

Sisterhood and gender intersectionality in American fiction: *The Bold Type* of a case study

Sororidad e interseccionalidad de género en la ficción estadounidense: The Bold Type como caso de estudio



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Abstract:

Video-on-demand (VOD) platforms revalue the production of fictional series, creating new identities that converge with the sexual diversity and multiculturalism of the Fourth Wave of Feminism. This study aims to verify whether the American series *The Bold Type*, described by critics as transgressive from a gender perspective, is based on the composition of its technical team, the portrayal of characters and the themes and issues addressed. The findings show a female predominance in creation and technical development, although there is underrepresentation in sectors such as postproduction and music. New roles and neo archetypes are also introduced, depicting self-sufficient, entrepreneurial women who are committed to and supportive of each other. New discussions about women's health,

Resumen:

*Las plataformas VOD revalorizan la producción de series de ficción, creando nuevas identidades que convergen con la diversidad sexual y la multiculturalidad de la Cuarta Ola Feminista. El propósito de este trabajo persigue verificar si la serie estadounidense *The Bold Type*, enmarcada por la crítica como trasgresora desde una perspectiva de género, lo es según la composición de su equipo técnico, la representación de sus protagonistas y las temáticas abordadas. Los resultados arrojan superioridad femenina en la creación y el desarrollo técnico, aunque infrarrepresentación en sectores como la postproducción y la música. También reflejan nuevos roles y neo-arquetipos, que describen a mujeres autosuficientes, emprendedoras, comprometidas y solidarias entre ellas. Se introducen nuevos debates sobre salud femenina,*

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as well as sexual, social, and labour demands, are introduced from a multicultural and sexual intersectionality perspective. *The Bold Type* depicts the serious issues of work-life balance and the postponement or rejection of maternity, making it a feminist series in its content. However, it operates within a capitalist orbit that glorifies beauty and luxury, preventing understanding the diversity of these women in different socioeconomic contexts, which could offer new voices to the television landscape.

Keywords:

Stereotypes; audiovisual narratives; TV series; gender; intersectionality, *The Bold Type*.

así como sobre reclamos sexuales, sociales y laborales, desde una interseccionalidad multicultural y sexual. The Bold Type escenifica los graves problemas de conciliación y la postergación o rechazo a la maternidad, lo que la convierte en una serie feminista por su contenido, aunque bajo una órbita capitalista que hace apología de la belleza y el lujo, imposibilitando conocer la diversidad de estas mujeres en diferentes contextos socioeconómicos que aporten nuevas voces al panorama televisivo.

Palabras clave:

Esteriotipos; narrativas audiovisuales; serie de televisión; género, interseccionalidad; The Bold Type.

1. Introduction

In serialized productions, revalued by video-on-demand platforms (Cascajosa-Virino, 2018; Mateos-Pérez & Ochoa-Sotomayor, 2016), the female gender continues to be underrepresented (Cascajosa-Virino, 2019), hindering the faster evolution of creating new discourses and approaches that represent women. When successful producers such as Teresa Fernández-Valdés, the cofounder of Bambú Producciones and creator of successful productions such as *Las Chicas del Cable* (Netflix, 2017-2020), are found, it is evident that female authorship and its mark on series are conditioned by profit motives (López & Raya Bravo, 2019). Hence, there is a need to continue with feminist intersectional analysis (Contreras & Alfaro-Beracochea, 2021) on the stereotypes, roles, and archetypes of women and new masculinities in audiovisual media without “detaching from an analysis of capitalism and its strategies of co-opting identities for consumption purposes” (Bonavitta & De Garay-Hernández, 2019: 219).

However, technical and artistic teams have slowly become more balanced (Cascajosa-Virino, 2017), especially since the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements (Garrido & Zaptsi, 2021). This evolution has reached masculinized cinema sectors, such as editing and postproduction (Gutiérrez-San Miguel et al., 2020). Owing to the growth of serialized productions directed by and starring women (Gavilán et al., 2019), a trend that favours feminism both behind and in front of the camera can be observed, creating “a more equal and inclusive television landscape” (Garrido & Zaptsi, 2021: 21).

