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## Identification with lesbian characters: Reception processes of heterosexual and homosexual audiences from a mixed method approach

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** This research explores the identification of homosexual and heterosexual men and women receivers with lesbian protagonists of audiovisual fictions, in Spain. **Methodology:** The study uses a mixed method, consisting of two independent investigations whose results are interpreted together: a quantitative investigation determines the magnitudes of the effects, and a qualitative one explains the reasons for them. **Results:** The results show that the sex of the receivers does not affect the magnitudes of identification, but the reasons for identification. However, results show that the sexual orientation of the receiver does affect identification. Finally, they show that the reactions of heterosexual men are significantly more indifferent to lesbian characters and the stories set in lesbian communities. Furthermore, the investigation finds that the principal weight on identification derives from the affective empathy with characters. **Discussion and Conclusions:** The application of a mixed methodology provides depth. The use of scales in the identification of quantitative data collection requires the participant to take a position within the range of values available, but interviews of a qualitative method can reveal the extent of meanings attached to these values. As expected (H1), the content of fiction affects lesbian identification characters. The morally virtuous protagonist induces greater identification, and it is produced by similar reasons among populations of different sex or sexual orientation. In addition, there are reasons to refute the gender of the receiver's affected identification with lesbian characters (H2). It also confirms that there are differences in the identification based on the general sexual orientation (H3). These differences, however, do not happen only in the general magnitudes, but in the motivations for identification. The personal resonance evoked by stories and the similarity of the stories with their own experiences, are the two important factors for homosexuals' identification. In addition, we find that homosexuals and

heterosexuals process these narratives in differently ways. The responses of male heterosexuals are always distant and indifferent to those of heterosexual women or gay men and women.

## Keywords

identification with characters; mixed method approach, representation; lesbian characters; heterosexual and homosexual audiences; reception.

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Traslation by **Luke Berte**

## 1. Introduction

This research aims to advance the understanding of the processes of reception of fiction set in lesbian communities. Although gay characters have not had much visibility on the screens (Capsuto, 2000; Gross, 2002; Harrington, 2003; Tropiano, 2002), their presence has grown since the early nineties (Avila- Saavedra, 2009). In fact, at present, in some cases driven by the success of the American TV series *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009), the commercial production of different genres and different media has long since began which portrays lesbians and their lives as the main theme. Some examples are, the show *The Real L Word* (Showtime Networks, 2010-2012) and the web series *Once you leave* (for Now Productions, 2012), *Venice, the series* (Open Book Productions, 2009-2012) and *Words with girls* (Nichols and Dimes Entertainment & HeavenHell Entertainment, 2012). Although data about Spain or Europe is unknown, in the United States, during the 2012-2013 TV season, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender characters accounted for 4.4% of all the regular characters in the main series of the major television networks in the country (ABC, CBS, The CW, FOX and NBC). This percentage was 1.5 % higher than in the 2010-2011 season (3.9%) (GLAAD - Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2014).

The representations of lesbians are less than those of gays and their characterizations have generally followed a stereotyped representation model, designed homosexuality from heterosexuality (Capsuto, 2000; Collis, 1994; Dow, 2001 Epstein & Steinberg, 1997; Hantzis & Lehr, 1994; Hubert, 1999; Moritz, 1994; Moscovitz, 2010, 1996; Thynne, 2000), or models of stereotypical femininity of women as objects of desire (McRobbie, 2004). In fact, the representations of lesbians seem to be constructed to appeal to heterosexual audiences, rather than to challenge heteronormative society values (Battles & Hilton-Murrow, 2002; Dow, 2001). It is a common observation in investigations that the representation of lesbians is working in order to please both the gay and heterosexual audience. Therefore reinforcing traditional values such as family, monogamy and stability. In addition, the particularly erotic connotations of homosexuality are generally removed (Moore, 2007; Sender, 2004). Research also notes that lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender audiences are not

familiar with openly giving their opinion on the satisfaction of the representation of gay characters in the media (Freymiller, 2010). However, the current characterization of lesbians has left behind the stereotypical masculine woman, butch, villain or comic character that annoys lesbians and with which many of them do not identify (Dow, 2001; Streitmatter, 2009).

Reception studies on gay characters, particularly lesbians, are not scarce. In general, reports state that the increasing visibility of gays of both genders in the media does not necessarily produce greater social recognition or tolerance (Dow, 2001). Furthermore, the representations available to help gays and lesbians understand their own sexuality (Meyer, 2003), some homosexual audiences do not like and consider them to be stereotyped (McKee, 2000). Besides, viewers of any gender assess positively the attitudes of homosexuals when their portrayal is positive on the screen (Bonds-Raacke, Cady, Schlegel, Harris & Firebaugh, 2007). However, it is necessary for studies to analyze the impact of the representation of homosexuals - male and female - in the psychological process of reception entertainment, and analyze the specific factors while knowing they are predictors of enjoyment. Not only in gay audiences, but in all audiences.

This study seeks to help fill this knowledge gap and observe the phenomenon of identification with characters in fictional narrative consumption with lesbians as protagonists. Specifically, we asked whether there were differences in the identification, and the factors that define these differences according to the sex of the receivers (male and female), their general sexual orientation (gay and straight), and then gather their sexual orientations (homosexual women, heterosexual women, homosexual men and heterosexual men). The broad purpose is to abound on the study of the communication link that is established between the gay characters, particularly lesbians, and receivers of fictions.

The study is opportune not only because of the preeminence of identification with the characters in the psychological effects of fiction, especially in the enjoyment and appreciation of the audiovisual, but because of its impact on processes of narrative persuasion or changing attitude (Igartua, 2007). Furthermore, this study is relevant for the growth of these characters in audiovisual narratives. In Spain, without going any further, although also in other European countries, some TV shows regularly incorporate characters who characterized this form of sexual expression. Moreover, the movie *La vie d' Adèle* (directed by Abdellatif Kechique) was recently screened in commercial cinema and with positive audience feedback. The film which premiered at international film festivals, addresses specifically, emotional relationships between women.

However, apart from contributing to the scientific knowledge of the responses of audiences to new entertainment offerings, this research is also of interest to professionals in the audiovisual industries. Mainly because it provides useful information on how to create more effective narratives and characters. It particularly takes into account the current fragmentation of audiences.

## 1.1. The identification with characters

Identification is a key factor for understanding the entertainment media and its effects (Cohen, 2006). Its definition is based on the affinity of receivers with the characters, the understanding of the empathic feelings they experience, and motivations or the challenges of characters (Cohen, 2006). Because of this affinity, the receiver can remain absorbed in the audiovisual text, feel what happens to the character, and forget himself in order to merge with the viewing experience (Cohen, 2001).

Previous studies have determined that identification with the characters, besides the enjoyment (Soto-Sanfiel, Aymerich-Franch & Ribes, 2010), affects the message processing in the same way. It

can produce more intense emotional reactions (Tamborini, Stiff & Heidel, 1990), increased attention and memory (Maccoby & Wilson, 1957), cause more intent to adopt the point of views of the character (Rubin & Step, 2000) and determine the impact of the message itself (Basil, 1996).

Previous studies have shown that the characteristics of the audiences affect identification. For example, an influential factor is the similarity with the character (Cohen, 2006). It will also affect the likeness of the receiver with the character in sex, age, social class or motivations (Maccoby & Wilson, 1987), attitudes, feelings or life history (Cohen & Perse, 2003) and demographic characteristics (Cohen, 1997). There is evidence that certain psychological receivers, and their relationships with friends (Kanazawa, 2002), self-esteem or shyness (Turner, 1996), emotional maturity (Giles & Maltby, 2004) and personality (Soto-Sanfiel, Aymerich-Franch & Romero, 2013) impact their parasocial relationships with the characters. In addition, there is evidence on the relationship between the gender of receivers and the genre of characters (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Feilitzen & Linne, 1975), and the psychological characteristics of the character (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991) influences the identification. Furthermore, there is evidence that cultural proximity to the character can also be an influential factor (Soto-Sanfiel & Igartua, 2013).

