has been debating the representation of immigrants in the media and how it might affect possible racist behavior in everyday life. This study responds to the need for a better understanding of the representation of immigrants in fiction programs broadcast on platforms, and the shortage of studies that have analyzed fiction broadcast via video-on-demand because of it being such a recent phenomenon. Content analysis was conducted of 749 characters that appeared in 38 Spanish-produced programs. We observed that immigrant characters are not underrepresented, although there are statistically significant differences in terms of nationality, origin, and ethnicity. This suggests that it is not origin that conditions the role of immigrant characters, but skin color and place of birth. Moreover, there continues to be a perverse association between immigrant characters and the use of violence or drugs, thus maintaining the stereotype that links nationality with criminal behavior and substance abuse.

Keywords: immigrant, VOD, characters, media, representation

Several studies have shown a high number of North Americans and Europeans develop negative attitudes toward immigrants (e.g., De Coninck et al., 2018; Meltzer et al., 2017). These attitudes are considered to be “stable, hard to change and value-based” (Huddleston & Sharif, 2019, p. 10). There are certain determinants of these attitudes, such as the presence and percentage of migrant population (De Coninck, Ogan, & Haenens, 2021; Messing & Ságvári, 2021), the level of economic development of the

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country (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018), national migration and integration policies (Callens, Meuleman, & Valentova, 2015; Messing & Ságvári, 2021), and the impact generated by different major crises (such as the refugee crisis of 2015–2016; Schlueter, Masso, & Davidov, 2020) or by media coverage and treatment of migration (De Coninck et al., 2021).

Although migration is by no means a new phenomenon, its treatment in the media is, because it generates a different instability in the production of modern subjectivities (Appadurai, 1996). The media's treatment of migration has profoundly modified public and private imaginaries, radically transforming identity. The power that the media wields over the population should not be ignored, and as pointed out by various authors (e.g., Hall, 2011; van Dijk, 2009), their main function is ideological.

For the study of media and immigration, there are two main approaches that are not isolated from each other. The former is the study of representation, that is, how immigrants are represented in the media. The latter is to consider the effect of this representation on the audience. This study is framed within the first approach, whereby it studies the representation of immigration, so future research can analyze audiences' perception thereof, as well as its possible influence on increasing or decreasing racist attitudes.

Following the research line of previous work by the authors on the representation of immigration on TV, this study aims to characterize the way that immigrants are portrayed in the Spanish media. This follows on from the most recent study by Martín-García, Marcos-Ramos, and González-de-Garay (2022) on the phenomenon in 38 different Spanish-created series broadcast between 2017 and 2020, as well as the previous study (Marcos-Ramos, González-de-Garay, & Arcila-Calderón, 2021) that analyzed how immigrants are portrayed in Spanish prime-time TV series (2016–2017). The present study also aims to determine whether there has been any change in trends, possibly because of the rise of Spanish fiction worldwide, the increase in the number of productions, and even the rise of extreme-right parties, among other causes.

Regarding the first of the aforementioned approaches, the study of representation, several studies have focused on news coverage as it constitutes a key source of information that is likely to shape perceptions of immigrants (e.g., Bleich, Bloemraad, & de Graauw, 2015; Jacobs, Hooghe, & de Vroome, 2017). For example, Eberl et al. (2018) analyzed 78 research studies focused on European media discourse and concluded that migrants were mostly framed as an economic, cultural, or criminal threat. As other studies have shown, media representations of migration, and specifically television representations, often portray immigrants as threats to a country's economy or culture, as victims of their situation, or associated with crime (e.g., De Poli, Jakobsson, & Schüller, 2017; Meltzer et al., 2017).

The way immigrants are represented in news coverage is also conditioned by the ownership of the channels on which this news is broadcast (e.g., Bartlett, 2015; Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Jacobs, Meeusen, & d'Haenens, 2016). For example, the research conducted in the United States by Qadri (2020) shows how CNN tends to include news stories in which immigrants are shown in more vulnerable positions, whereas Fox News represents them as a threat to the country's security. Similarly, Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan (2016) found that 64% of Fox News stories referred to immigrants as illegal, whereas only 42% of stories on CNN did. Another interesting observation, also in the framework of U.S. research, is that news about refugees is often related to crime (Callanan, 2012; Qadri, 2020).

There are certain key aspects regarding the effects this stereotyped representation might have on society, following the postulates of cultivation theory (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1986; Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorelli, 2009). Several studies have found significant relationships between the consumption of televised news and attitudes toward immigration (e.g., De Coninck et al., 2021). As Meltzer et al. (2017) put it, media coverage is essential for the formation of judgments about mobility and migration. In general, most studies in Europe show that viewers who are more exposed to news that presents immigrants in a negative light will themselves have negative, stereotypical attitudes toward such people (Eberl et al., 2018).

Although the media is not exclusively to blame for xenophobia, it should be acknowledged that it plays an important role in the dissemination and reinforcement of harmful attitudes and beliefs toward immigrants, as shown by several studies that have analyzed the negative, stereotypical portrayal of this group (e.g., Blinder & Allen, 2016; Valentino, Brader, & Jardina, 2013; van Dijk, 2005) and how that impacts the audience (e.g., Etchegaray & Correa, 2015; Lahav & Courtemanche, 2012).

As Hall (2003) points out, the media are a key factor in the production and transformation of ideologies, highlighting their prominent role as a place where these ideologies are "articulated, worked, transformed and elaborated" (pp. 90–91). Hall (2003) also defines two types of racist ideologies: open racism and illative racism. Other authors such as van Dijk (2000) use the term "new racism" to refer to this phenomenon.

Hence, it is essential to analyze the representation of immigration and the effects that the disseminated image generates in society to evaluate its influence on the propagation of hate speech, because the media resort to the use of stereotypes that promote prejudice, and these lie at the very foundations of the pyramid of hate. It should be borne in mind, when defining hatred, that as suggested by other authors (e.g., Casanova, Giner, & Fernández, 2023), we will refer not only to crimes or offenses but also to the manifestation of intense hatred.

Hate speech, which is often generated in the media through the use and abuse of stereotypes, is still an illegal action that seeks to cause hurt to others out of prejudice. Hence, it is essential to be attentive to the portrayal of immigrants in the media because these images "can equally contribute to producing dehumanization, stigmatization, and, finally, violent outbursts toward any form of otherness" (Isasi & Juanatey, 2017, p. 4).

