


## THE INVISIBLE "B": bisexual erasure and biphobia on the television series *Glee*

O "B" INVISÍVEL: apagamento bissexual e bifobia na série televisiva *Glee*  
LA "B" INVISIBLE: borrado bissexual y bifobia en la serie de televisión *Glee*


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### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to understand how female bisexuality is represented on the television series *Glee*, a worldwide phenomenon in the first two decades of the 21st century, through the analysis of the character Brittany Pierce. For this, the content analysis technique was used, based on a qualitative, exploratory, bibliographic and documentary research. It was concluded that *Glee* abuses negative stereotypes related to female bisexuality, such as indecision, promiscuity and infidelity, despite being a series known for its diversity and positive representation of the LGBTQIA+ community. *Glee* missed the opportunity to portray bisexuality in a valid and legitimate way, reinforcing the diverse stigmas that hover over bisexual women.

**KEYWORDS:** bisexual erasure; biphobia; stereotypes; TV series; *Glee*.

Bisexuality means I am free and I am as likely to want to love a woman as I am likely to want to love a man, and what about that? Isn't that what freedom implies?

(Jude Jordan, poet and bisexual activist)

## Introduction

Frequently ignored and forgotten, bisexuality has been a constant topic lately – and the reason is precisely its lack of visibility. On February 7th, 2021, Lucas Pentead<sup>1</sup>, a contestant on the reality show *Big Brother Brasil*, asked to leave the most watched house in the country. The reason, among many others, was the prejudice of the other participants against his sexual orientation. Lucas had shown romantic interest in a woman on the beginning of the show, but ended up assuming his bisexuality and kissing

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<sup>1</sup> Actor, director, producer and poetry slammer, member of the *Camarote Group*, which includes celebrities who were invited to the reality show.

Gilberto Nogueira<sup>2</sup>, a homosexual man. The kiss, which was the first between two men in the history of *BBB*, became a source of intrigue in the house, with several contestants questioning Lucas' sexuality.

What surprised the audience – and made Lucas decide to leave the program – was mainly the reaction of fellow participants Karol Conká<sup>3</sup> and Pocah<sup>4</sup>, who are bisexual, and Lumena Aleluia<sup>5</sup>, who is lesbian. The brothers and sisters, as they are called in the show, accused Lucas of kissing Gilberto to gain advantage in the game and questioned why the participant had not previously revealed his bisexuality. In one of the episodes of the unusual imbroglío, in a house that lives on intrigues and “loving” and frankly sexualized liaisons, Lucas asks Lumena for advice, and she responds with laughter, mockery and the affirmation that Lucas, after all, wasn't “special”.

In the Italian version of *Big Brother, Grande Fratello VIP*, another participant was attacked because of her bisexuality. On February 22, 2021, during the live program, Brazilian contestant Dayane Mello<sup>6</sup> came out as bisexual and said she was in love with fellow participant Rosalinda<sup>7</sup>. Dayane already suffered from xenophobia within the show, and her statement caused an uproar in the house that resulted in her being called fake and a strategist. Dayane was dubbed “half lesbian” by an openly gay participant who said her love for Rosalinda “is shit” (sic).

What happened on *Grande Fratello VIP* and *BBB21*, one of the most popular entertainment programs in the history of world television in the 21st century, is most likely a portrait of what happens daily in Western societies and shows how bisexuality tends to be denied and marked by various prejudices. These prejudices are often disseminated and/or reproduced by members of the LGBTQIA+ community themselves, which involves lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgenders and queer, intersex and asexual people, in addition to all other possibilities of sexual orientation and gender identity.

It's a fact that the LGBTQIA+ acronym has been increasingly thematized in society and, above all, in the media. Lesbian and gay couples are part of everyday life and appear in songs, television series, soap operas and all kinds of news outlets focused on entertainment and the lives of celebrities. Transsexuality is still considered a taboo topic, but it started to be debated. But what about bisexuality? Although its representation in

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<sup>2</sup> Economist, member of the *Pipoca Group*, which includes unknown people who signed up for the show.

<sup>3</sup> Singer, songwriter and television host, from the *Camarote Group*.