It is generally accepted that in the process of identification, receivers value the characters' behaviors based on their own experiences, therefore, maintaining a positive disposition towards characters who resemble them or remind them of positive life experiences, and negative dispositions toward those who do not resemble themselves or remind them of previously bad experiences (Zilman, 1991; Raney, 2003, 2004). Also, and based on the theories of affected disposition, it recognizes that one of the most influential factors in the relationship established between receivers and characters of the narrative, is enjoyment and the morality of the character (Raney, 2004). The receivers respond more favorably, and develop stronger empathy with characters who behave in a morally acceptable way. This is because audiences tend to continuously judge and assess the behaviors and attitudes of the characters (Raney, 2006) as they watch the show. Finally, no studies examine the role of identification according to relationships between sexual orientation of the characters and the receivers.

**Dimensions of the identification.** To define the identification with the characters, Igartua & Páez (1998) proposed the *EDI scale* which consists of 17 items and has been applied and refined by subsequent work (Igartua & Muñiz, 2008; Igartua, 2010, 2012, Soto-Sanfiel *et al.*, 2010). Igartua & Páez (1998) characterized identification as a multidimensional concept related to a number of psychological processes: 1. *cognitive empathy*, defined as the ability to "understand or take the place of the protagonists" (related to the ability to take the point of view of the character and follow the story from their perspective) 2. *emotional empathy*, defined as the ability to "feel what the characters feel, vicariously involved emotionally or able to worry about their problems" (related to the possibility of experiencing similar to the emotions of the characters) 3. *the ability to fantasize or imagine*, defined as the subject's ability to "anticipate the situations that the protagonists of the fictional stories expose and infer what the consequences of actions may become". 4. *become the protagonist*, defined as the "feeling of being outside oneself as if one of the protagonists, while watching" (1998, pp. 424).

Later, Soto-Sanfiel *et al.* (2010) validated the EDI scale and concluded that the first factor, rather than cognitive empathy, should be called 'feeling to become the character' (merger). The authors considered that all together, the factors expressed the ideas of fusion, absorption and uniqueness of the receiver with the character. Specifically, the structures that were warranted during exposure, the

users adopt parts of the identity of the character and imagines that they are the characters (Klimmt, Hefner & Vorderer, 2009, Moyer-Guse, 2008).

Soto-Sanfiel and her colleagues also found that it is more appropriate to call cognitive-emotional empathy the second factor's Igartua & Páez (cognitive empathy) because the evaluation of cognitions and emotions of the characters is coexisting and symbiotic. Finally, we also find that the scale consists of a fourth independent factor: I have been able to anticipate what was going to happen to the characters, consistent with what Igartua & Páez, called the ability to fantasize or imagine. A recently published study by Igartua (2012) and in harmony with Soto-Sanfiel *et al.* (2010) confirmed that identification is a second-order factor formed by a confluence of merging empathy.

## 2. Method: A hybrid approach integrated

Given the shortage of reception studies by different audiences about gay characters, the sensitivity of the issue and the possibility that prejudices play an important role in assessing the effects of narrative and characters, in this investigation we use a mixed method consisting of a quantitative and a qualitative study. Although there is abundant literature on the epistemological difference between the two approaches and much of it proclaiming their incompatibility (Hodgkin, 2008), there is a growing number of researchers who advocate the advantages of their combined use (Cresswell, 2003; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

In this investigation, two complementary approaches are used and concurrently. Its design is based on the idea that the quantitative study reveals general trends and the qualitative explains the observations (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989). Then the second fundamental purpose is to develop, highlight, illustrate and clarify the results of the first (Hodgkin, 2008). Following a model of interdependent mixed methods (Yin, 2006), and pursuing the common goal of dissecting the phenomenon of the identification with characters of lesbians to understand it deeply –in a superior way that is provided by each method separately– (Wooley, 2009), participants of both studies are asked about the same aspects.

In addition, the research design takes into account the recommendations on the desirability of integrating the preliminary results of each method (Bryman, 2007). Consequently, although both scans are performed in parallel, and preliminary analyzes are produced separately (following technical characteristics of each method), results are mixed and follow the pattern: quantitative proceeds the qualitative and qualitative explains the quantitative.

### 2.1. Common stimuli

Consistent with the foregoing, the narrative stimuli of both studies were the same, using images and plots of the series, *The L Word*, which aired for six seasons in the USA (2004-2009, Showtime, 70 episodes), and one in Spain (2007, Canal +, 12 episodes) . *The L Word* was one of the first narrative representations with leading lesbian figures. Homosexual women of *The L Word* have complex and exciting lives, are upper middle class and are sexually liberated. Its impact and novelty, in fact, has motivated researcher's reflections of different sensitivities (Campanello, 2007; Farr & Degroult, 2008; Herman, 2005; Moore, 2007; Moore, 2009; Wolfe, 2009).

The series was chosen because it offered up to 70 chapters, it was dubbed in Spanish, it used appropriate stimuli, it offered a variety of homosexual female characters (and some heterosexual, although all of the secondary were mostly secondary). The main characters are mostly lesbians that



play recognised professionals with high social status' (deans, television producers, journalists, tennis players, stylists, writers, teachers). It could be considered the ideal mirror to observe perceptions of lesbians because in all the chapters, whole situations around these women are developed.

Finally, it was decided to choose two stories, having obtained a varying range of possible answers to the narrative, it was then possible to "neutralize" the effect of specific content in the opinions and draw general, and not subsidiary or attributable findings to the particular case. Previous research confirms that emotional responses such as enjoyment, pleasure and gratification, are different depending on the content of the narrative (Soto-Sanfiel, Aymerich-Franch & Ribes, 2009).

The scenes that were part of the two stories that were used for this research were happening throughout various chapters of the six seasons of the series. The principal purpose of selecting the chosen stories and scenes was conducive to obtaining coherent narratives with a beginning, middle and end, and maintaining dramatic tension, while, presenting a touchy subject in making recommendations and intense emotional reactions. Seven stories were built about fifteen minutes after full viewing of the chapters.

Then we selected which stories would form part of the definitive corpus with the help of outside judges. The selections also considered stories that had happy endings and others that did not. The preceding literature acknowledges the influence of the content (including the outcome) in the enjoyment of the audience (Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld, 2004). Moreover, a claim by homosexual groups is that films which address gay issues often have sad endings (the homosexual dies, is murdered, commits suicide or is separated because of social requirements) (Palencia, 2011). Finally, there are indications that some lesbians like the happy ending of these stories (Ibiti, 2013).

The content of the first story (14:58 min), which is called *Soldier*, is about Tasha. She is Captain of the U.S. army, accused of homosexual conduct and could be expelled. Captain Beach, assigned to defend her, read the charges. Tasha denies promoting another military woman - based on affected interest and states that it was because of her merits. Tasha complains to Beach that Army men came to her girlfriend, Alice's home to interrogate her. Beach is convinced that Tasha should not be expelled and prepares an effective defense. The trial begins. The prosecution lawyer is a colonel who also appears to be a lesbian. She interrogates Alice, who suggests that the Colonel could also be homosexual. The colonel then fears for her reputation, and in the interval of judgment, she proposes a deal to Alice which will save Tasha. However, Tasha decides to reveal the truth (she loves Alice and is a lesbian). Tasha is expelled from the army. She feels justified because she has been true to herself, her values and her love.

Tasha has qualities of the classic hero (always male, but here, exceptionally feminine) (Mulvey, 1975). The character represents the virtues of honor, love, courage, sincerity and consistency (Campbell, 1949). The ending is bittersweet for the loss of work, but it can be considered happy because it is in the name of love and honesty. Although the main conflict seems intimate and personal, because of its context, it has a social and historical perspective.