This exponential production and distribution of content have brought greater female prominence with the turn of the century (Hidalgo-Marí, 2017; Mateos-Pérez, 2021) and new archetypes and stereotypes that have moved away from the cultural productions of underrepresented and stereotyped women (Belmonte & Guillamón, 2008; Mancinas-Chávez & Morejón-Llamas, 2012). This has occurred especially since the emergence of VOD platforms, which, owing to technology, have hypersegmented audiences (Bernárdez-Rodal, 2017), producing series that meet their needs (Fernández-Manzano et al., 2016) with a significant plurality of themes and voices for all tastes. In this sense, Netflix, Prime Video, or HBO have adopted themes and discourses of third- and fourth-wave feminism, focusing on intersectionality and gender violence (Garrido-Rodríguez, 2021), championing new identities and addressing the problems of these minorities. In contrast, this issue has timidly appeared on the main traditional television channels (Smith, 2020).

The portrayal of women in fictional series has been widely studied, given television's transformative and socializing nature (Menéndez-Menéndez & Zurian, 2014). These cultural productions reflect stereotypes and archetypes that convey meanings (Galán, 2006) and construct the viewer's identity, as television series act as vehicles "for highly individualized and cybernetic audiences" (Morejón-Llamas, 2020: 126) and even more so with the rise of this type of on-demand consumption (Cascajosa-Virino, 2018). This regeneration in protagonists and their discourses helps audiences internalize, through symbolic modelling (Yubero-Jiménez, 2004), new roles and themes, addressing the need to represent "more alternative and nuanced models in series, characters that escape gender stereotypes and heteronormative models" (Masanet and Fedele, 2019: 22), which are equally important in adolescence and adulthood (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2021).

From a gender perspective, this capacity has prompted studies since the beginning of the 21st century (Belmonte & Guillamón, 2008; Coronado & Galán, 2015; Galán, 2006, 2007; Gordillo-Álvarez et al., 2009) on constructing protagonists and their storylines and determining whether they correspond to reality by depicting new family, work, and social contexts.

Series began to build stories with unconventional themes which used complex, non-linear narrative structures that appealed to diverse audiences. Regardless of their narrative genre, their plots and characters were developed based on reality. Series were therefore fertile grounds to raise topical issues for debate that traversed and alluded to identities, collective imaginations, representations and social discourses. (Mateos-Pérez, 2021: 172)

These studies suggest greater female prominence in recent years, as well as greater diversity in their profiles and roles (Cascajosa-Virino, 2017; Lacalle & Gómez-Morales, 2018; Menéndez-Menéndez & Zurian, 2014), despite the continued presence of patriarchal representations at both the national and international levels (Bonavitta & De-Garay-Hernández, 2019; Gavilán et al., 2019; Mateos-Pérez, 2021; Parra-García et al., 2019). In Spain, studies show gender underrepresentation and limited sexual diversity, as well as a professional gap, with a high prevalence of domestic settings and a decrease in the execution of professional roles. Women are also depicted as emotional rather than rational (De-Caso-Bausela et al., 2020).

The catalogue of existing series and the scientific literature reveal that the new setting for women is the workplace. Consequently, protagonists have been examined in their family and professional environments, as well as for their ability to balance both, indicating a gradual acceleration in US productions (Medina-Bravo et al., 2009; Sánchez-Aranda et al., 2011), although not many Spanish (Hidalgo-Marí, 2017; Lacalle & Gómez, 2016; Ruiz-Muñoz & Pérez-Rufí, 2020; Tous-Rovirosa & Aran-Ramspott, 2017) or Latin American productions (Mateos-Pérez & Ochoa-Sotomayor, 2016). However, television series break gender stereotypes and represent empowered women (Padilla & Sosa Sánchez, 2018) who are supportive of one another (Cuenca-Orellana & Martínez-Pérez, 2020), ending the rivalries often depicted in the previous century. Some productions also depict the transformation of postfeminist entertainment into increasingly politically committed feminism, albeit from a neoliberal perspective (Fegitz, 2023). Nonetheless, thematic gaps exist that prevent the visibility of issues such as women's health problems, for example breast cancer (Lacalle & Gómez-Morales, 2018), or abortion (Hidalgo-Marí & Palomares-Sánchez, 2020), which are present in our society.