<sup>4</sup> Singer, from the *Camarote Group*.

<sup>5</sup> Psychologist and DJ, from the *Pipoca Group*.

<sup>6</sup> Brazilian model who has lived in Italy for 10 years.

<sup>7</sup> Italian actress.

the media is increasing, it's still tiny compared to heterosexuality and small compared to the other letters of the acronym.

Despite the fact that bisexuals are the majority within the LGBTQIA+ community, according to Deschamps and Singer (2017), little is heard about this sexual orientation on television, cinema and print media. The authors claim that one of the first bisexual characters in a TV series was *Soap's* Jodie Dallas (Billy Crystal), who begins identifying himself as gay until he falls in love with a woman. However, he's still recognized by the public as being homosexual, not bisexual. On the same line of observation, Eisner (2013) notes that few characters in television series are identified as bisexual, even when they have characteristics related to bisexuality. As if that wasn't enough, most of these characters are portrayed in a stereotyped way. This is the case with *Glee*.

*Glee* was one of the main phenomena of North American series in the first two decades of the 21st century. Created and produced by Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk and Ian Brennan and distributed by 20th Century Fox Television, the show aired in more than 60 countries, from May 2009 to March 2015. The musical series portrays a group of students who are part of the school's choir, the glee club. In its six seasons, *Glee* was known for presenting topics considered risky and/or controversial such as bullying, virginity, teenage pregnancy, racial conflicts and issues related to sexuality, including the so-called LGBTQIA+ minorities. When it was released in 2009, the *GLAAD Annual Report*, which analyzes LGBTQIA+ representation on North American television, estimated that only 3% of recurring characters in US television series identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual. There were no male characters considered bisexual on TV and only four female characters. At the time, *Glee* was one of five comedy series to feature an LGBTQIA+ main character, with Kurt Hummel (Chris Colfer), who comes out as homosexual in season one.

One of *Glee* highlights was the relationship between Santana Lopez (Naya Rivera), a lesbian character, and Brittany Pierce (Heather Morris), a character considered bisexual by the public, but who was never recognized in this way by the series. Although loved by the viewers, Brittany's portrayal received some not-exactly uncritical reviews. In an article for *Logo TV's* website, an American television channel focused on the LGBTQIA+ audience, writer Chris O'Guinn criticized the way the character's sexuality is portrayed in the series. Despite the fact that Brittany shows romantic and sexual interest in both male and female characters, the word "bisexual" is rarely mentioned on the show (O'GUINN, 2011). Just like Lucas Penteado in *BBB* and Dayane Mello in *Grande Fratello*, Brittany had her sexuality made invisible, denied and criticized, in a program extremely important for

the LGBTQIA+ audience<sup>8</sup>, which helped several homosexual teenagers to accept their sexuality.

This article will defend the hypothesis that, despite being an important milestone for the LGBTQIA+ community and for the history of representation of diversity in the scope of American and global audiovisual production, *Glee*, when addressing female bisexuality with the character Brittany Pierce, failed to contribute to the necessary confrontation of the stigma and prejudice that surround the representation on bisexuality in cultural products. The study, an updated version of the article *Apagamento, estereótipos e preconceito: a representação da bissexualidade feminina na série televisiva Glee (Erasure, stereotypes and prejudice: the representation of female bisexuality in the television series Glee)* (KURTZ; THOMAS, 2020)<sup>9</sup>, will focus its analysis on the opportunities lost by *Glee* to inaugurate, in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, an approach capable of breaking through the surprising stereotypes and invisibility that still surround bisexual people.

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, widely used for questions that are difficult to quantify and the most critical and potentially emancipatory form of research, according to Bauer, Gaskell and Allum (2002). The type of research is exploratory, which constitutes empirical research investigations whose objective is to formulate questions or a problem. Moura and Lopes (2016) report that exploratory research allows the researcher to find a gap in studies of a given subject. The data collection technique used is bibliographic and documentary, and the analysis technique is content analysis.