The contents of the other story, *Seduction* (14:39 min), is about Jenny. She arrives to live with her boyfriend, Tim, moves to a new neighborhood and meets their lesbian neighbors. The curiosity and doubts about their own sexual orientation seize her after amorous spy games with the neighbors. Jenny tells her boyfriend what she has seen, and this renews a mutual passion. Jenny goes to a party where most of the people in attendance are lesbians. One of the guests, Marina, seduces her. Meanwhile, Tim, oblivious to this new situation, proposes marriage to Jenny. Tim prepares to travel

when realizing that he forgot something. He returns home, to discover Jenny is having sex with Marina. Marina and Tim leave while Jenny stay's alone crying.

*Seduction* revolves around an ambivalent and complex protagonist because of her lights and shadows. Jenny's character is not as clearly virtuous as Tasha, from *Soldier*. The main conflict of the story is intimate and personal.

### **3. First study: quantitative**

#### **3.1. Hypothesis**

Previous evidence suggests and formulates the following hypotheses:

H1: There will be differences in the identification based on the history. Following Raney (2004), it is expected that a history with a clearer and morally virtuous protagonist produces more identification than that of the protagonist with light and shadow.

H2: There will be differences in identification according to gender of the receiver (male vs female). Following mainly to Eyal & Rubin (2003) and Maccoby & Wilson (1987), women are expected to manifest greater identification than men do.

H3: There will be differences in identification according to the sexual orientation of the receiver (heterosexual vs. homosexual). The reasons could be the similarities of the characters with the receiver (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Perse, 2003), or by personal resonance (Igartua & Muñiz, 2008). Homosexuals will manifest greater identification than heterosexuals will.

In addition, according to the evidence of the influence of the similarity of the receiver with the character in different factors (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Perse, 2003; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Feilitzen & Linne, 1975; Kanazawa, 2002; Maccoby & Wilson, 1987), it is believed that:

H4: There will be differences in the identification (and dimensions) according to sexual orientation expressed by the receiver. Lesbian women will manifest greater identification than homosexual men, heterosexual women and heterosexual men. Consistently,

H4a: There will be differences in emotional empathy dimensions.

H4b: There will be differences in cognitive empathy dimensions.

H4c: There will be differences in the ability to fantasize.

#### **3.2. Participants**

314 subjects (195 women and 119 men) of different sexual orientation (heterosexual and homosexual) and of different age were randomized to one of two films. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants by gender, age and sexual orientation. All participants underwent the experience freely and voluntarily. The selection criteria werethat the participant lived in Spain and that they were more than 18-years-old.

The subjects were informed that they would participate in a study on audiovisual reception. The call for participation was made through social networks. To reach women and gay men we requested the support of some associations: the State Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals and Bisexuals

(FELGTB) of Spain, the *Casal Lamba* and *Coordinadora Gai-Lesbiana de Barcelona* who helped with recruitment by emailing potential participants.

**Table n. 1**  
**Sample distribution by sexual orientation manifests (SOM), sex and age**

				Age of participant						
				Up to 18	19-29	30-40	41-51	52-62	Over 63	Total
SOM	W	Ht	N	1	67	43	37	15	3	166
			% SOM	.6	40.4	25.9	22.3	9	1.8	-
			% Age	16.7	62.6	56.6	51.4	36.6	25	52.9
		% Total	.3	21.3	13.7	11.8	4.8	1	52.9	
		Hm	N	3	11	4	11	0	0	29
			% SOM	10.3	37.9	13.8	37.9	0	0	-
	% Age		50	10.3	5.3	15.3	0	0	9.2	
	M	Ht	N	1	20	20	13	16	6	76
			% SOM	1.3	26.3	26.3	17.1	21.1	7.9	-
			% Age	16.7	18.7	26.3	18.1	39	50	24.2
		% Total	.3	6.4	6.4	4.1	5.1	1.9	24.2	
		Hm	N	1	9	9	11	10	3	43
% SOM			2.3	20.9	20.9	25.6	23.3	7	-	
% Age	16.7		8.4	11.8	15.3	24.4	25	13.7		
Total			N	6	107	76	72	41	12	314
			% SOM	1.9	34.1	24.2	22.9	13.1	3.8	-
			% Age	-	.	-	-	-	1	-
			% Total	1.9	34.1	24.2	22.9	13.1	3.8	-

Legend: SOM= sexual orientation manifest, W= woman, M= man, Ht= heterosexual, Hm= homosexual, N= number of cases, %SOM= percentage within SOM, %Age = percentage within age, %Total= percentage in total.

### 3.3. Procedure

A quasi-experimental research was conducted using a factorial design 2 x 2 x 2. The independent variables were the movie (*Soldier* vs. *Seduction*), gender (women vs. men) and sexual orientation (heterosexual vs. Homosexuals).

Two online applications were created which contained: the presentation of the experience along with the instructions, one of the films and a (post-test) questionnaire which was to be completed by the end of the viewing. The films were exactly the same as those envisioned in the qualitative study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two applications: 214 to *Soldier* and 100 to *Seduction*. The smaller number of participants in the second film was due to the difficulty of finding more homosexual participants before the deadlines for data collection.

In the invitation to participate in the experiment, we requested that participants used their laptops via internet. It was also requested that before beginning the experience they would ensure they were completely alone. This is because the reception needed to be individual, viewing conditions needed to be comfortable, and they were also asked to turn off any other devices that would distract their attention. Moreover, they were expressly warned that the task must be performed continuously (the



viewing and questionnaire). It was also clarified that the overall experience would last for 25 minutes.

The applications were linked to an online Excel database which automatically collected the responses of participants. Once the data was collected the file was converted to SPSS for statistical calculations.

### 3.4. Materials

**Dependent variables.** The identification with the characters was measured by a shortened version (of 6 items) of the EDI scale Igartua & Páez (1998) and took into account the contribution to the scale of Soto-Sanfiel, Aymerich & Ribes (2010). The items included were measured with Likert scales of 5 degrees (1 = strongly disagree / 5 = strongly agree): "I have identified with (name of character), the main character", "I liked how the main character behaves", "I think the main character had reason to act the way he/she did", "As I saw the story, I could feel the emotions that the main character felt", "While experiencing the story, I could put myself into the skin of the main character" and "As I experienced the story, I thought about the future of the main character".

The same set of items was applied with factor analysis with *Varimax rotation* and extraction methods of principal components and this confirmed the existence of a structure formed by a single factor that accounted for 56.27 % of the variance. The *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin* ( $KMO = .790$ ) index and *Bartlett's test of sphericity* ( $\chi^2 = 841.36$ ) showed that the structure was strong ( $p < 0.001$ ). Reliability analysis confirmed that it was reliable ( $\alpha = .836$ ,  $M = 21.47$ ,  $SD = 5.19$ ). Variables were formed, calling the overall identification with characters, with the sum of the scores of each of the items.

**Emotional and cognitive empathy.** The factor analysis showed that the measurement Identification of this study consisted of a single construct containing six items. For better observing in detail the emotional and cognitive empathy, each item that referred artificially, was isolated. An emotional empathy index formed by the sum of the two items related to the identification scale was created: "I felt the emotions of the protagonist" and "I could put myself in the shoes of the protagonist" ( $\alpha = .852$ ,  $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). An index of cognitive empathy is also the sum of what was created: "I liked the way the protagonist behaved" and "The protagonist had reason to behave as he/she did" ( $\alpha = .868$ ,  $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ).

**Intensity of emotions.** Emotions felt when watching the movie, were measured through a scale used in previous research (Igartua & Páez, 1998; Soto-Sanfiel *et al.*, 2011) constructed from differential emotions Izard's scale. It consisted of a list of 12 emotions that followed the statement: While watching the story, I felt the following emotions (1 = I have not felt that emotion / 5 = I felt that emotion very strongly): "Interest or curiosity", "Joy", "Embarrassment or shame", "Repugnance or disgust", "Anguish", "Fear", "Contempt", "Anger", "Sadness", "Surprise", "Guilt" and "sexual arousal". An index of overall intensity of emotions consisting of the sum of the scores for each emotion was created.