The gradual evolution of female representation in fictional series underscores the need to study feminist productions, either to turn them into coeducational models (Belmonte & Guillamón, 2008) or to demystify them if they embody patriarchal stereotypes. Hence, the main objective of this research is to analyse the American ensemble fiction series *The Bold Type* (2017-

2021), judged by media and experts (Fegitz, 2023; Kornfield & Long, 2023) as a feminist series. The primary purpose of this study is to verify this information by reviewing the archetypes, stereotypes, discourses, and themes present in *The Bold Type* from a gender perspective. To this end, the specific objectives of this paper are as follows:

- SO1. Analyse the presence of women in front of and behind the camera.
- SO2. Study the profiles and roles of the protagonists within their narrative as representative case studies.
- SO3. Identify the storylines contextualized in fourth-wave feminism, characterized by the fight against violence towards women and the parity between men and women in any sphere.

2. Methodology

The sample selection was based on the following criteria: a) a series featuring women in early adulthood, within the 25–35 age range; b) an ensemble series (Ruiz-Muñoz and Pérez-Rufí, 2020) to showcase different voices; c) distributed by streaming on various platforms, in this case, on Freeform, Hulu, Prime Video, and Netflix, the platforms that promote international dissemination and viewing; and d) considered and categorized by media and critics as a feminist series.

The *Bold Type* (2017-2021) is an American series inspired by the life of *Cosmopolitan's* editor-in-chief, Joanna Coles. Created by Sarah Watson and produced by Universal Television for Freeform, it premiered in 2017 and concluded in 2021 after 5 seasons and 52 episodes. It was distributed on Hulu, Prime Video and Netflix, capturing a female audience that rates it 7.8 out of 10 on IMDb and amassing 469,000 followers on Instagram (@theboldtypetv).

This ensemble fiction, led by women and starring Katie Stevens, Aisha Dee, Meghann Fahy, and Melora Hardin, chronicles their professional adventures at Scarlet magazine in different departments, including fashion, social media, and editorial, with diverse hierarchical roles—Jacqueline as a mentor and gatekeeper, Kat as a director, and Sutton and Jane as apprentices. The series also depicts the romantic experiences of its protagonists in Manhattan, in the style of other productions such as *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004), *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012), or *Girls* (HBO, 2012-2017), blending professional, personal, and social spheres.

This series has been praised by various Spanish media outlets (Table 1), which have heralded the subversive discourse of the series and its characters. According to the study by Gavilán et al. (2019), in addition to the media, the public also appreciates the feminist ethos, reflecting women's perceptions of this series and its influence on their preferences, attitudes, and judgements. The study emphasizes the normalization of bodies, the depiction of new workplace scenarios, and the protagonists' involvement in the gender struggle. Nevertheless, there are discrepancies due to the idealization of their jobs and the recurring need to resort to romantic relationships as a measure of happiness.

Table 1. Headlines published in digital media about *The Bold Type*

Date	Media	Headline
30/06/2018	elpais.com	'The Bold Type', mujeres que apoyan a mujeres
25/08/2018	lavanguardia.com	Por qué 'The Bold Type' es la serie ligera y feminista que te pide el cuerpo
07/05/2019	vogue.es	Moda, amistad y feminismo en 'The Bold Type', la última serie que me ha hecho feliz
03/08/2019	fotogramas.es	'The Bold Type': La serie feminista de Amazon Prime Video perfecta para el verano
03/09/2019	elconfidencial.com	'The Bold Type' (Amazon): la serie feminista que todas las adolescentes deberían ver
16/03/2021	larazon.es	Moda, FEMINISMO y amistad en 'The Bold Type', la última serie que ha enamorado a Mery Turiel y que deberías ver este 8 M
16/03/2021	smoda.elpais.com	'The Bold Type' le da vuelta al estereotipo de la directora tirana

Source: own elaboration

After conducting a bibliographic and newspaper analysis to address the state of the art, the composition and parity of the artistic-technical team were studied via the Inclusion Rydel by Stacy L. Smith (Gutiérrez-San Miguel et al., 2020), which considers it necessary to have at least 50% women behind the cameras. This analysis was carried out through the technical sheet on the IMDb website and the credits appearing in the episodes viewed.