## TV series: a representation of society

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<sup>8</sup> *Big Brother Brazil* also was an important program for the LGBTQIA+ community. Professor Jean Wyllys, for example, came out in the middle of the reality show in 2005 and was supported by the LGBTQIA+ community in Brazil, having even won that edition. After joining *BBB*, Wyllys embarked on a political career. Twice elected federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro, he defended diversity and the LGBTQIA+ community itself and entered a collision course with the Bolsonaro government and its supporters. Even though he was re-elected for a third term, Wyllys decided to leave Brazil after receiving death threats.

<sup>9</sup> The national controversy that took place in Brazil due to *Big Brother Brasil*, accompanied by traditional media and thousands of users of social networks, seemed to the authors to be a good reason for updating the work. Thus, this version also allowed for some minor changes in its titles, as well as in the final considerations, seeking a closure that would take into account the case raised by *BBB*. Both the text originally presented at the Intercom GP and the present update come from Fabiana Marsiglia Thomas' Final Paper, supervised by Prof. Dr. Adriana Schryver Kurtz and submitted to the panel at the Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing – ESPM -POA, in the Journalism Course, in July 2020.

Who has never spent hours watching several episodes of a TV show, rooted for a fictional couple or identified with a character? According to Esquenazi (2011), TV series have become the main product of television, being part of everyday life in contemporary society. They are considered both a social and media phenomenon and are watched by people from different social classes and ages, moving the public due to crushes and ships<sup>10</sup>, including (and increasingly) homo-affective ones.

"We are what we see and hear", Kellner (2001, p.124, own translation) writes in his book *Cultura da Mídia (Media Culture)*. According to the author, media dominates everyday life, as people turn their attention and their daily activities to the different forms of culture transmitted by the media. This allows programs broadcast by the media to provide models and ideas that contribute to the creation of the audience's personal identity, transforming their opinions and behaviours.

As stated by Kallas (2016), television is the medium that most corresponds to the way we see the world today. According to the author, television series present a greater possibility of empathy and identification due to the number of characters, making the narratives closer to the experience of the audience. With a significant number of narrative threads, – in the good scripts, above all – TV shows present complex worlds and real characters, with which the viewers easily identify. "One thing is certain: whenever you ask a fan to talk about a series, they never shut up again and they seem literally impregnated by a universe lived like a real planet," Esquenazi (2011, p.140, own translation) ironically says.

Esquenazi (2001) notes that one of the main characteristics of television series is its taste for the intimate, resulting in more daring, relevant and risky approaches, including the representation of different sexual orientations. According to the same author (2011), American series are marked by an explosion of sexual identities, constituting one of the main instruments of minority representation. This posture marks a moment of inflection. In fact, for a long time, characters who didn't fit the binary and monosexist pattern of society were marginalized and ridiculed in films and TV shows, stifled by a logic according to which one can only be one thing *or* another, man *or* woman, heterosexual *or* homosexual. In the opinion of Butler (2003), this results in a normative and compulsory heterosexuality. Still, in the scenario of an effective increase in the representation of LGBTQIA+ characters in the media, according to Deschamps and Singer (2017), the letter "B" of the acronym continues to be forgotten and invisible.

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<sup>10</sup> "Crushes" are characters the public falls in love with and "ships" (short for relationships) are couples that fans of the series root for and like to see together.

It is known that gender identity, which refers to how people see and show themselves to the world, is different from genitalia, which concerns biological sex, and doesn't define affective and sexual desire, which refers to who someone is attracted to, whether physically, romantically or emotionally (LINS; MACHADO; ESCOURA, 2016). In the light of the concept of sexual orientation, bisexual people are those who have the ability to feel physical, romantic or emotional attraction for more than one gender. Despite the evident interest in studying different forms of sexuality, Angelides (2001) notes that bisexuality represents a blind spot in research on sex, being less discussed when compared to other sexual orientations. This could be the reason why these studies exclude bisexual people or put them together with homosexuals.

According to Yoshino (2000), this exclusion doesn't happen because bisexuality doesn't exist, but rather because it is erased. The habit of forgetting, ignoring, silencing or denying the existence of bisexual people in historical records, academic materials and media, information and entertainment is called bisexual erasure by the author. And it happens in three main ways: the complete denial of the existence of bisexuality; the notion that bisexuality is just a phase; and, no less important or problematic, the insistence on classifying bisexual people as either heterosexual or homosexual.