**Enjoy.** A single item measured it: "I have enjoyed the story" (1 = strongly disagree / 5 = Strongly Agree).

**Variables control.** All these variables were answered from selection options in the questionnaire: "Sex" (woman/man) and "General Sexual orientation" (homosexual or heterosexual). Consisting then was a variable called "manifest sexual orientation", the result of the relationship between sex and

sexual orientation overall, in categories: heterosexual women, homosexual women, heterosexual men and homosexual men.

## 4. Second study: qualitative

The qualitative study aims to answer the following research question:

RQ1: What are the characteristics and differences, in the identification with the characters of lesbians according to receivers, depending on gender (male and female) and sexual orientation (gay and straight) and the story told?

### 4.1. Sample

It consisted of four groups of participants formed by 20 heterosexual women ( $A = 34.93$  years /  $Rg = 24-68$ ), 20 lesbians ( $A = 34.50$  years /  $Rg = 26-52$ ), 20 heterosexual men ( $A = 36.64$  years /  $Rg = 21-63$ ) and 20 gay men ( $A = 35.40$  years /  $Rg = 26-52$ ). Of these, and for the present work, 16 people in each group were chosen at random, because with around that number, the responses and reflections that emerged were saturated and meant that new themes appeared.

The criteria used to form the sample were that all participants should be homosexual or heterosexual, living in Spain, able to understand the Spanish Castilian Peninsular dialect (language films and interviews), able to speak perfect Castilian or Catalan, and be over 18 years old (one movie contained explicit sex scenes).

### 4.2. Empirical tests

The researchers went to the homes of the participants where the tests were performed. They took with them a DVD containing both films. This choice of design was adopted because of the difficulty of moving the great amount of subjects to a laboratory. In taking this decision, it was also considered that testing would have some sort of ecological validity because it would occur in the participant's usual place of narrative reception.

Once at the participant's house, the researchers assured them, that the stories could be watched by the participant individually, comfortably, without interruption, in one place, and with the usual consumption set of the participant movie reception. At the beginning of the meeting, the researcher asked the participant about his/her sexual orientation to confirm his/her suitability for the sample. Then, the researcher explained to the subjects the conditions of empirical experience in which they would participate.

When the film was prepared at the beginning, the researcher left the house so the participant saw the first movie alone. After viewing it, the participant called the researcher, who then interviewed the participant about the story. After completing this data collection, they both proceeded in the same manner with the second story. Half of each group of participants saw *Seduction* first, and secondly *Soldier*. The other half did the opposite.

#### 4.2.1. Data collection

Open and semi-structured interviews were performed using a questionnaire guide. The global identification with the character was explored through the following questions: "What did you think

of the characters?", "Have you identified with any of them? (To which one and Why?)", and "What is your opinion about each character?"

Then researchers asked about the protagonist of the story to explore the cognitive empathy, the emotional empathy, and the ability to fantasize or anticipate what happens to the character. The researchers asked the next questions: "Do you understand the reasons for the protagonist to act as he has acted?", "Why?", "While you saw the story could you feel the emotion of the protagonist?", "Did you feel on her skin? ", "What emotions did you feel?", and "Did you think or imagine what might happen in the future of the protagonist?"

The interviews lasted about 60 minutes. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim later.

### 4.3. Analysis of results

A thematic analysis was performed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). The responses were identified in the transcripts of the interviews. They were ordered according to the categories defined by the observed variables. Later, the context units were identified: sentences, paragraphs, words or blocks of text (Bravo 1999; Krippendorff, 1990). From the context units, emerging themes were also identified. Then, the themes (and their associated responses) were compared by looking for similarities and differences according to the sex of the participants and their sexual orientation (homosexual and heterosexual). The process was repeated for each narrative.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Identification with the characters according to the story

The analysis shows differences in the overall identification with the characters depending on the story [ $F=4.27$ ,  $p=.039$ ,  $t(169, 07)=-11.08$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. *Soldier* promotes greater identification ( $M=3.90$ ,  $SD=.683$ ,  $n=214$ ) than *Seduction* ( $M=2.88$ ,  $SD=.799$ ,  $n=100$ ).

The qualitative study also reveals the existence of differences. Although participants spontaneously do not appear to identify with any of the protagonists, a deeper inquiry contradicts this. The protagonist of *Seduction* (Jenny) inspires a greater deal of empathy and identification between participants than the protagonist of *Soldier* (Tasha). The reasons for that were also more common (see Table 2).

Table n. 2. Global Identification in all groups of participants according to the story				
Sex	Female		Male	
Sexual orientation	Hetero	Homo	Hetero	Homo
	<b>Story Seduction</b>			
	Majority does not identify with any character: There is no similarity, neither cultural, nor by sexual orientation.	Majority does not identify with any character: There is no personal resonance, or similarity, nor liking of the	Majority does not identify with any character: There is no similarity, neither by sex, nor by sexual orientation.	Majority does not identify with any character: There is no similarity, either by sex or by personal resonance. Those who identify:

<b>Global identification</b>		characters.		mainly because similarity with characters in sexual orientation. Others because the story elicits personal resonance (the order is reversed in lesbians).
	<b>Story <i>Sold ado</i></b>			
	There is not because lack of personal resonance with the story.	There is not because lack of cultural and personal resonance. They do not like militarism.	Majority does not identify because the lack of similarity and absence of personal or cultural resonance.	More than half does not identify because there is not personal resonance, or cultural similarity with the characters or the story. A residual proportion identifies with the situation. These individuals appreciate the representation of homosexuality. Less than half identifies because of the similarity with the character or the situation (in hiding his private life or act as the protagonist), the shared homosexual condition, the injustice represented, the personal resonance and the perceived realism of the story.

### 5.2. Identification with the protagonists according to the sex of the participant

There are no statistical differences in identification according to the sex of the receiver. Male and female participants identify with lesbian characters in similar proportions. The qualitative study also confirms that while sex does not influence by itself, it does in conjunction with sexual orientation. There are differences in the reasons why heterosexuals and homosexuals of both sexes identify with the characters (see Tables 2 to 6). More than sex, sexual orientation is relevant.

<b>Table n. 3. What character participants identify with (and why) according to the story</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Female</b>		<b>Male</b>	
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>Hetero</b>	<b>Homo</b>	<b>Hetero</b>	<b>Homo</b>
	<b>Story <i>Seduction</i></b>			



<p><b>What characters do participants identify with? Why?</b></p>	<p>Some identify with Marina (seductive) because of her attractive or interesting personality. Also, because she knows what she wants and is determined. Some identify with Tim (cheated boyfriend) because they feel empathy for his sincere love. There are some that identify for personal resonance (having been deceived in their private life) and because of their own suffering personality ("We, as women, are more accustomed to suffer"). A residual part identifies with Jenny (protagonist), because of sexual personal resonance ('I have been attracted to a woman').</p>	<p>Some identify with Jenny (protagonist), because of personal resonance. Some with Marina (seductive), because of perceived similarities (both like to seduce and are bold). Some with Tim (cheated boyfriend) because of the similarity with his personality. Also, because they like the character design. Residually (1 participant) with the three characters, because memories of different times of his life.</p>	<p>Some identify with Tim (cheated boyfriend) because of a similar sex ("although it seems silly"). Some with Marina because of her provocative and seductive attitude. A minority identifies with Jenny because she looks for new experiences.</p>	<p>Most identify with Jenny (protagonist) because she is curious and does different things. A minority identifies with Tim (cheated boyfriend) because of personal resonance (they were also betrayed in their personal lives). A minority identifies with Marina (seductive) because she is bad, seductive, and gorgeous (these participants think they have those characteristics in common with the character).</p>
	<b>Story Soldier</b>			
<p>Most with Tasha (protagonist) because they admire her courage and consistency. Also, because of personal resonance: they have experimented with injustice in their lives too. A minority with Alice (the girlfriend of the protagonist) because of her loyalty. A residual part identifies with the lawyer because it evolves through the</p>	<p>Most with Alice (girlfriend of the protagonist) because she is not military. A minority with Tasha (protagonist) because of the perceived similarity in fighting for and defending their sexual orientation. Also, because they share common moral values, personal resonance and empathy with the character.</p>	<p>A third part identifies with the lawyer because it evolves and because of the perceived similarity (in gender and sexual orientation). A minority identifies with Alice (girlfriend) or Tasha (protagonist) because they prioritize their love life above all. A minority feels empathy with Tasha (star) for her consistency, courage and for being victim of an injustice. A residual proportion</p>	<p>Most identify with Tasha (protagonist) because she fights for her rights, she values her love relationship and she is fair. Most identify with Alice (girlfriend) because of a perceived similarity with her or because she is not military. Residual (1) identifies with</p>	