Content analysis (Piñuel, 2002) of the protagonists, their discourses, and themes was employed after viewing the first four seasons, as the last season was not available on Netflix or Prime Video in Spain. The total sample comprises 46 episodes (S1, 10; S2, 10; S3, 10; S4, 16), with an average duration of 45 minutes each. For the analysis, the following ad hoc sheet was applied after an initial viewing of the series (Table 2), inspired by the physical, psychological, and sociological dimensions (Galán, 2006, 2007) and the behavioural dimension (Gordillo-Álvarez et al., 2009) of the protagonists, to detect the representation of stereotypes on which female characters are constructed (Menéndez-Menéndez & Zurian, 2014) and the feminist challenge through discourses, attitudes, and relationships.

Finally, new themes focusing on female conflicts from an intersectional perspective were defined, emphasizing axioms inherent to feminism (Donstrup, 2022:31): liberal feminism (individualism, equal rights in the market, legal and political equality), radical feminism (patriarchy, the personal is political, sisterhood, denunciation of gender-based violence, myth of romantic love), racial feminism (racism, multiple oppression, differences among women), and postmodern feminism (deconstruction

of gender identity, antifundamentalism). This approach will help understand the behaviour and interactions of these women (Gordillo-Álvarez et al., 2009) with fourth-wave feminism (Aguilar-Barriga, 2020; Garrido-Rodríguez, 2021).

Table 2. Character analysis sheet

Variables	Categories
Physical	Age: young (15-24), young/adult (25-44), adult (45-64), over 65.
	Cultural/ethnic origin: Caucasian, African-American, Arab, Asian.
	Physical appearance: attractive/very attractive, average, unattractive.
	Style of dress: elegant, sexy, casual/sporty, masculine.
Psychological	Personality: extroverted, introverted.
	Temperament: intuitive, perceptive, reflective, sensitive.
	Goals/objectives: career advancement, becoming a good professional, economic necessity, altruism.
Sociological	Sexual orientation: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, queer.
	Marital status: single, married, divorced/separated, widowed.
	Relationship stability: stable, changing.
	Number of children: none, 1, 1-2, more than 2.
	Economic level: high, medium, low.
	Profession: journalist, editor, marketing/communication, photographer.
	Position in the job hierarchy: executive/assistant executive, high qualification, medium qualification, low qualification.
Behavioural	Discourses: references to feminism, sexual, ethnic, religious or political diversity, violence against women.
	Attitudes: valence (positive, negative, neutral), activity (proactive, reactive), motivation (self-interested, altruistic), evaluation of stimuli (emotional, rational).
	Relationships: inclusive, manipulative, passive, aggressive, assertive, permissive.