Fiction and Immigration

In view of what has been stated, the representation of immigrants in the media has been the subject of prolific study. However, televised fiction has not been examined to the same extent, despite it offering an excellent vantage point for exploring social imaginaries regarding immigrants. As the literature review by Eberl et al. (2018) notes, it is important to not overlook social networks and entertainment media when studying content and its effects. This is especially important now that much of the population is less exposed to traditional media, which means the social discourse of entertainment gets ignored.

Although research on the representation of ethnic minorities and immigrants in Spanish fiction is still young, the available studies have generated important and useful conclusions, in many cases

overlapping with findings derived from studies of news content (e.g., Fernández, Prieto-Andrés, & Uldemolins, 2021; Igartua, 2007; van Dijk, 2003).

Video-on-Demand

Televised fiction has become one of humankind's favorite pastimes, as shown by the exponential increase in viewing figures during the COVID-19 lockdown. It should not be ignored that in recent years, the growing popularity of video-on-demand (VOD) platforms has changed Spanish audiovisual consumption, with one in four households now owning a subscription to at least one (Barlovento Comunicación, 2022). Another study found that subscriptions are present in 40% of homes (Estudio General de Medios, 2019). Of these platforms, Netflix (2.2 million households) and Movistar (2 million households) have been the most popular in Spain (Ruiz, 2019). Streaming platforms have not only increased the number of audiovisual products but also influenced the offer of unconventional content in terms of aesthetics and the variety of topics (Cascajosa, 2006; Lacalle, Gómez, Sánchez, & Pujol, 2019).

Spanish fiction is reaching exceptional maturity on both a narrative and technical level, and it has been highly successful at connecting with its audience. This is particularly so in the case of *Money Heist* (Pina, 2017–2020), which was a worldwide hit. As Millán (2020) explains, it was the second most watched show in the world in the first 24 hours after its release, and it is the most popular non-English-speaking series on Netflix. Lacalle et al. (2019) claim that "the rise of Spanish fiction in VOD is evident in the 24 premiere titles in 2018, which include 16 Spanish productions, three Mexican, a Brazilian, a Colombian, and an American" (pp. 201–202). As Diego and Grandío (2018) specify, Spain is now one of the four countries that produce the most fiction in the world.

Studies that have focused on the image of immigrants on traditional television have shown they are usually underrepresented, are characterized in a negative manner, do not usually have leading roles, and are often used as plot devices (e.g., Galán, 2006; Lacalle, 2008; Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2019; Marcos-Ramos, González-de-Garay, & Portillo, 2019; Romero-Rodríguez, de-Casas-Moreno, Maraver, & Pérez, 2018).

This situation is not very different in the case of Spanish series broadcast on platforms, as found in the research conducted by Martín-García et al. (2022). Immigrant characters are barely present in these series, mainly play supporting roles, and are lead characters only in an anecdotal number of cases, and they continue to be portrayed in a stereotypical manner. As Spanish fiction becomes more visible around the world, it does the image of Spain that this fiction conveys. This limited representation of immigrant characters on platforms is consistent with the lack of diversity in traditional televised fiction, as demonstrated by the study conducted by Marcos-Ramos et al. (2019) of TV Spanish prime-time series broadcast between 2016 and 2017.

It must be considered that many people will not travel to Spain in their lifetime, so the knowledge they may have of this country is through parasocial contact. Therefore, care must be taken when spreading the image that one wants to give of Spain, whether it is one of a diverse country or not. It is necessary to analyze the media, because it allows us to know in a scientific way whether there is a correspondence between reality and fiction as far as representation is concerned.

This study analyzes the representation of immigrant characters on audiovisual platforms. The aim of this article is to analyze whether there has been a significant shift toward equal representation of immigrant characters on VOD platforms (Movistar, HBO, Amazon Prime, AtresPlayer, and Netflix) or whether stereotypes are still present. Having reviewed the state of the question, the following hypotheses are established:

- H1: Underrepresentation of immigrant/foreign characters is expected in comparison with population indexes.*
- H2: Immigrant/foreign characters, in comparison with native/national characters, will have secondary or background roles to a greater extent and will feature as main characters to a lesser extent.*
- H3: Immigrant/foreign characters, in comparison with native/national characters, will have a lower level of education and a lower socioeconomic level and will have less qualified professions.*
- H4: Differences are expected between native/national characters and immigrants/foreigners in terms of violence rates: native characters will be less violent than foreigners.*
- H5: Native/national characters are expected to drink less alcohol, take fewer drugs, consume less medication, and smoke less than immigrants/foreigners.*
- H6: Differences are expected to be found in conversational richness indexes between native/national characters and immigrants/foreigners.*
- H7: Native/national characters are expected to have higher scores for positive personality traits (e.g., being friendly, hardworking, good, intelligent) in comparison with immigrants/foreigners, who will score higher than natives for negative traits (e.g., being conflictive, aggressive, violent).*

Methods

Sample

The analyzed sample is made up of 38 series and 749 characters, and it was obtained from an analysis of original Spanish fiction series broadcast in 2020 and 2021 on the following platforms: Movistar, HBO, Amazon Prime, AtresPlayer, Netflix, and Disney+. The series were sourced based on an analysis of the Spanish audiovisual production catalogue, and the episode to be encoded was chosen randomly.

Codebook, Unit of Analysis, Coding Procedure, and Reliability

The codebook used in this research was modified from others implemented in previous research (e.g., González-de-Garay, Marcos-Ramos, & Angulo-Brunet, 2022), and establishes that the unit of analysis is the human character who makes a visual appearance at some point in the show and who has at least one line of dialogue with other characters (talking individuals; Koeman, Peeters, & D'Haenens, 2007). Coding involved drawing up a coding sheet with which to collect data on the more than 80 variables that were included in the codebook, which was made up of different groups of variables: general data (gender, sexual orientation, nationality [National, Immigrant or Foreign; Immigrant and Foreign were labeled with the same category because of small representation of Foreign ($n = 22$)],

geographic origin, etc.), narrative level (i.e., main, secondary or background; personality traits; based on Igartua & Páez, 1998), characterization (work, educational, social characterization, etc.), conversational level, perpetration/victims of violent conduct, and more.