	story.		(1) made a homophobic comment: "if she wasn't a lesbian, she'd be perfect".	the Colonel because of liking bad people.
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### 5.3. Identification with the protagonists according to the general sexual orientation of participants

There are statistical differences [ $F= 4.27, p =.917, t (312)= -3.27, p< .001$ ]. Homosexuals show a greater identification ( $M = 3.86, DS =.834, n= 72$ ) than heterosexuals ( $M = 3.49, DS =.857, n = 242$ ). The qualitative study obtains evidence in the same direction: the identification with characters of homosexuals is greater than that of heterosexuals. The reasons for the identification among homosexuals are generally linked to two factors: the personal resonance evoked by the stories, and the perceived similarity of the situations represented in the stories with the participants' own life experiences.

By exploring the responses in detail, we find that lesbians identify with the characters to a greater extent because of the personal resonance provoked by the story and, secondly, because of perceived similarities with the characters. This is consistent with Ibiti (2011). In gays the opposite occurs. They identify with characters primarily because of the perceived similarity with the characters, and secondly due to personal resonance.

The qualitative study also reveals that the reasons for identifying with the characters are richer in descriptions and reasons in homosexuals of both sexes (especially in lesbians) than in heterosexuals (see Tables 2 and 3).

### 5.4. Identification with the protagonists and manifest sexual orientation of participants

Although the *Levene test* is not significant [ $F (3, 310) =.271, p =.846$ ], ANOVA models do show differences [ $F=4.11, p =0.007$ ]. The Welch statistic confirms them [ $F(3, 3.90) = 4.22, p =.008$ ]. Female homosexuals identify with characters to a greater extent ( $M = 4.02, SD = .828$ ) than heterosexual women ( $M= 3.48, SD = .870, p =.11$ ) and male heterosexuals ( $M = 3.50, SD = .832, p =.34$ ).

The qualitative study provides explanations for those differences. Given the demonstrated effect of the story, the comparison between the responses of all groups of participants is performed separately by each story. First we compare the responses of homosexual and heterosexual women. Thereafter, we compare the responses of homosexual women and heterosexual males (see Tables 2 and 3).

#### 5.4.1. Differences between homosexual and heterosexual women

The qualitative analysis shows that, in *Soldier*, both heterosexual and homosexual women do not identify with the protagonist because there is no received, personal resonance with history. Lesbians specifically justify their lack of identification by absence of cultural resonance with the military context of the story, which is greatly repelled. However, a sharper inquiry reveals that there is identification, although not recognized by these participants.

According to the data more than half of heterosexual women admit identifying with the protagonist because they admire her courage or personal integrity. Homosexuals also admit to identifying but

with a secondary character (Alice, the protagonist's girlfriend), who is not military, although she is a lesbian. This indicates that the identification is not automatically produced with the main character, but is selective and targeted.

In those few cases in which homosexuals identify with the protagonist, they hold the same reasons as heterosexuals. Homosexuals allude to the personal resonance they feel with the story and to the similarity with the sexual orientation of the protagonist. The main differences between the identification of homosexual and heterosexual women in *Soldier*, are related to the personal resonance and similarity with the sexual orientation of the protagonist.

Homosexual and heterosexual women do not spontaneously identify with the protagonist of *Seduction* mainly because of a lack of personal resonance and similarity. Both groups reject the character, although for different reasons. While homosexuals do not like the character design (perceived as superficial or frivolous), heterosexuals morally dislike her behavior.

In those rare cases in which female homosexuals and heterosexuals identify with the protagonist of *Seduction*, they differ in their reasons why. Lesbians allude to personal resonance while heterosexuals consider the character to be educated, interesting, and complex. Also, they believe this character takes charge of her life or is the opposite and is in fact, insecure. A unique heterosexual has a specific reason for identification with this homosexual character: she was attracted to another woman once in her life.

#### **5.4.2. Differences in the differences between lesbians and heterosexual male**

In *Soldier*, both groups mostly and spontaneously reveal that they do not identify with the character because the story does not personally resonate with them. In the specific cases where lesbians admit identification, they argue personal resonance with the story and similarity of their own life experiences with those portrayed by the story. Heterosexual males do not identify with the protagonist because they do not perceive similarity of gender, sexual orientation or personal resonance with the story at all. However, within this group, indicators of empathy can be detected, with the courage or consistency of the character and the sense of being a victim of injustices.

Regarding *Seduction*, most lesbians and heterosexual men do not identify with the protagonist because of common reasons: lack of personal resonance or similarity. However, in minor proportions, lesbians do not like the character design. When lesbians identify with the protagonist, it is because of personal resonance. In the very residual cases of heterosexual men who do identify, it is because they share with the protagonist the personality trait of searching for new experiences.

#### **5.5. Emotional and cognitive empathy**

There are significant differences in emotional empathy according to the story ( $F = 4.15, p = .042, t = 5.48, p < .001$ ). *Soldier* gets a higher rate ( $M = 3.66, DS = 1.01, n = 214$ ) than *Seduction* ( $M = 2.96, DS = 1.15, n = 100$ ). Also observed is the effect of participant's genre and their general sexual orientation. Sex does not affect emotional empathy, although general sexual orientation does ( $F = 9.22, p = .003, t = -3.75, p < .001$ ). Homosexuals attribute more emotional empathy ( $M = 3.86, DS = .95, n = 72$ ) than heterosexuals ( $M = 3.31, DS = 1.11, n = 242$ ).

The manifest sexual orientation is explored. ANOVA models confirm that there are differences in the emotional empathy of heterosexual and homosexual women ( $F = 4.88, p = .002$ ). Homosexual women express more emotional empathy ( $M = 3.93, DS = .96, n = 29$ ) than heterosexual women ( $M = 3.34, DS = 1.14, n = 166$ ). Moreover homosexual women show more emotional empathy than heterosexual men ( $M = 3.25, DS = 1.07, n = 76$ ).

The intensity of emotions is examined. Student t-test reveals statistical differences depending on the story [ $F= 3.72, p<.054, t(220,192) = 4.45, p <.001$ ]. *Soldier* gets a higher rate ( $M = 2.02, DS = .62, n= 214$ ) than *Seduction* ( $M = 1.71, DS = .54, n= 100$ ). There are no differences in emotional intensity by gender. There are differences in the intensity of emotions according to the general sexual orientation [ $F=4.27, p <.039, t(101,422) = -3.30, p<.001$ ]. Homosexuals show greater intensity of emotions ( $M = 2.15, DS=.69, n=72$ ) than heterosexuals ( $M = 1.85, DS=.57, n=242$ ).

Regarding manifest sexual orientation, the ANOVA models reveal the existence of differences between groups [ $F(3, 310)= 5.69 p<.001$ ]. The *F Welch* confirms them [ $F(3, 87.16) = 4.02, p <.010$ ]. Male homosexuals show higher emotional intensity ( $M = 2.26, DS=.74, n=43, p<.011$ ) than heterosexual women ( $M = 1.86, DS=.58, n = 166$ ) and heterosexual men ( $M = 1.84, DS=.54, n=76, p <.012$ ).