In the opinion of Garber (2000, p.156), bisexuality "simply does not fit" in a binary system. Because of its ambivalent character, bisexuality is considered the most controversial of sexual orientations. For the author, much of the discrimination against bisexuality, as well as pressure for bisexuals to fit into one side of the binary, comes from the fact that this sexual orientation disturbs the certainties of both heterosexuality and homosexuality. According to Seffner (2003), this makes people who identify as bisexual forgotten and/or made invisible in a universe in which it's forbidden to question the binary logic.

It is important to observe that bisexual erasure carries with it several stereotypes and prejudices associated with bisexual people, significant enough to contribute to the so-called biphobia; that is, the hostility suffered by bisexuals, a phenomenon present in society. From the perspective of these concepts, this article will analyze several scenes from *Glee*, identifying three patterns – problematic in their essence – in the way the series portrays bisexuality, that is: the inability to admit bisexuality as a valid identity; the reinforcement of the stereotype of bisexual promiscuity and, as a kind of inevitable and no less important consequence, the stigma that these people are much more prone to betrayal than homo or heterosexuals. The study's hypothesis suggests that these three patterns are responsible for *Glee's* failure to overcome a stereotyped and conservative

representation of bisexuality, even though the series had the merit of thematizing the issue amidst a scenario of invisibility of bisexual characters.

### **Bisexual invisibility**

Tall, blonde and blue-eyed, Brittany Pierce is a cheerleader and member of the William McKinley High School's glee club. Brittany is naive and usually kind to people. She claims to love everyone, regardless of who they are. During the series, Brittany gets romantically and sexually involved with both men and women, marrying Santana in the last season. In many of the scenes of a narrative full of teenagers, accelerated hormones and love and sexual dramas, *Glee* misses the opportunity to be a reference in the treatment of the theme and fails to represent bisexuality as a valid identity.

As already mentioned, bisexuality is often overlooked, ignored or not taken seriously. In a scene from the 18th episode of the second season, Brittany refers to herself as "bi-curious"<sup>11</sup>, reducing her sexual orientation to just a passing curiosity. According to Eisner (2013), one of the main stereotypes regarding bisexuality is that it is seen as just a phase. Calling herself "bi-curious", Brittany also contributes to the bisexual erasure explained by Yoshino (2000), denying bisexuality as an identity and seeing it only as a practice. Furthermore, Brittany says that she "thinks" she is "bi-curious", which contributes to yet another stereotype presented by Eisner (2013): that bisexuals are confused and indecisive people.

Bisexual erasure can also be seen in a scene from the 20th episode of the third season, in which Santana says Brittany is gay, and Brittany replies that she's not "totally gay". The dialogue demonstrates the binary structure that exists in society. As Brittany is attracted to women, many characters automatically think she is homosexual, showing that bisexuality doesn't fit in a monosexist world. An excerpt from season 3's episode 22 presents the same problem. In a farewell speech from the glee club, Kurt says it doesn't matter if someone is gay or straight; the only thing that matters is they're friends. The line reinforces, once again, the stereotype mentioned by Eisner (2013) that bisexuality does not exist, since the monosexist perspective makes it prohibited, denied and/or erased. The three reviewed scenes present examples of bisexual erasure that, according to Yoshino (2000), can be the result of prejudice, which causes biphobia, or just the forgetting of this possibility by people who believe in its existence, but are used to the binary system, even if they understand the problems related to it.

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<sup>11</sup> All quotes in this part of the paper are lines spoken by the characters of *Glee*.



In another scene, aired in the ninth episode of season four, Brittany explains to Sam Evans (Chord Overstreet), her new love interest, that she can't be with him because "all the lesbians of the nation," she says, had found out about her old relationship with Santana and started rooting for them. The character thus believes that, if she dated Sam, the lesbians would be disappointed and "get really violent" and could even "hurt" him. The scene features a bisexual girl who falls in love with a man, after having had a relationship with a woman, and fears being judged by a community that used to support her. The apparently anecdotal character of the situation can be explained by Seffner (2003), who postulates that, since bisexuality doesn't belong to a specific community, it is seen as inferior.