Nine coders participated in the coding procedure, and they were trained in the application of audiovisual content analysis. To verify that the method was being implemented properly and the data were reliable, another coder acted as interjudge to analyze the intercoder reliability of the variables. This procedure was conducted with 32.57% ($n = 244$) of the study sample, following the recommendations of Igartua (2006) for "a sample composed of 10%–20% of the units of analysis to be analyzed independently, drawn from the same material, by two or more encoders" (p. 218). Different coefficients were used: Krippendorff's alpha coefficient, which is typically used in content analysis, and the observed percentage agreement. Because these measures are limited in the presence of skewed distributions (Lovejoy, Watson, Lacy, & Riffe, 2016), we also obtained bias-adjusted and prevalence-adjusted kappa (PABAK; Byrt, Bishop, & Carlin, 1993). All of the studied variables, except age, obtained adequate reliability. For an extended overview of all coefficients obtained, see Table A1. The percentage agreement was greater than 75% for all variables except for those related to personality (weighted Cohen's kappa between .19 and .81, $M = .51$).

To inferentially study the association between the study variables, Fisher's exact test was used with a Monte Carlo simulation. This approach is preferable when conditions for application of Chi-square are not met.

Results

Assessment of Underrepresentation

The first hypothesis expected to find an underrepresentation of immigrant/foreign characters that appear in Spanish audiovisual fiction broadcast on platforms in comparison with population indexes.

This study found that 85% of the characters were nationals, 11% were immigrants/foreigners, and 4% could not be classified into either of the two previous variables because their nationality was not clearly identified. According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2022), 47.4 million people live in Spain, of whom 88.4% are of Spanish nationality and 11.6% are foreigners. Therefore, a comparison between the real demography and that depicted on television suggests there is a correspondence between the two.

When analyzing the results, calculations were made only for people who were either nationals (88.4%) or immigrants/foreigners (11.6%). It was determined that 37.5% ($n = 30$) of immigrants/foreigners had Spanish nationality, 32.5% ($n = 26$) came from some European country (other than Spain), 17.5% ($n = 14$) belonged to a Latin American country, 7.5% ($n = 6$) belonged to an Asian country, 3.8% ($n = 3$) came from an African country, and one person (1.2%) was a U.S. citizen.

Regarding ethnicity, and as shown in Table 1, there are statistically significant differences when considering whether characters are nationals or immigrants/foreigners ($p = .001$). Practically all of the characters were of Caucasian origin (97.6%), and only three African American or African characters were detected, one in the series *Valeria* (Benítez, 2020–2021) and two in *White Lines* (Pina, 2020). There were two Arab or Middle Eastern characters, one in *Riot Police* (Peña et al., 2020) and another in *The Boarding*

School: Las Cumbres (Fernández, 2021). There was one Gypsy in the aforesaid *Valeria*, and nine people of Latin American origin were distributed as follows: six in the aforesaid *White Lines*, one in *Someone Has to Die* (Caro, Ley, Córdova, & Taivo, 2020) and another in *Deudas* (Écija, 2021). As for immigrant or foreign characters, 49.4% were of Caucasian origin, followed by Arab or Middle Eastern characters (25.3%, $n = 21$). It should be noted that there was a major concentration of these characters in a single production, because 17 of these 21 characters appeared in the series *La Unidad*. As for the other characters coded as immigrants or foreigners, 12.0% were Latino, 9.6% were African or African American, 3.6% were Asian, and no Gypsy characters were found.

Table 1. Main Characteristics by Nationality.

	Total		Foreign		National		<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Sociodemographics							
Ethnics							.001
African American/African	12	1.6	8	9.6	3	0.5	
Arab/Middle East	23	3.1	21	25.3	2	0.3	
Asiatic	4	0.5	3	3.6	1	0.2	
Caucasian	673	91.4	41	49.4	614	97.6	
Gypsy	2	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.2	
Latin	21	2.9	10	12.0	8	1.3	
Not recognized	14		0		6		
Gender							.08
Cis-female	291	38.9	24	28.9	259	40.8	
Cis-male	448	59.8	59	71.1	369	58.1	
Trans-female	10	1.3	0	0.0	7	1.1	
Not recognized	0		0		0		
Sexual orientation							.81
Heterosexual	309	91.2	35	94.6	266	90.5	
Homosexual	28	8.3	2	5.4	26	8.8	
Plurisexual	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3	
Other	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3	
Not recognized	410		46		341		
Type of character							.13
Main	135	18.0	20	24.1	111	17.5	
Secondary	203	27.1	26	31.3	170	26.8	
Background	411	54.9	37	44.6	354	55.7	
Studies							0.14
No studies	33	9.1	6	17.6	23	7.2	
Elementary studies	116	31.9	10	29.4	105	32.7	
University	215	59.1	18	52.9	193	60.1	

	Total		Foreign		National		<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Not recognized	385		49		314		
Socioeconomic status							.009
Low	54	9.1	9	14.5	41	8.1	
Medium	410	69.3	42	67.7	358	70.5	
High	128	21.6	11	17.7	109	21.5	
Not recognized	157		21		127		
Religiosity							.03
Yes	57	92.4	71	85.5	591	93.1	
No	692	7.6	12	14.5	44	6.9	
Civil status							.06
Divorced	18	5.8	5	13.9	13	4.9	
Married/in a couple	133	43.0	10	27.8	119	44.9	
Single	150	48.5	20	55.6	127	47.9	
Widow	8	2.6	1	2.8	6	2.3	
Not recognized	440		47		370		
Relationship status							
Monogamous	159	93.5	13	100.0	141	92.8	
Not monogamous	11	6.5	0	0.0	11	7.1	
Not recognized	579		70		483		
Functional diversity							
Yes	7	0.9	83	100.0	638	98.9	
No	742	99.1	0	0.0	7	1.1	
Hypersexualization							.72
Yes	21	2.9	3	3.8	18	2.9	
No	714	97.1	75	96.2	608	97.1	
Not recognized	14		5		9		
Majority of relationships							<.001
Female	281	43.9	20	26.0	252	46.8	
Male	359	56.1	57	74.0	287	53.2	
Not recognized	109		6		96		

Note. The *p*-value is from Fisher's exact test Monte Carlo simulation. Foreign represents = 11.5% of the sample, Nationals = 88.4% of the sample

Regarding gender, the results suggest this factor is not conditioned by a character's origin (*p* = .08). In the study, 38.9% of characters are cis women, 1.3% are trans women, and 59.8% are cis men. No statistically significant differences were found for sexual orientation (*p* = .81), and it should be noted that 91.2% of the characters were coded as heterosexual. If analyzed by nationality, 90.5% of nationals are heterosexual, whereas among foreign characters, this figure rises to 94.6%.

If the characters' ethnicity and gender are taken into account, statistically significant differences can be observed ($p = .03$). There is also a similar proportion of Caucasians among cis-female people (92.8%) and cis-male people (90.8%). In contrast, among trans women, there is a lower proportion of Caucasians (77.8%, $n = 7$) and a higher proportion of Gypsies (11.1%, $n = 1$) and Latinos (11.1%, $n = 1$). These results should be interpreted with caution given that the sample contains a relatively small sample of trans women ($n = 9$).