The qualitative analysis shows that, in *Soldier*, participants of the all sexual orientations mainly admit to experiencing the following emotions of the protagonist: impotence, anger, tenderness, and joy (at the end of the story). The analysis also shows that homosexuals and heterosexuals differ in experiencing some of the specific emotions of the protagonist: only homosexuals experience pride and only heterosexuals experience sorrow (see Table 4).

Tablen. 4. Emotional empathy with the protagonist and felt emotions in all groups of participants depending on the story				
Sex	Female		Male	
Sexual orientation	Hetero	Homo	Hetero	Homo
	<b>Story Seduction</b>			
<b>Emotional Empathy: Did you share the emotions of the protagonist? What emotions did you feel?</b>	Majority do not share emotions with Jenny (protagonist) and disapprove of her behavior. They feel grief and rage for the cheated boyfriend. A minority feels her confusion and distress (because a similar thing has happened to them). A third of the participants feel excitement and curiosity.	Majority share emotions of the protagonist, in particular those related with the discovering of the homosexual condition. They also feel excited by the lesbian sex portrayed. They experience stress, anxiety, desire, fear, anxiety, jealousy and rage. A minority does not share the character emotions because they	Majority alludes to experience sexual arousal (because of the explicit portrayal of lesbian sex) rather than feelings. These are mainly curiosity ("like all men" is an often repeated expression), and excitement. A minority shows no emotional empathy with	Almost half of the group feel the emotions of Jenny (protagonist) and experience personal resonance because of the realism of the story. A minority feels no emotion of the protagonist: they either did very quickly or there was no personal resonance. Most feel: surprise, intrigue, delight, curiosity, excitement, confusion, anger, sadness, joy, shame, and indifference. There is just one case that no emotion is experienced.



	<p>A single case feels total emotional empathy because it has experienced the discovery of new things. It also experiences the fear that infidelity happens along with its consequent guilt. One individual feels disgust.</p>	<p>disapprove of its behavior.</p>	<p>Jenny (protagonist). Another minority feels guilt (because the protagonist cries). Most express feeling in the characters' skin rather than experiencing sexual arousal.</p>	
<b>Story Soldier</b>				
	<p>Majority feels the emotions of the protagonist: anger, helplessness, courage and happiness at the end. A minority also feels grief or pity. Residually (1) there is no shared emotion.</p>	<p>Most feel similar emotions because the portrayal awakens personal memories. They also feel anger, helplessness, sadness, pride and happiness at the end.</p>	<p>Majority feels the emotions of the protagonist. They mostly feel helplessness and rage. A minority feels joy at the end. A minority feels sorrow or pity. Residually (1) there is not any feeling. One third admit to having felt themselves as being on the skin of the protagonist.</p>	<p>More than half share anger, helplessness, joy at the end, tenderness, pride and hatred felt by the protagonist. Less than half feel no emotions because the film was dubbed or they were not involved.</p>

In *Seduction*, the sexual arousal is the only emotion common to the four groups. This emotion is most often felt by lesbians, followed by heterosexual males, heterosexual females, and finally gays. Most female homosexuals and, to a lesser extent, male homosexuals, have experienced curiosity, stress, and anxiety. Only gays have experienced surprise. Some lesbian (and residually heterosexual female) say they have experienced the confusion and distress of the protagonist. Heterosexual and homosexual men deny having shared emotions of the protagonist in any way (see Table 4).

From all of the above, it can be extracted that the differences between the emotional intensity of male homosexuals, compared to that of the heterosexuals of both sexes, is due to the fact that male homosexuals report having experienced more emotions than the heterosexuals.

Cognitive empathy is observed. As in the case of emotional empathy, there are significant differences according to the story ( $F= 11.92, p<.001, t = 16.72, p<.001$ ). *Soldier* gets a higher rating of cognitive empathy ( $M= 4.39, DS = .70, n= 214$ ), than *Seduction* ( $M = 2.78, DS= .95, n= 100$ ). The effect of sex and manifest sexual orientation is also expressed. In contrast to the emotional empathy, there is no effect of manifest sexual orientation or sex. Women and men of all sexual orientations experience similar rates of cognitive empathy for the characters of the protagonists.

The qualitative study also reveals no differences between groups in the understanding of the reasons of how the two protagonists to behave. There are no differences in the appreciation of the protagonists either. Thus, the intellectual understanding of the motivations of the protagonists, and the approval (or disapproval) of their behavior, are not related in any way to the sex of the audience or to their manifest sexual orientation. However, the relationship of male and female homosexuals with both characters is different: the protagonist of *Soldier* is positive in both aspects (understanding and appreciation). With the protagonist of *Seduction*, homosexuals understand her reasons but consider her behavior objectionable and morally unacceptable see Table 5).

<b>Table n. 5. Cognitive empathy with the protagonist according to the story in all groups of participants</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Female</b>		<b>Male</b>	
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>Hetero</b>	<b>Homo</b>	<b>Hetero</b>	<b>Homo</b>
	<b>Story Seduction</b>			
<b>Cognitive Empathy: Do you understand the behavior of the protagonist and her reasons?</b>	Majority understands because of the comprehension of the characters' curiosity, sexual excitement, and willing to find her real sexual orientation. Minority does not understand because of the rejection of the character's sexual conduct ("she should have stayed at home') and the refusal of her boyfriend's foul play.	Majority understands: "you are confused, you want to try something new, you cannot resist it" Minority does not understand because of the rejection of the character "she is a liar and that is unfair".	Majority understands: the obvious sexual attraction, the need to find something different (all reasons for understanding are related to sex) A residual minority does not understand.	Majority understands: because of curiosity, for experiencing something new. A minority does not understand because the plot does not give enough information. A residual part of the sample (1) does not understand it at all.
	<b>Story Soldier</b>			
	All understand well the reasons of the protagonist to act: she had to defend herself, wanted her freedom, and prioritizes her	Majority understands and considers the character's decision to be wise. A residual part (1) does not	Majority understands: the irrational regulations and the rejection of an injustice of which she is the	Majority does understand. Residual (1) do not understand.

	personal life.	understand because the plot is predictable.	victim. Marginal (1) do not understand: "she could have been smarter and kept the relationship a secret".	
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### 5. 6. Capacity of fantasize

The Student t- test shows differences in the imagination of the future of the protagonists of the story ( $F= 24.84, p<.001, t = 4.57, p<.001$ ). Participants fantasize more with the future of the protagonist of *Soldier* ( $M = 3.84, DS= 1.03, n= 214$ ) than of *Seduction* ( $M = 3.21, DS= 1.33, n = 100$ ).

Moreover, there are no differences in the capacity to fantasize because of the sex of the participant. Women and men imagine the future of the character in similar proportions. Besides, there are differences depending on the general sexual orientation of participants ( $F= 9.08, p =.003, t = -2.76, p =.006$ ). Homosexuals show greater capacity to fantasize ( $M = 3.97, DS= 1.03, n = 100$ ) than heterosexuals ( $M = 3.54, DS= 1.19, n = 242$ ).

ANOVA models reveal the existence of differences between the capacity to fantasize of female homosexuals and male heterosexuals ( $F = 4.64, p = .003$ ). Female homosexuals show greater capacity to imagine the future of the protagonists ( $M = 4.21, DS= .902, n = 29$ ) than male heterosexuals ( $M = 3.32, DS= 1.24, n = 29$ ).

Meanwhile, the qualitative study confirms that *Soldier* promotes more often fantasies about the future of the character than *Seduction*. Moreover, and coincidentally with the quantitative study, the qualitative study shows that homosexuals tend to fantasize more often than heterosexuals. In addition, the study finds that there are differences between male and female homosexuals, heterosexuals, and offer explanations for this.