As stated by Seffner (2003), bisexuals don't have an identity of their own, because they are not completely part of – but also don't deviate from – any group. They are only accepted into the heterosexual community when they are with someone of the opposite sex; and in the homosexual community, when they are with someone of the same sex, as shown in the scene. Abandoning the lesbian community, Brittany is left without a group and without an identity, in a limbo between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The character thus experiences a common situation for bisexual people: isolated from the LGBTQIA+ community, she is also not part of what Garber (2000, p.20) calls "heterosexual privilege".

It cannot be stressed enough that not only heterosexuals encourage bisexual erasure; the LGBTQIA+ community, ironically, also contributes to the problem, which is visible in *Glee's* narrative. In the first scene, Brittany cannot identify herself as bisexual, even though she has made it clear throughout the series that she is interested in people of both genders. In the subsequent scene, Santana, a character who comes out as a lesbian at Brittany's encouragement, calls her friend and love interest gay, forgetting that Brittany is also attracted to men. In the third scene, Kurt falls into the famous hetero/homosexual polarity explained by Butler (2003), during a speech that was intended to be inclusive. Finally, we see Brittany's fear that the lesbian community will turn against her, as if she had changed her sexual orientation just because she fell in love with a man, reinforcing yet another stereotype mentioned by Eisner (2013): that bisexual people are actually straight or homo.

In summary, the four *Glee* moments presented fail to show bisexuality as a real and valid identity. Throughout the series, Brittany demonstrated emotional and sexual interest in men and women, although the term "bisexual" was rarely mentioned. In fact, and to make matters worse, these rare mentions of the term are marked by a pejorative character, as will be seen below.



## Promiscuity and eroticization

In addition to the invisibility surrounding the representation of Brittany's bisexuality, one more factor unveiled in the analysis of the character's scenes casts yet another stigma on bisexuals: in several scenes, Brittany is represented as an extremely sexually active girl, almost bordering on promiscuity. According to Eisner (2013), this is a stereotype which is commonly associated with female bisexuality (while for males such a condition is not only tolerated but socially encouraged).

In an excerpt from the 17th episode of the first season of *Glee*, Brittany tells her classmates that she has "made out with everyone in the school"<sup>12</sup>, both boys and girls, and even the janitor. She says she doesn't understand why she was ranked fourth in the *Glist*, a raking of the members of the glee club based on their sexual action and looks, and says she needs "to do something to get into the Top 3". The scene exemplifies the fact mentioned by Garber (2000) that bisexuals are seen as people who aspire to have it all, whether men, women, or the school's janitor – something even inappropriate, as Brittany is underage and the janitor is supposed to be older. Also, Brittany often uses her sex appeal to get what she wants, as in the scene where she promised to go to school topless if she won the election for class president.

Bisexuals are often portrayed as promiscuous people. Season 1's episode 18 reinforces, once again, the fact that Brittany has already "made out" with "everyone at school." In one scene, the character Kurt pretends to be heterosexual in search of acceptance from his father. Thus, he changes his way of dressing and starts to have attitudes considered "more masculine". Assuming Kurt is heterosexual, Brittany offers to go on a date with him. She claims that Kurt is the only boy at school she hasn't hooked up with because she thought he was gay. "But now that you're not, having a perfect record would mean a lot to me, so let me know if you want to tap this" (sic), she says.

Another scene, aired in the first episode of season two, presents something similar. In an excerpt marked by a certain mischief, Brittany says that she wants to touch the breasts of the coach of the school's football team. In other words, promiscuity is shown again - and in a way that can be seen as inappropriate, considering not only the girl's age (who would have already been involved with an adult, the janitor) but the boldness in front of a professional from the school, who is hierarchically superior.