Narrative Roles

The second hypothesis analyzes the role that immigrant/foreign characters play in the fictional narrative and aims to analyze whether there is a relationship between a character's nationality and the role that they play in the series.

Table 1 shows that there are no statistically significant differences when considering the type of character and their nationality ($p = .13$). However, there are statistically significant differences if the origin of the characters is considered ($p = .001$). The proportions of Spanish characters in main and secondary roles are very similar (84.4% for main, 85.6% for secondary), but there is a higher proportion of Spanish background characters (94.3%). Moreover, 7.4% of main characters are from another European country, a similar proportion to that for secondary characters (9.0%), but the proportion is lower for background characters (3.9%). Meanwhile, Latin Americans represent 5.9% of main characters, 4% of secondary characters, and 0.8% of background ones. Other nationalities make up less than 2% of all categories.

Statistically significant differences were detected in the type of character with regard to their ethnicity ($p = .01$; this finding should be interpreted with caution because of the small sample size of some groups). The three types of character feature similar proportions of Caucasians: 91.9% of main roles, 90.1% of secondary roles, and 89.1% of background roles. The results show that 5.2% of main characters are Latinos, 1.5% are Asians, 0.7% are African Americans, and 0.7% are Arabs. As for secondary characters, 3.4% of these are Arabs, 3.0% are Latinos, 2.5% are African Americans or African, 0.5% are Asian, and 0.5% are of other ethnicities. Finally, 3.8% of background characters are Arabs, 2.0% are Latinos, 1.5% are African Americans or Africans, 0.5% are Gypsies, and 0.3% are Asians.

Level of Education, Economic Status, and Employment

The third hypothesis expects to find significant differences between level of education, economic status, and the occupations of characters based on their nationality, whereby immigrant/foreign characters will have a lower level of education and lower socioeconomic status and will have less qualified professions.

Regarding level of education, as shown in Table 1, there are no statistically significant differences ($X^2 = 4.00$, $df = 6$, $p = .11$). It should be noted that most characters have university degrees (60.1% of nationals, 52.9% of immigrants/foreigners). In turn, there are statistically significant differences when considering socioeconomic status ($X^2 = 13.30$, $df = 4$, $p = .009$). Although most people, both nationals and foreigners, are of medium socioeconomic status, there is a lower proportion among national characters, in

comparison with immigrant and/or foreign ones, of people of low socioeconomic status, and there is a higher proportion of characters of high socioeconomic status.

Violent Behavior and Its Victims

The fourth hypothesis expects to find statistically significant differences between native/national characters and immigrants/foreigners in terms of violence rates, both as perpetrators and victims. Regarding the perpetration of violence (Figure 1), there are statistically significant differences for making hostile comments ($p = .02$), acting in an intimidating manner ($p < .001$), minor attacks ($p = .001$), and damaging property ($p = .01$).

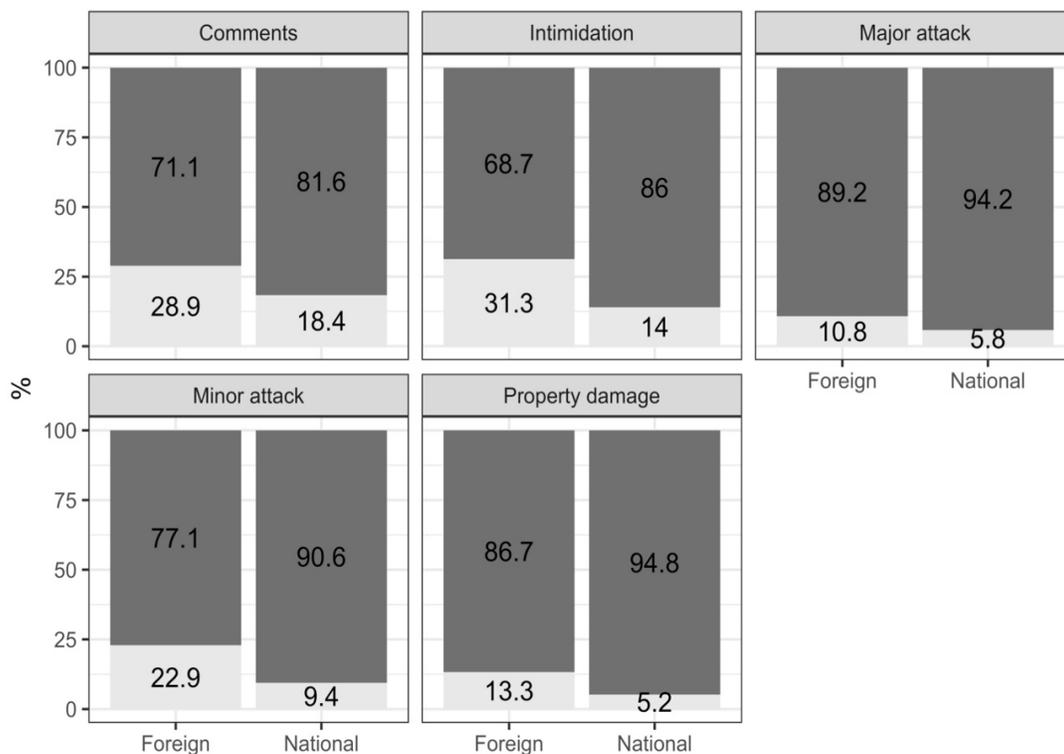


Figure 1. Violence perpetrated by characters.

As for being victims of violence (Figure 2), there are differences when it comes to suffering hostile comments ($p = .03$), because foreigners (25.3%) are on the receiving end of more such comments than nationals (15.0%) and are more commonly the victims of intimidation. A greater proportion of immigrant/foreign characters are also victims of violent acts, 24.1%, as opposed to 13.2% of national characters.