Source: own elaboration

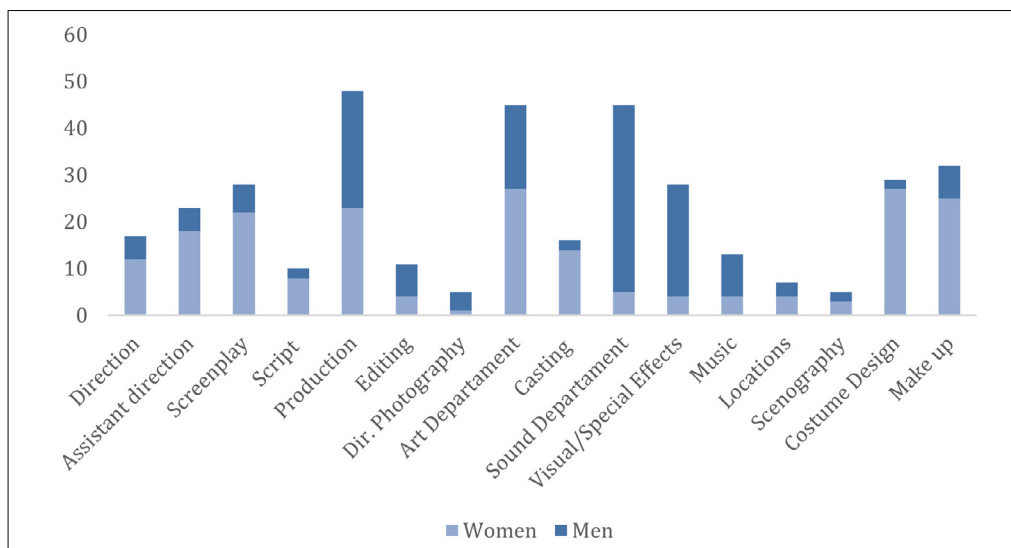
3. Results

3.1. Prominence with exceptions

Applying the Rydel inclusion test to the cast reveals gender parity with a slight predominance of women, at 43 women (58.11%) compared with 31 men (41.89%). When the actors and actresses are divided into categories based on their appearance, we observe that among the main characters who appeared in 30 –to 52 episodes, 5 were women (55.56%), and 4 were men (44.44%). Of the secondary characters, with appearances in 15– to 29 episodes, 1 was a woman (33.33%), and 2 were men (66.67%). For occasional characters who appeared in 5 to 14 episodes, there were 9 women (64.29%) and 5 men (35.71%). Finally, among the sporadic characters with appearances in 2 to 4 episodes, 28 were women (58.33%), and 20 were men (41.67%). Notably, in the department of stunt doubles, whose actors perform risky stunts, there are two women for the stunt doubling of Aisha Dee and Katie Stevens and one man who participates as a driver in one episode. Here, women also predominated at 66.67%, compared with the male at only 33.33%.

Behind the scenes (Figure 1), significant data are presented, which, depending on the sector analysed, confirm underrepresentation. When all the positions are computed, we find a female prevalence, with 201 women (55.52%) compared with 161 men (44.48%). By sector, we observe female dominance in the direction department, whether as directors (12 women; 70.59%) or assistant directors (18 women; 58.06%), as well as in the writing department (22 women, 75.86%) and script supervision (8 women, 80%).

Figure 1. Composition of the technical-artistic team



Source: own elaboration

The difference in production is less significant (23 women, 47.92%; 25 men, 52.08%), although here, it is notable that men dominate the production leadership roles (4 women, 26.67%; 11 men, 73.33%). Conversely, in production design, only one man and one woman assumed a role, with the man doing so only anecdotally in one episode, whereas the woman was responsible for 51 episodes. The set design team (3 women, 60%; 2 men, 40%) and the location team (4 women, 57.14%; 3 men, 42.86%) display a balanced composition.

Furthermore, the prevalence of women is noticeable in departments such as the art department, led by 2 women (66.67%) and one man (33.33%), as well as within the art department itself, comprising 25 women (59.52%) and 17 men (40.48%). The presence of females is significant in casting (14 women, 87.5%; 2 men, 12.5%), costume design (27 women, 93.1%; 2 men, 6.9%), and makeup (25 women, 78.13%; 7 men, 21.87%). However, in several sectors of the artistic-technical team, there is a clear male dominance. This is the case in the editing department (4 women, 36.36%; 7 men, 63.64%), cinematography (1 woman, 20%; 4 men, 80%), sound (5 women, 11.11%; 40 men, 88.89%), visual and special effects (4 women, 14.29%; 24 men, 85.71%), and music (4 women, 30.77%; 9 men, 69.23%).

The study of women's presence in front of and behind the camera offers relevant data that demonstrate equal representation (Cascajosa-Virino, 2017), contributing positively to the #TimesUp movement, with women in leadership roles both as protagonists and behind the scenes. The test application confirms that *The Bold Type* meets the necessary 50% requirements in most departments. However, there is underrepresentation in sectors traditionally associated with men, such as production leadership, editing, cinematography, sound, visual and special effects, and music, aligning with other studies such as that of Gutiérrez-San Miguel et al. (2021). Conversely, there are feminized departments, such as casting, costume design, and makeup. Despite their underrepresentation in these traditionally male-dominated sectors, the leadership and writing departments are predominantly female, providing the series with a distinct voice from its creator, Sarah Watson, and a female-driven team that crafts stories by, for, and about women.

3.2. Female sisterhood in personal and professional growth

The physical dimension of the protagonists (Table 3) reveals the presence of young/adult women (Jane, Kat and Sutton) and an adult woman (Jacqueline), with three instances of women of Caucasian origin compared with one African-American woman. These women share the common trait of conforming to the beauty standards imposed by the entertainment industry (Kornfield & Long, 2023). However, they are not depicted perfectly, nor do they use their attractiveness to achieve their goals. This distances them from the femme fatale, opportunistic woman, or objectified woman images commonly portrayed in female-centric television series such as *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004-2012), *Revenge* (ABC, 2012-2015), *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012), or *Pretty Little Liars* (Freeform, 2010-2017) (Morejón-Llamas, 2020), among others. Adena, a recurring character, is of Arab origin and beautiful. Perhaps the only woman who does not conform to traditional beauty standards is Sage, a journalist and colleague at Scarlet, who, despite appearing in more than 30 episodes, does not have storylines or significant interventions and, thus, is not considered by this analysis.