Also during season two, Brittany begins to get romantically involved with Artie Abrams (Kevin McHale). In the fourth episode, Santana is jealous of the relationship between the two and tries to prove that Brittany was just using Artie: as the boy has a

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<sup>12</sup> All quotes in this part of the paper are lines spoken by the characters of *Glee*.

beautiful voice, the bisexual character would have sex with him in order to ensure a good duet partner. In her jealous vendetta, Santana asks the first unknown boy who passes her and Artie when the two are in the high school cafeteria if he knows Brittany. The boy answers: "Yeah, we had sex". The situation refers to the observation of Deschamps and Singer (2017) about the stereotype most associated with bisexual people: that they are easy; that is, that they engage in sexual activities with anyone, a notion reinforced by this and other scenes in *Glee*.

In addition to the suggestion of a certain promiscuity, bisexuality - especially female - is a very eroticized sexual orientation. *Glee* introduces Brittany as a very sexual person and without any criteria, because she has already been involved and is attracted to "everyone at school". As stated by Eisner (2013), the hypersexualization suffered by bisexual women may be related to the fact that men, naturally, are seen as more sexually active people, while women would be more demure. So when a woman is free to have sexual relationships with whomever she wants, she ends up being oppressed or having a negative image.

In this sense, *Glee* can have a double reading as a cultural product open to a certain selective perception of the public. In a way, the fact that Brittany is sexually active can be interpreted as a celebration of female sexual freedom, which has been partially achieved with the advances of the feminist movement, although it still has a long way to go. It is important to emphasize that the absolute denial of stereotypes can end up excluding people who identify with them, creating a unique image of bisexual people (EISNER, 2013). However, Brittany's stereotyped representation can also lead the public to believe that all bisexual women are like that, creating an eroticization of the bisexual woman and, at the limit, even stimulating violence by some men who believe they should be available all the time, being a sexually desirable (straight) object.

### **Infidelity and betrayal**

The next analyzed scenes present Brittany as an unfaithful person due to her sexual orientation. The character is constantly rejected, doubted and questioned by her partners throughout the series. According to Garber (2000), it is common for both heterosexuals and homosexuals to be reluctant to get involved with a bisexual person in a romantic context. This happens because, for some, freedom means confusion. Let's see how this perception is enacted in the series.

Halfway through the second season of *Glee*, Brittany and Artie are dating. In a scene from the 15th episode, Brittany discusses her relationship with Santana. The girl mentions the fact that the two have kissed, and the friend declares that it isn't cheating,

as they are women and the “plumbing is different” (sic)<sup>13</sup>. Brittany says this confuses her, and Santana replies that even breakfast is confusing for her. The scene presents two stereotypes commonly associated with bisexual people, according to Eisner (2013): infidelity and confusion. Brittany dates a man but cheats on him with a woman. Santana's line also invalidates bisexuality, as if the only valid relationship was Brittany's with a man and hers with a woman didn't matter.

At the end of the same episode, Santana declares her love to Brittany. At first, Brittany doesn't understand, presenting – once again – an image of confusion. Upon understanding what she means, Brittany says she loves both Santana and Artie, introducing the idea – quickly stereotyped – that bisexuals necessarily like men and women at the same time. However, she refuses to be with Santana while dating Artie, which demonstrates a loyalty that hasn't been present in other scenes. Angered by the rejection, Santana says that “being fluid” has left Brittany “stuck”, criticizing, in fact, the bisexuality of the woman she's in love with, but not using the term to refer to her, which contributes, once again, to bisexual erasure.

From the 19th episode of season two, it's possible to see that Brittany's idea of staying true to Artie doesn't work for long. Artie suspects that the girl is hooking up with Santana, because of the signs of infidelity already presented by her. Again, Brittany reduces bisexuality to just a practice, saying that making out with another girl is not cheating. The character is stereotyped as someone who wants the best of both worlds, showing no ability to commit to anyone.