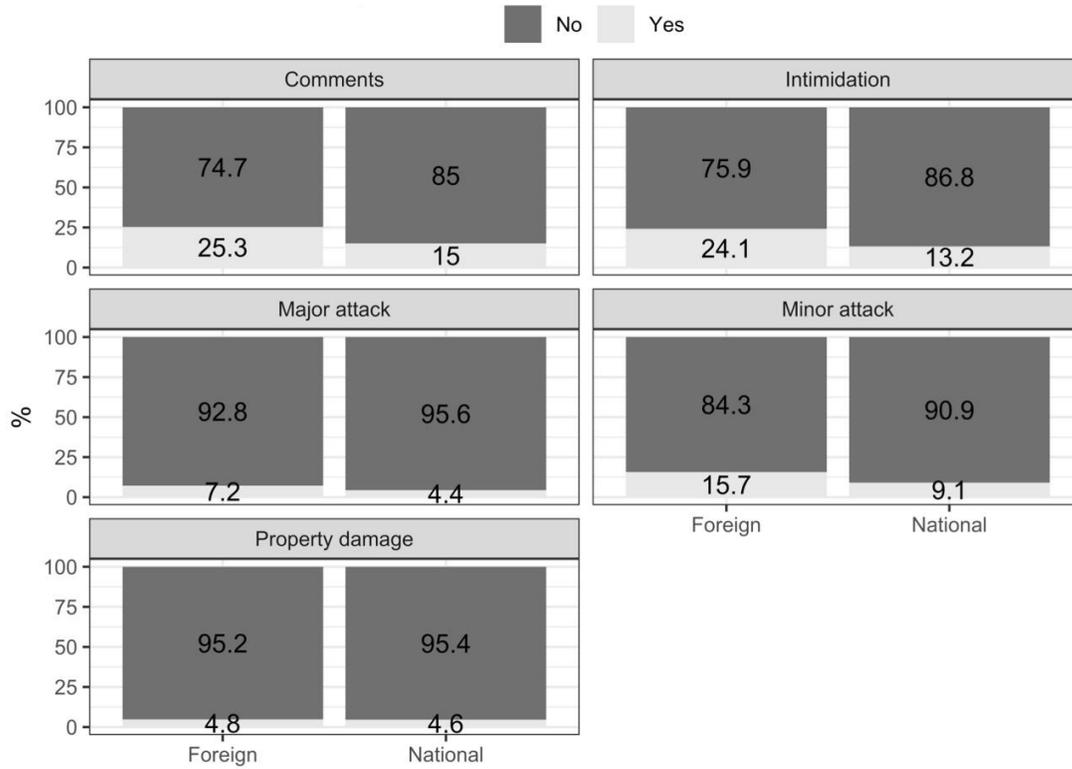


Figure 2. Being a victim of violence.

Health Behavior

The fifth hypothesis analyzes health behavior and investigates whether there is a relationship between nationality and the performance of these behaviors, whereby native/national characters are expected to drink less alcohol, take fewer drugs, consume less medication, and smoke less than immigrants/foreigners.

Figure 3 shows how health behavior is conditioned by characters' nationalities. There are statistically significant differences between nationals and immigrants and/or foreigners in the consumption of alcohol ($p = .01$) and of illegal drugs ($p = .03$). Immigrant/foreign characters are shown to consume more alcohol (31.3% compared with 19.1%) and drugs (7.2% compared with 2.4%). No eating disorders were detected among national or immigrant/foreigner characters.

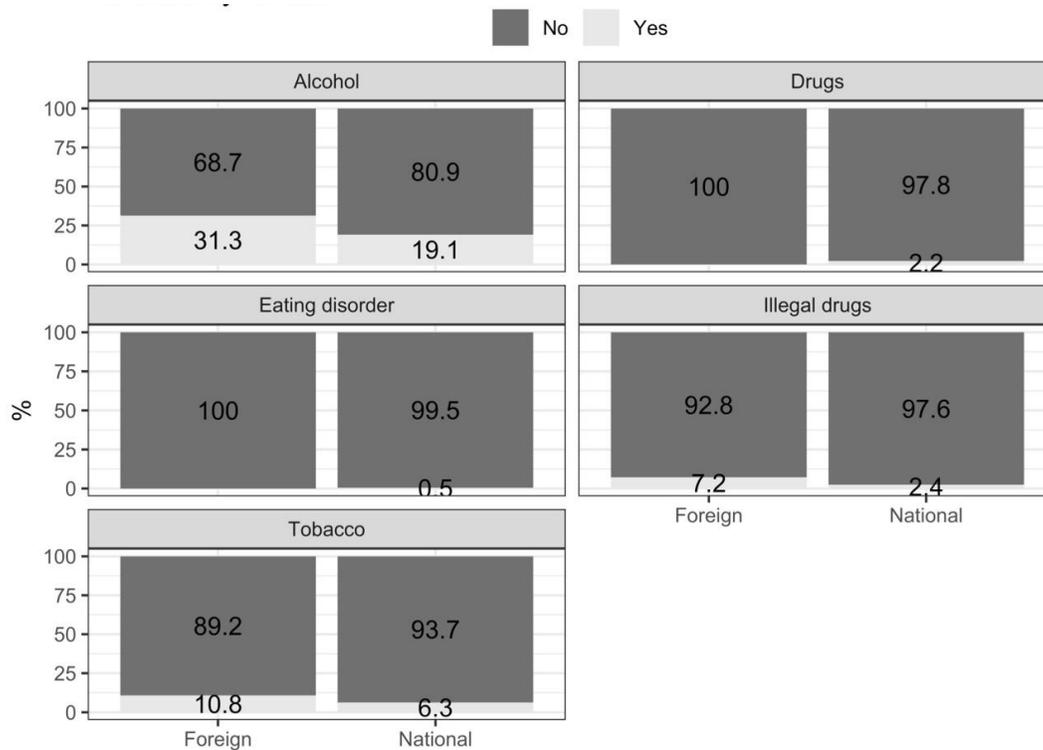


Figure 3. Health behavior.

Conversation Topics

The sixth hypothesis expects to find statistically significant differences between native/national and immigrant/foreign characters in terms of conversational richness indexes. First, we examine whether there are differences for each topic of conversation. Frequencies can be found in Figure 4.

In this case, it was found that national characters talk more than foreigners about education ($p = .03$; 13.9% vs. 7.2%) and health ($p < .001$, 21.1% vs. 13.3%). In turn, immigrant/foreign characters talk more than Spaniards about empowerment ($p = .002$; 9.6 vs. 6.0%), family ($p = .001$; 48.2% vs. 40.6%), friendship ($p = .005$; 33.7% vs. 21.7%), love ($p < .001$; 32.5% vs. 31.3%), and work ($p = .02$; 62.7% vs. 57.5%).

Second, a conversational richness index was created from the sum of "Yes" responses for the different conversation topics. Statistically significant differences were observed between immigrants/foreigners and nationals ($\chi^2 = 10.19, p = .001$). Immigrant/foreign characters had slightly greater conversational richness ($M = 3.45, SD = 2.03$) than nationals ($M = 2.77, SD = 2.00$).