In *Soldier*, most lesbians are concerned about the future of the protagonist, while heterosexual males are not. These, for the most part, argue they have just not thought about it. Lesbians question the professional and personal future of the character. They also imagine different endings for the story, reflect on the implications for the character if she had remained in the army, and speculate about the idea that the character would have more freedom out of the army. Those few men who fantasize about the future of the protagonist worry about her future career and wonder what she would dedicate to after leaving the army.

In *Seduction*, there are also differences in frequencies. Most lesbians think about the future of the protagonist, while almost all men said that they have not imagined her future. Lesbian think about who will stay with the character (the boyfriend or the lover). They are uncertain about what might happen to the protagonist or other characters. They also worry about what the protagonist feels and suffers. On the other hand, most heterosexual men do not think about the protagonist. The minority, who do, cares about who the protagonist will stay with. One case fantasizes about the future of the character of the cheated boyfriend.

From all the above it is observed that, regardless of the story, lesbians are richer in reflecting on the protagonist and her future or the implications of her actions than heterosexual men.

<b>Table n. 6.</b>				
<b>Capacity to fantasize in all groups of participants depending on the story</b>				
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Female</b>		<b>Male</b>	
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>Hetero</b>	<b>Homo</b>	<b>Hetero</b>	<b>Homo</b>
<b>Story Seduction</b>				
<b>Capacity to fantasize about the future of the protagonist</b>	Majority does: "With whom she will stay? What will happen?" Majority believes she will stay with Marina (the seductive) by the defiant attitude of Jenny (protagonist) at the end of the story, which contrasts with that, peaceful of Tim (cheated boyfriend). The majority believes that Jenny will regret. A minority do not fantasize with the possible endings.	Majority does: "Who does she remain with?" "What is the future of the three characters?" Minority does not because the character does not like it or because she knew what would happen in the story.	Majority does not fantasize. A third part fantasizes about whom the protagonist will stay with. A residual part (1) fantasizes about the future of Tim (boyfriend).	Majority is concerned about the future of the protagonist: "What will happen?" Sexist expressions emerge: "Will the boyfriend forgive her? or What would happen if he hits her or he participates in a threesome?" A minority does not fantasize because they don't care about the story or think about the future of Tim (boyfriend). A residual part (1) anticipates the solitary future of the protagonist.
	<b>Story Soldier</b>			
	Majority does not because of the close ending. Some others think: "They will have to keep fighting" or "maybe Tasha	Majority does: "Tasha (protagonist) will have more freedom". Minority does not fantasize.	Majority does not fantasize because the story is closed. Minority thinks that Tasha will have conflicts or wonders how her new life will be.	Majority cares about the future of the protagonist: "What will she work in?" Minority does not because of the closed end.



	(protagonist) regrets her decision".			
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## 6. Discussion

Unlike typical empirical studies on identification within Media Psychology, this research uses a mixed method approach (Wooley, 2009). The application of this methodological strategy is a contribution of this study. The mixed method provides depth to the research. For example, the use of scales of identification as a strategy for collecting quantitative data requires the participant to take a precise position within the range of available values (Newstead & Griggs, 1983), but it restricts the ability to build spontaneous subjective descriptions (Freksa, 1980).

The use of a mixed method also facilitates the pronouncement of participants in morally controversial or compromising situations, such as when there are sex scenes or in the case of prejudices or stereotypes.

The use of in-depth interviews with semi-structured open questions of the qualitative method allowed the range of meanings associated with the identification and also guaranteed that the integrated data processing, paradoxically, granted a fairer measure of the quantitative information. The qualitative study helped to balance the fallacy that the instrument is more accurate than the experience of the self (Polkinghorne, 1984). Then, one of the contributions of this research is its methodological approach to the study of identification with characters, which is unusual in the literature of media entertainment, and encourages further discussions about the method and its scope in the study of the phenomenon.

As expected (H1), this study provides evidence that the content of fiction affects identification with the characters (in this case, lesbian). The research finds that the story with the most morally virtuous protagonist not only leads to greater identification, but makes it more homogeneous and common than the story of the protagonist with lights and shadows in her moral reasons. This is consistent with previous literature (Raney, 2004, 2006). This occurs among participants of both sexes and with different sexual orientations.

This result confirms that lesbian characters can produce identification between audiences of all sexual orientations and of both sexes. It also confirms that the moral appraisal of the story and characters weigh in identification. This is consistent with voices clamoring about the importance of moral judgment in receiving media entertainment (Raney, 2002, 2005). However, the research observes that moral judgment is not about the sexual orientation of the protagonist or the receiver, but about universal virtues and related to the protagonist's behavior (e.g, treason or falsehood). The research clarifies that this effect is independent of the sexual orientation of the character - sexual orientation of the receiver relationship. That is to say, in identification, the moral behavior of the lesbian protagonist is more important than her sexual orientation. This is a contribution of this study.

This study finds reasons to refute the hypothesis that, in general, the gender of the receiver affects identification with lesbian characters (H2). A priority, it may seem contrary to Eyal & Rubin (2003), and Maccoby & Wilson (1987). However, some nuances may be considered because although the quantitative study did not find differences in the magnitudes, the qualitative revealed differences in

the motivations for identification. The mixed methodological approach provided the opportunity to find this kind of result. The qualitative found that men use character's sex as a motivation for identification, while women do not. More specifically, in a plot with a predominance of male characters and lesbians as protagonists, some men justify identifying with male characters because of the fact of being of the same sex, while women do not use gender identity to justify their relationship with the character. Future studies could examine whether in the depiction of gay men with secondary female characters (lesbian and heterosexual), the reverse occurs. Research on feminist film narratives do not induce to think so, because given the male gaze of conventional audiovisual depicting, women are trained to identify equally with men and women (Mulvey, 1989).

This research confirms the hypothesis that there are differences in the identification based on general sexual orientation (H3). This is consistent with the works that predict the influence of the similarity of the receiver with the character and of personal resonance of the audience in the identification with the character (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Perse, 2003; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Feilitzen & Linne, 1975; Kanazawa, 2002; Maccoby & Wilson, 1987). This research finds that homosexual viewers of narratives about lesbians show greater identification than heterosexuals. It also confirms that differences occur not only in the general magnitudes, but in the motivations for the identification and its expression (always richer and more varied among homosexual than among heterosexual receivers).

The study highlights the weight of having two factors of identification among homosexual receivers: the personal resonance that stories evoke and the similarity of the stories with their own experiences. At this point, differences occur: lesbians identify, firstly, through personal resonance and, secondly, by the similarity with the character. The opposite occurs within gays. Gays look for points of similarity to their own life histories and that leads them to identify with the characters. Lesbians, meanwhile, spontaneously believe that representation is plausible and its discourse offers information for the good of the world.

The study finds evidence that leads to, and almost fully confirms the hypothesis that there are differences in the global identification depending on the manifest sexual orientation of the participant, (H4) because of the action of the similarity or personal resonance (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Perse, 2003; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Feilitzen & Linne, 1975; Kanazawa, 2002; Maccoby & Wilson, 1987). In this work, the identification reaches higher magnitudes within lesbians than in heterosexuals of both sexes.

The qualitative study shows that lesbians identify with the characters because of personal resonance (of the sexual orientation) and cultural resonance. Heterosexual females identify with the characters because of the intellectual and emotional characterization, and especially because of moral characterization. Then, personal resonance induces more intense identification than the design of the character. This is a specific contribution of this study to the knowledge of identification.

Moreover, the differences between lesbians and heterosexual men are explained mainly by the lack of identification of the heterosexual men. They say they do not identify with lesbian characters because they have no reasons to do so: there is neither gender similarity, nor similar sexual orientation or personal resonance of the story. In the very few cases where heterosexual men show signs of empathy with lesbian characters it is because heterosexual men admire their virtues such as courage, consistency, or the seeking of new experiences. It is also because they were moved by the injustices that were experienced by homosexual characters.