During some time in *Glee*, Brittany and Santana finally date. Due to the distance (since the two end up living in different cities), they decide to break up. In an excerpt from the second episode of the fifth season, after the break up, Santana meets Dani (Demi Lovato), a lesbian woman. In a conversation between the couple, Santana reveals that she used to have a bisexual girlfriend, with a noticeable tone of judgment in her voice. Dani then says that Santana deserves a “100% Sapphic goddess”, in a reference to Sappho, the Greek poetess from the island of Lesbos who is considered the first lesbian poetess. The scene does not fail to demonstrate prejudice against bisexual people within the LGBTQIA+ community itself. According to Yoshino (2000), this prejudice happens because monosexual sexualities want to stabilize sexual orientation, keeping society in a binary system. As the scene continues, Santana tells a friend that she has never been with an “actual lesbian”, only with bisexuals or “college girls trying to experiment”. The speech delegitimizes bisexuality (including the “curious girls”), as if bisexual women didn't like

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<sup>13</sup> All quotes in this part of the paper are lines spoken by the characters of *Glee*.

other women that much. Furthermore, it reduces the orientation to a curiosity or experiment, as if it were just a phase. This is precisely the only time the term “bisexual” is used in the series and, as the dialogue shows, its mention is committed to a pejorative touch.

In the same episode, Santana tells her friends that she is very happy because she finally has a girlfriend who she doesn't need to “worry about straying for penis” (sic). Here, it's possible to see that Santana sees Brittany as an unfaithful person, even though she has never cheated on her during the series. In addition, she presents the phallogocentric idea mentioned by Eisner (2013) that bisexual women prefer men, as the penis is seen as powerful. The situation also suggests the possibility of rejection or moral sanctions that bisexuals have to face when seeking support in LGBTQIA+ communities.

The five different moments rescued from *Glee's* narrative present Brittany as an unfaithful and indecisive person, concepts linked to the idea of promiscuity that, according to Yoshino (2000), are stereotypes bisexual people continue to face – and with which they must fight. We will tend to say that, in relation to this challenge, the series ends up leaving a mixed message. There are several other scenes throughout the six seasons of *Glee* that show Brittany as an eroticized character who can't control her sexual urges, as well as being seen as a “cheater” by many characters, even when she doesn't cheat. As Yoshino (2000) well noted, bisexuality is especially overlooked in a romantic context, and these scenes demonstrate this: both straight characters and homosexual characters are reluctant to get emotionally involved with Brittany. However, she's supposedly hooked up with “everyone at school”, which shows that the reluctance to get involved with the “bi” girl is only in a romantic and not a sexual sense; as if Brittany, after all, was only good for having sex and not for a serious relationship. Not by chance, every time she is in a serious relationship, her partner gets suspicious about the possibility of betrayal.

### Final considerations

Eisner (2013) states that although some letters of the LGBTQIA+ acronym have a certain visibility in American media, the “B” is not one of them. According to the author, even when characters have characteristics related to bisexuality, they rarely identify as bisexual. And when they do, their representation is full of stereotypes. *Glee* could have changed this scenario and advanced in terms of representation of bisexuality, given its (certainly commendable) pioneering in having thematized the subject. But the show wasn't able to deal with the challenge, losing its opportunity by falling into the hetero/homosexual polarity, which ended up neglecting Brittany's sexual orientation.

The series became known for debating issues considered controversial by society and for providing a refuge for the LGBTQIA+ community in the media, in which different genders and sexual orientations found themselves represented and accepted. However, Brittany is the only character considered bisexual in the main cast, but her sexuality was negatively stereotyped and/or marked by invisibility. *Glee*, when trying to address female bisexuality, failed to contribute to a thematization freed from the stigma and prejudice surrounding its representation in cultural products. Despite the good intentions, the series was victim of the very prejudices it could combat or minimize, losing the chance to stimulate a debate about bisexual erasure and biphobia, abusing stereotypes and even contributing to the eroticization of female bisexuality. The show didn't even have the courage to verbalize Brittany's sexual orientation, incurring the same mainstream media's inability to recognize the existence of bisexuality and portray it as a valid identity.

The prejudices that surround the character were repeated in the controversy raised with the – in a way also characters – brothers and sisters of reality shows such as *Big Brother Brasil* and *Grande Fratello*, mentioned at the beginning of the article. These programs are often based on the formation of pairs and couples, who are highly stimulated to romantic or sexual performances, but in which a certain cynical morality rejects LGBTQIA+ participants in favor of a heteronormativity that has the right to be fully expressed, as people who get involved with someone of the same gender are judged, criticized and their sexual orientation isn't recognized as valid, especially if they have previously shown interest in people of the opposite gender.