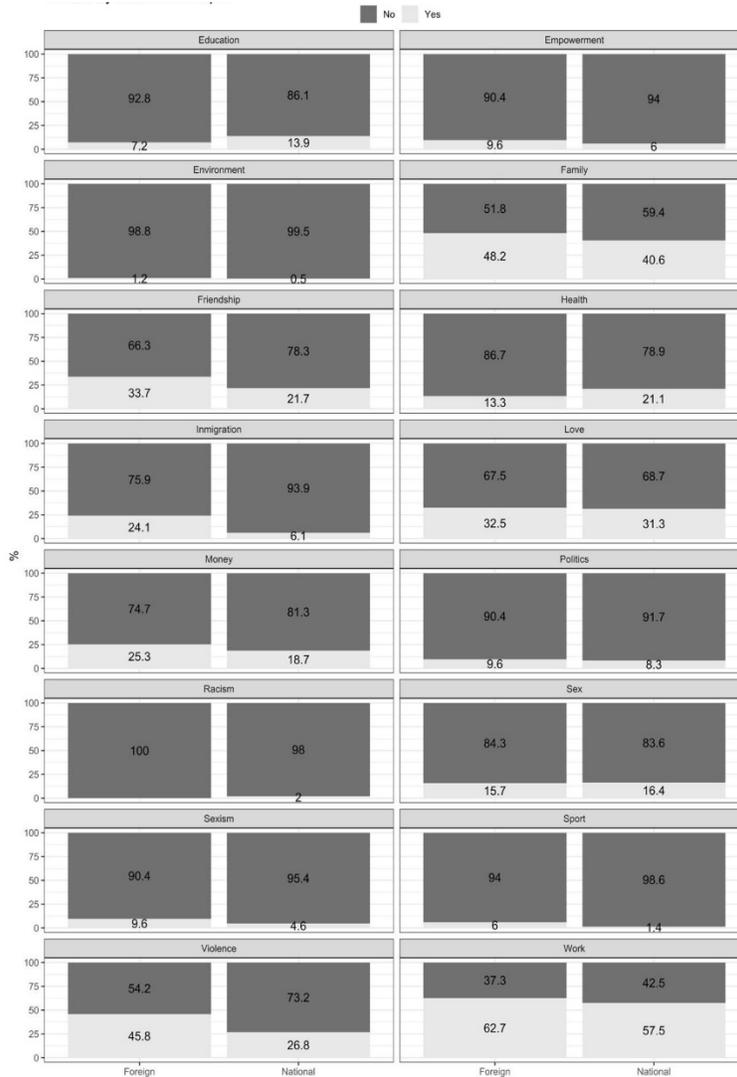


Figure 4. Conversation topics.

Personality Traits

The final hypothesis analyzes the personality traits with which the characters are created and whether there is a statistically significant relationship between nationality and personality traits measured as positive and negative attributes. Native/national characters are expected to score higher in the indexes for positive personality traits (identified with adjectives such as friendly, hardworking, good, intelligent, etc.) as opposed to immigrants/foreigners, who are expected to do so for negative traits (adjectives such as conflictive, aggressive, racist, etc.).

A consideration of the assessed dimensions (Figure 5) reveals that there are statistically significant differences for traits such as “aggressive” ($X^2 = 12.63, p = .0003$), “conflictive” ($X^2 = 9.30, p = .002$), “intolerant” ($X^2 = 5.03, p = .02$), and “perverse” ($X^2 = 10.59, p = .001$). As reflected in the analyzed fiction, national characters are perceived as less aggressive, conflictive, perverse, and intolerant than immigrant/foreign characters. In turn, Spanish people are perceived as more extroverted ($X^2 = 4.43, p = .03$).

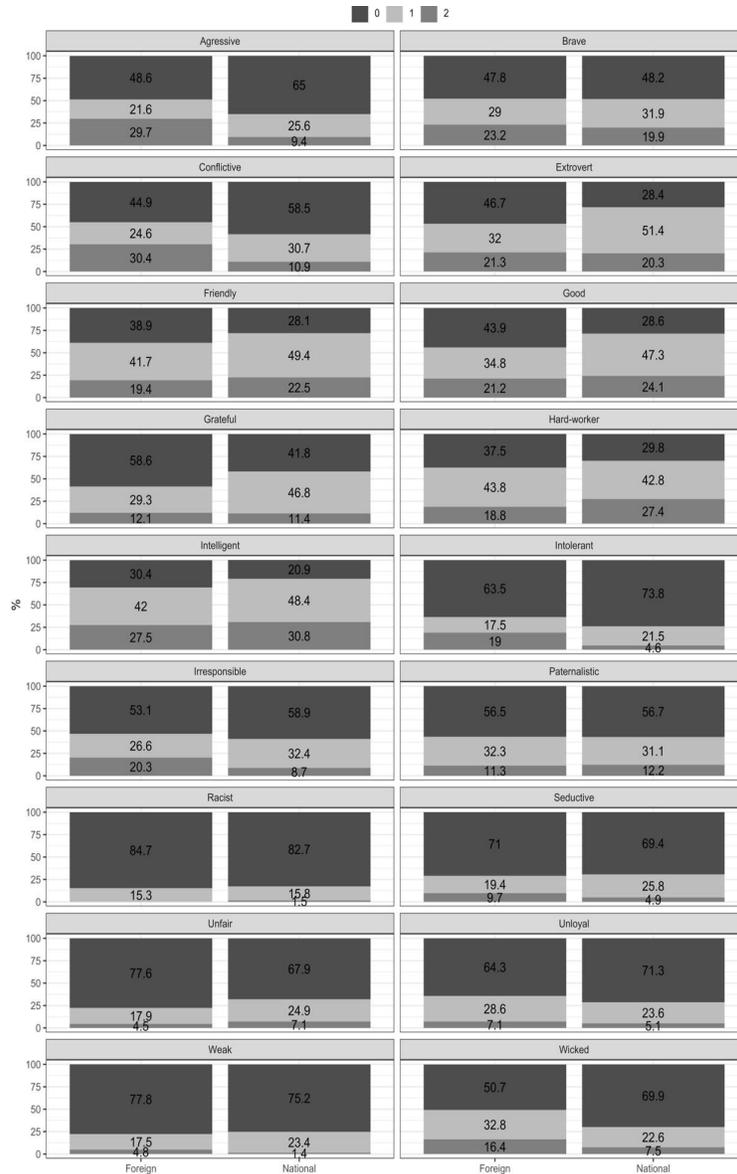


Figure 5. Personality traits.