Regarding the dimensions of the identification, the study confirms hypothesis H4a. The research finds differences in emotional empathy according to the general sexual orientation: homosexual receivers show greater emotional empathy than heterosexuals. Consistent with what was explained in the previous paragraph, this study finds differences between emotional empathy of lesbian receivers and heterosexual (females and males). The qualitative study shows that all groups of receivers claim to have experienced some of the emotions felt by the protagonist of *Soldier*, who is morally simpler (vg. impotence, anger, tenderness, and joy due to the happy ending).

In the story *Seduction*, all participants expressed having felt some degree of sexual arousal in explicit sex scenes. However, men of both sexual orientations did not report to emphatically experience any emotion of the protagonist. This highlights the importance of the sex of the character, this characters morality in the experience of emotional empathy and, consequently, in the identification with the character (Raney, 2006). Homosexuals of both sexes admitted to having experienced the pride, the curiosity and the anguish of the protagonist; the female heterosexuals felt the pain of the protagonist, and only gay receivers experienced her surprise and pride.

In observing cognitive empathy we find that women and men of all sexual orientations experienced similar rates of this dimension. The qualitative study also proves that intellectual understanding of the motivations of lesbian protagonists and approval (or disapproval) of their behavior are not decisive in any way, by gender, or explicit sexual orientation of the receiver. Therefore we absolutely reject the H4b.

All this leads to the conclusion that male and female homosexual receivers relate differently to lesbian characters, depending on the behavior of the characters. With the protagonists that show simple behavior, the receiver attitude is that of understanding and appreciation. With those characters of complex behavior, receivers understand their reasons but consider them unpleasant and morally unacceptable. Then, among homosexuals of both sexes, there is an intellectual judgment of the morality of the lesbian characters acting above the common condition of homosexuality.

However, the moral judgment does not influence the magnitudes of identification (determined mainly by emotional empathy), although it does on some qualitative aspects of cognitive empathy. This information helps to theoretically delineate the processes by which identification with the characters is produced and suggests that identification could happen differently with different attitudes, emotions and behaviors of the characters. This also invites further consideration in future studies.

The differences in identification with lesbian characters among all groups are explained largely by affective empathy. At this point, it should be noted that this study was conducted in Spain, which in 2005 [1], allowed marriage between people of the same sex. The Spanish Penal Code criminalizes discrimination based on sexual orientation [2]. This explains why, in all groups of participants in this study, intellectual tolerance of homosexuality emerged as an important factor for identification. Future studies should validate these observations (at least quantitatively) by empirical tests in different cultural environments.

Finally, this study finds evidence for the H4 c argument that there are differences in the capacity to fantasize about the future of the protagonist depending on the explicit sexual orientation of the receiver. As expected, homosexuals tend to show higher indicator than heterosexuals. Lesbians also have a greater capacity to imagine the future of the protagonist than male heterosexuals.

Besides, heterosexual men do not mostly fantasize about the future of the protagonists. In those few cases where they do, they wonder about the professional evolution of the character and /or about the future of the heterosexual male character who was cheated on in the story. Instead, lesbian receivers imagine or care about the emotional and moral future of the characters. The richness and variety of the reflections are also higher than that of men.

## 7. Conclusions

The main contribution of this research is that it provides information about the reception of narratives depicting the life of gay characters, particularly lesbians, by different genders and sexual orientations. The recent proliferation of narratives set in organized communities under the sexual orientation of homosexual protagonists inspired us to study the phenomenon, even though there is still little information.

Specifically, this study explores the identification with the characters, a key variable in Media Psychology, as it is considered crucial to understanding the effects of entertainment (Cohen, 2006; Igartua, 2012). Identification explains some of the most important reactions to fiction, as enjoyment (Igartua, 2012) or appreciation (Oliver & Bartsch, 2011). It also can help to understand specific processes such as engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008).

As it has been said, the results of this research are consistent with previous work on identification with the characters. In general, they confirm that the particular characteristics of the audience influence the identification. Specifically, this study finds that sexual orientation is a key aspect in the receptor responses to narratives whose characters are lesbians and tell stories set in their communities.

Homosexual people, in particular, lesbians, identify themselves and enjoy these narratives more than heterosexual men and women. This is consonant with studies reporting that likeness, the similitude of the receiver with the character's feelings, and vital experiences are influential in the identification (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Perse, 2003; Maccoby and Wilson, 1987).

This study tests the impact of the relationship between the receivers sex and the characters sex during identification (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Feilitzen & Linne, 1975) and depending on the psychological characteristics of the character (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). Regarding the first, this research finds that these narratives are processed differently by homosexuals and heterosexuals of both sexes. However, the differences in the responses of male heterosexuals are always more distant and indifferent than those of female heterosexuals and homosexuals of both sexes. Future studies could expand on this data analysis from different perspectives.

The other main contribution of this research is that it shows that the weight on the identification with the characters by lesbians falls in emotional empathy rather than in the cognitive one. This happens among the different sexual orientations. The study also shows that the capacity to fantasize about the future of the character, a dimension observed in other studies on identification (Igartua & Paez, 1997; Soto-Sanfiel *et al.*, 2010) does not really affect the identification that concerns us. Future studies would be convenient to observe this phenomenon in audiences of different cultures and, above all, of different ages.

This study is further evidence that supports the “moral sanction theory” of Zillmann (2000), which states that in the drama, audiences play the role of moral monitors for the characters. The result of moral prosecutions of the audience determines how much the audience likes or dislikes a character (Raney, 2002, 2005). In this case, the lesbian protagonist with the most controversial moral behavior received less favorable responses from participants of all sexual orientations, than the character with the most virtuous moral behavior. Hence, on the process of identification with lesbian characters, moral behavior seems to be more important than sexual orientation.

Regarding the methodology, this study is further proof of the virtues of using a hybrid approach for a deeper comprehension of psychological phenomena of reception. Despite its slow pace of implementation, the great number of resources involved and the difficulty of dealing with a large amount of information, the combined use of both approaches turns out to be a more effective way to study objects more accurately. Specifically, the research design allows for quantitative and qualitative data that can be explained between them and draw better conclusions.

The hybrid approach has proven to be very useful on studying an object that may involve new prejudices or inhibitions expressed by the participants. Although in this study intense stereotyped or biased attitudes did not appear, nor indications of inhibition against the represented female homosexuality, its methodological approach allowed not only to distinguish between global and specific justified behaviors of groups of subjects, but to detect faint or implied attitudes (particularly in male heterosexuals). Having reached this point, it must be remembered that Spain is one of the countries with greater social acceptance of homosexuality (Pew Research Center, 2013). It is probable that a similar methodological approach in other cultural environments could produce more intense attitudes of rejection or acceptance, and explained through a greater variety of reasons.

We consider that a challenge for future studies is to validate the observations of this research not only with other narratives set in gay communities of both sexes, but with laboratory studies that allow comprehensive control of the variables involved in the processes of reception and, perhaps, the appearance of more intense reactions in subjects. One problem that this research had to solve as to get the participation of homosexual people of both genders in both studies. Given the difficulty of reaching a significant number of subjects, and discouraged by their ecological validity, we decided to perform the acceptance tests in the participants' homes via Internet (a common practice today in audiovisual consumption). The alternatives to this were: a) to conduct the study, although knowing the methodological implications and being aware of this handicap on the process or b) to cancel the study. Since we obviously chose the first option, we strongly recommend future experimental studies with smaller samples to replicate the findings of this study. Moreover, we also recommend further studies to observe the processes of attitude change in different audiences after watching these narratives, mainly to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.

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Dates:

- Beginning of the Research: October 2010.
- End of the Research: December 2012.

## 8. Notes

[<sup>1</sup>] Law 13/2005 of 1<sup>st</sup> July, amending the Civil Code on the right to marry. BOEnº157, dated July 2, 2005.

[<sup>2</sup>] Organic Law 10/1995 of 23 November.

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