Given this scenario, we believe it is important to question the binary logic of sexuality in search of a fairer and less unequal world. In fact, doubts about bisexuality as a valid identity are constant in a scenario of hegemony – and oppression – of heteronormative logic. After all, what would be the cause of the enormous difficulty in abandoning some prejudices and accepting that bisexuality can be more than “just a phase” and that people who identify with this sexual orientation are not necessarily confused, indecisive or promiscuous?

Perhaps the only consensus is that the presence of bisexual characters in television series such as *Glee* is crucial to promoting a debate on the subject. It is even necessary to recognize that the scene of bisexual representation in the media has changed since the series was released. In the last *GLAAD Annual Report*, related to the US television season 2020-2021, it was found that bisexuals represented 18% of regular and recurring characters in the LGBTQIA+ community, with 13 women and five men. It's important to remember that at the time of *Glee's* release, these numbers were, respectively, four and zero. The increase can be considered small; however, on streaming platforms such as

Netflix and Amazon Prime – which were not yet very popular or didn't even exist in 2009 – 27 women and 17 men were found to be bisexual. Furthermore, in many of these series, whether in television or streaming platforms, bisexuality has been represented in a less problematic (or more positive and valid) way, as is the case with the characters Darryl Whitefeather from *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, Callie Torres from *Grey's Anatomy*, Delphine Cormier from *Orphan Black* and Rosa Diaz from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. However, it's a small step considering that shows like *Orange Is the New Black*, *Gypsy* and *Dare Me* feature visibly emotionally disturbed and crime-prone bisexual women, including partner murder.

We agree with Yoshino (2000) when he, certainly with his fair dose of militancy, postulates that the only way to end biphobia and bisexual erasure is by recognizing these issues as real problems and giving due importance to the bisexual movement. Thus, this article also shares the purpose of giving visibility to an often silenced theme. We know how identities that have no space in the media tend to be mostly ignored or treated with prejudice, which increases the power and responsibility of cultural products in promoting a debate on taboo topics. As American cultural critic Douglas Kellner (2001) has stated – perhaps with some optimism – the media should be a free from prejudice environment that promotes freedom and democracy.

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**RESUMO:**

O artigo busca entender como a bissexualidade feminina é representada na série televisiva *Glee*, fenômeno mundial nas duas primeiras décadas do século XXI, por meio da análise da personagem Brittany Pierce. Para isso, foi utilizada a técnica de análise de conteúdo, a partir de uma pesquisa qualitativa, exploratória, bibliográfica e documental. Chegou-se à conclusão de que *Glee* abusa dos estereótipos negativos relacionados à bissexualidade feminina, como indecisão, promiscuidade e infidelidade, apesar de ser uma série conhecida pela sua diversidade e representação positiva da comunidade LGBTQIA+. *Glee* perdeu a oportunidade de retratar a bissexualidade de uma maneira válida e legítima, reforçando os diversos estigmas que pairam sobre a mulher bissexual.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVES:** apagamento bissexual; bifobia; estereótipos, série televisiva; *Glee*.

**RESUMEN:**

Este artículo busca comprender cómo se representa la bisexualidad femenina en la serie de televisión *Glee*, un fenómeno mundial en las dos primeras décadas del siglo XXI, a través del análisis del personaje Brittany Pierce. Para ello se utilizó la técnica de análisis de contenido, basada en una investigación cualitativa, exploratoria, bibliográfica y documental. Se concluyó que *Glee* abusa de estereotipos negativos sobre la bisexualidad femenina, como la indecisión, la promiscuidad y la infidelidad, a pesar de ser una serie conocida por su diversidad y representación positiva de la comunidad LGBTQIA+. *Glee* perdió la oportunidad de retratar a la bisexualidad de una manera válida y legítima, reforzando los diversos estigmas que se ciernen sobre las mujeres bissexuales.

**PALABRAS-CLAVES:** borrado bisexual; bifobia; estereotipos; series de televisión; *Glee*.