Characterization

On a general level, there are other interesting aspects related to characterization that should be highlighted. National characters are portrayed as less religious than immigrants/foreigners ($\chi^2 = 4.79, p = .03$), because 7% of national characters are religious compared with 15% of immigrants/foreigners. Meanwhile, no statistically significant differences are observed with regard to the characters' marital status. As for whether the characters have monogamous relationships or not, no nonnational character has been classified as nonmonogamous, with 92.8% of people being observed to be monogamous. However, regarding this variable, there were very few cases where it was possible to identify whether or not characters are in monogamous relationships, with a large proportion of unknown values.

A crucial aspect of character analysis is the goals they pursue within their plotlines. The results in relation to this point are shown in Figure 6. Of all the aspects considered, statistically significant differences were observed only for violence, which was defined as a goal for 31% of immigrant/foreign characters compared with 16% of nationals ($p = .003$).

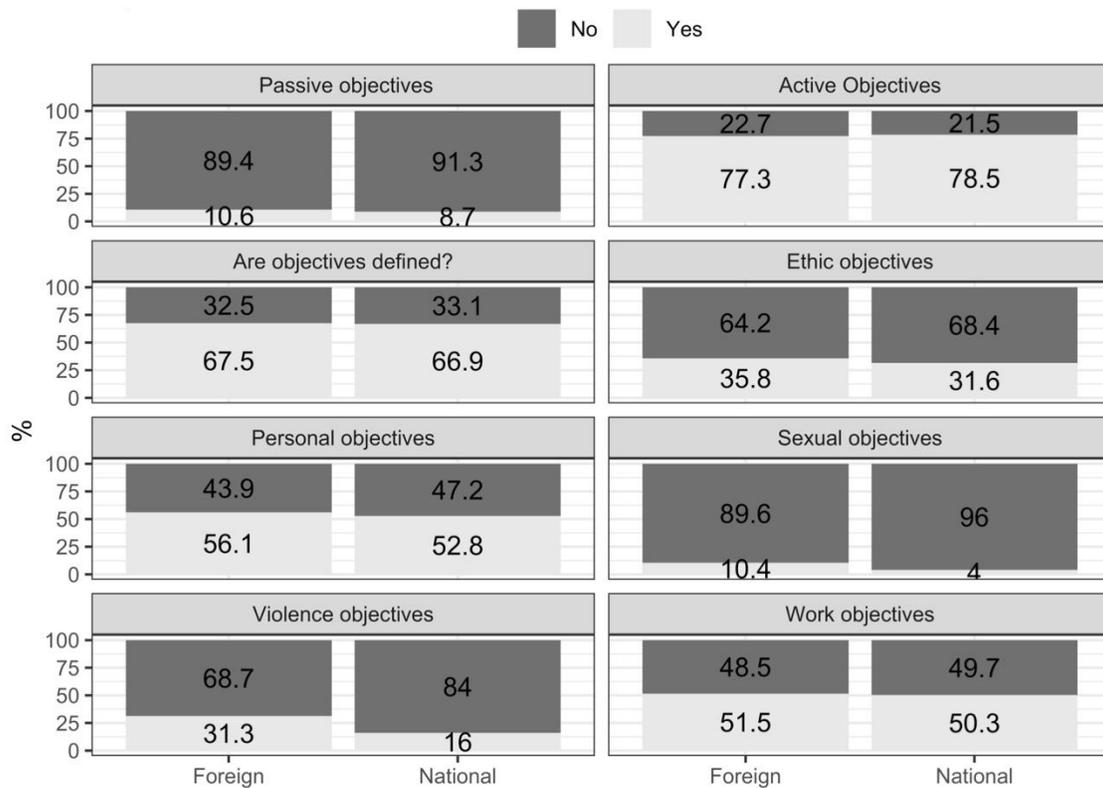


Figure 6. Characters' goals by nationality.

The inclusion of characters with functional diversity is still very minor. Of the 749 characters analyzed, only seven were coded with this condition, that is, 1%. Also note that all these characters are nationals.

Although no differences were found between nationals and immigrants/foreigners, 97.1% of the characters are not hypersexualized. Finally, we analyzed whether most relationships/interactions take place with men or with women, and we found statistically significant differences ($X^2 = 11.0, p = .001$). Analyzing these relationships by nationality, it is observed that although Spanish characters relate in a similar way to men (53%) as they do to women (47%), immigrant/foreign characters relate mostly with men (74%).

Conclusions and Discussion

By quantifying the data, we can obtain an approximate overview of how immigrants are represented in Spanish televisual fiction broadcast on platforms. The analysis reveals that in general terms, the proportion of nationals and immigrants is very similar to that of the Spanish demography—as observed previously in recent studies of general interest television, whereby such differences are found to be decreasing (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2019; Marcos-Ramos & Igartua, 2014; Marcos-Ramos et al., 2019)—although it has been confirmed that there are statistically significant differences in terms of nationality, origin, and ethnicity, with a huge tendency toward the inclusion of Caucasian characters, whether they are nationals or immigrants. We should also note the concentration of immigrant/foreign characters and those of Arab ethnicity in just a few productions, namely *La Unidad* (Aráujo et al., 2020), *Riot Police* (Peña et al., 2020), and *White Lines* (Pina, 2020). Therefore, characters' roles are not conditioned by whether they are an immigrant or a national but rather the color of their skin and their place of birth. Compared with other previous studies (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2019; Marcos-Ramos et al., 2019), a certain equality is observed in the level of university studies, because both native and immigrants/foreign characters present very similar percentages. However, there are differences in terms of socioeconomic status, whereby there are more wealthy people among nationals than among immigrants and/or foreigners.

Regarding the use of violence, statistically significant differences were detected for certain conducts, such as making hostile comments, intimidating behavior, minor attacks, and damage to property, which is somewhat in line with the goals pursued by immigrant/foreign characters, 31% of whose plotlines are related to violence. They are also victims of violence to a greater extent. Hence, violence continues to be highly associated with immigration in the storylines involving these characters, as has been observed by different studies (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2019; Marcos-Ramos et al., 2019, 2021). Likewise, the association between nationality and the consumption of alcohol and drugs also continues, with such practices being associated to a greater extent with immigrant/foreign characters, thus maintaining the stereotype that links nationality with criminal behavior and substance abuse (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2019; Marcos-Ramos et al., 2019). In line with this, immigrant/foreign characters are associated with more negative traits than nationals, thus reinforcing the stereotypes that are commonly created for them in Spanish fiction. It is also striking to note that there is not one immigrant/foreign character with functional diversity, which certifies that such characters are not only underrepresented (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2019; Marcos-Ramos et al., 2019) but are also created in a simple, schematic way, without including elements of intersectionality.

Finally, although there are too few values to be truly representative in this study, hypersexualized characters are once again featuring in Spanish fiction—in earlier studies (De-Caso-Bausela, González-de-Garay, & Marcos-Ramos, 2020; González-de-Garay et al., 2022), there were hardly any hypersexualized characters, although this is regardless of whether they are nationals or immigrants/foreigners.

In general, although progress has been made in terms of equal representation of national and immigrant/foreign characters, certain stereotypes, such as the use of violence, low socioeconomic status, alcohol and drug use, are still being employed when creating fictional characters for broadcasts on Spanish platforms. Far from being a trivial matter, it should be noted that these products “present identity models that are imitated and which tend to promote and further entrench stereotyped representations” (Galán, 2006, p. 236). Audiovisual fiction not only serves a leisure function but also reflects reality, projecting and disseminating frames of reference, images, and stereotypes that directly affect the way that people interpret social reality. It must not be forgotten that audiovisual fiction contributes to collective mindsets, so the appearance, to cite one example, of a character belonging to a migratory minority will not only help to make the audience aware of the existence of this group but also, and most importantly, create mental images of such people. Moreover, television series are today among the most widely consumed audiovisual products (e.g., Moreno & Rodríguez, 2016), so it is interesting to analyze how immigration is represented in them because, among other variables, the collective perception is created by what is transmitted via televised fiction, and it can shape the attitudes of an entire generation (Montero, 2005). For example, there is empirical evidence that approximately half of the young people who perceive immigration in television content do so by watching television series (Prats, De Régil, Lombarte, Higuera, & Santamaria, 2006).

Given the lack of frequent personal contact that most societies have with immigrants, the media has much responsibility in this regard. This is especially so in the case of television, which has become an indispensable element of everyday life, and one to which people attach extreme importance (Vázquez, 1999). It influences learning processes and the creation of the social imaginary (Pindado, 2010), and it shapes personalities through the processes of identification with media characters (Cohen, 2001). Several studies have demonstrated the importance of entertainment education (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Slater & Rouner, 2002), and when immigrant characters are portrayed in a positive, egalitarian manner, this can reduce prejudiced attitudes toward such people in real life (e.g., Igartua, 2007; Park, 2012; Poindexter, 2004).

Hence, and given that one of the functions that researchers serve with regard to the world in which they live is to help to make it better, the role of the media as creators of judgments and opinions needs to be analyzed because they may be becoming perpetrators of prejudiced and racist attitudes, which as a result might have implications for the adaptation of immigrants within societies, fostering attitudes of rejection or marginalization. The media must present a true and impartial image of immigration, naturalizing it and dropping stereotypes, prejudices, and perceptions that create or fuel existing conflicts. In view of this analysis, the representation of immigrant and/or foreign characters in fiction broadcast on Spanish platforms is far from promoting a realistic and positive image of this community.

Limitations

Despite its ambitious nature, analyzing 38 series and 749 characters—which can be considered a sufficiently broad and representative sample—this study has several limitations. First, it would be useful to analyze entire seasons of series rather than single episodes. A more complete analysis would reveal further changes in the representation of immigrant characters. It would also be advisable to complement the quantitative research with a qualitative study that looks in greater depth at these characters, the way they are portrayed, and their role in the narrative. The analysis could also be expanded by including the opinions of the creators and producers of televised fiction. Several studies have shown that scriptwriters tend to refer to news stories when creating storylines for their characters (Marcos, 2020), which undoubtedly amplifies the impact of the negative, stereotypical image that is usually presented in news reports about immigrants. Meanwhile, when defining the code book, a distinction was made between foreigners and immigrants. For this study, we opted for a single category for foreigners and immigrants for greater statistical power. It is also important to note that being a foreigner or immigrant is defined in reference to the place where the series takes place. That is to say, even though a series is produced in Spain, if it is set in a foreign country, then Spanish characters themselves could be deemed immigrants.

In the future, it would be useful to conduct research that takes these aspects into account and which also analyzes how these contents are perceived by the audience and whether they can be included among the many factors that explain the rise of racism and xenophobia in Spain. This is especially worrying among Spanish adolescents, for one in four is a confirmed racist, according to a survey of 1,200 young people conducted by the Reina Sofia Center (Andújar, Sánchez, Pradillo, & Sabín, 2022). According to 60.4% of the young people surveyed, the image of immigration in certain media has influenced the increase in the spread of racist discourse in Spain.

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Appendix

Table A1. Intercoder Reliability for all Study Variables.

Variable	α	% agreement	Kappa	PABAK
Type of role	.84	.94	.88	.88
Historical series	—	—		
Platform	—	—		
Age group	.38	.78	.58	—
Educational level	.91	.93	.81	.86
Socioeconomic status	.69	.88	.67	.78
Hypersexualization	.39	.99	.66	.98
Main interaction	.86	.94	.86	.87
Violence				
Comments	.87	.97	.87	.93
Intimidation	.85	.96	.85	.96
Major attack	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Minor attack	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Property damage	.66	.98	.65	0.97
Victim of violence				
Comments	.43	.86	.44	.72
Intimidation	.77	.95	.77	.95
Major attack	.65	.97	.65	.93
Minor attack	.96	.99	.96	.98
Property damage	.49	.98	.50	.97
Health behaviors				
Alcohol	.93	.98	.93	.97
Drugs	.66	.99	.66	.98
Eating disorder	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Illegal drugs	.80	.99	.66	.98
Tobacco	.74	.96	.74	.92
Conversation topic				
Education	.85	.96	.85	.92
Empowerment	.60			
Environment	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Family	.91	.96	.91	.92
Friendship	.87	.95	.87	.90
Health	.91	.97	.91	.95
Immigration	.88	.97	.88	.95
Love	.84	.96	.86	.92
Money	.76	.96	.76	.91

Variable	α	% agreement	Kappa	PABAK
Politics	.64	.95	.64	.91
Racism	1.00	.97	1.00	1.00
Sex	.73	.92	.73	.84
Sexism	.43	.94	.44	.88
Sport	1.00	.98	1.00	1.00
Violence	.80	.92	.80	.84
Work	.85	.93	.85	.87

Note. α = Krippendorff's alpha, Kappa = Cohen's kappa, PABAK = prevalence-adjusted and bias-adjusted kappa.