The protagonists use their clothing to express their emotions and personalities: Jane is sexy on the outside but shy on the inside; Kat is assertive, creative, and bold; Sutton is elegant, sweet, and self-assured; and Jacqueline is elegant, empowered,

decisive, and feminist. There are scenes discussing sexual assault, abortion, the glass ceiling, and feminist struggles where the protagonists use the colour red as a symbol of empowerment (e.g., S1E4, S2E1, S3E2).

The psychological dimension shows an excellent representation of extroverted women focused on their professional careers, such as Jane and Sutton. This allows the plots to delve deeper into their internal issues. On the other hand, Kat and Jacqueline exhibit an altruistic and committed focus, reflecting an understanding of their work and social responsibilities.

Table 3. Physical, psychological, sociological, and behavioural dimensions of the protagonists

Characters	Dimensions
Jane	P: Young/adult, Caucasian, very attractive, dresses sexy.
	PS: Introverted, reflective, sensitive, aims to become a good professional.
	S: Heterosexual, single, changing relationships, no children, high economic level, journalist, medium qualification.
	B: Discourses: feminism, sexuality, sexual violence, women's health. Attitude: negative, reactive, self-interested, emotional. Relationships: inclusive, passive.
Kat	P: Young/adult, Afro-American, attractive, dresses casually/sporty (sometimes with a masculine style).
	PS: Extroverted, perceptive, sensitive, altruistic.
	S: Queer, single, fluctuating relationships (infidelity), no children, high economic status, social media director, highly qualified.
	B: Discourses: feminism, sexual diversity, political activism, ethnic diversity, new technologies. Attitude: positive, proactive, altruistic, emotional. Relationships: inclusive, assertive.
Sutton	P: Young/adult, Caucasian, very attractive, dresses elegantly (with a softened style).
	PS: Extroverted, intuitive, perceptive, rising in professional hierarchy.
	S: Heterosexual, single/married, fluctuating relationships (infidelity), no children (one abortion), low economic status (high since marriage), fashion assistant, lower qualifications.
	B: Discourses: feminism, professional advancement, rejection of motherhood. Attitude: positive, proactive, interested, rational. Relationships: manipulative, assertive.

Jacqueline	P: Adult, Caucasian, very attractive, dresses elegantly.
	PS: Extroverted, perceptive, reflective, altruistic.
	S: Heterosexual, married/separated, stable relationship (with crises and an affair), two children, very high economic status, editor, executive.
	B: Discourses: feminism, violence against women, glass ceiling, work-life balance. Attitude: positive, proactive, altruistic, rational. Relationships: inclusive, assertive.

***Note: P=physical; PS=psychological; S=sociological; B=behavioural**

Source: own elaboration

Kat, a biracial and queer character, fits the neo-archetype of the fighter-heroine (Garrido & Zaptsi, 2021) who battles, challenges limits, and feels obligated to save everyone. Kat fights tirelessly for issues affecting her due to her biracial identity and sexual orientation. She begins as a “proud heterosexual” (S1E1) and evolves to identify as bisexual and later as queer throughout the series. Her struggle is intersectional, encompassing feminism (#MeToo, #TimesUp, #BodyPositive) and racism (#BlackLivesMatter), as mentioned in various episodes. Therefore, she focusses on cyberbullying, hate speech on social media, fear of women’s bodies, rights and equality, female political activism, the fight for creative freedom, ethnic diversity, and religious plurality.

Jacqueline, the boss, demonstrates an altruistic drive in her ability to contribute selflessly to the training of her employees at Scarlet, breaking gender stereotypes that associate leadership roles with female rivalry and portraying successful women as arrogant and authoritarian (Lacalle & Gómez, 2016). The archetype that Jacqueline represents is that of the female fighter-ruler (Garrido & Zaptsi, 2021) who can influence, dominate, and lead professionally and within her family. This breaks the negative representation of female executives in other audiovisual productions with similar themes, such as *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, 2006). Jacqueline is a boss, but above all, she is a woman who feels obligated to support her team so its members can soar. The three young adults support one another without judgement, work collectively against injustices, and help the others advance in their careers.

As we previewed with the character of Kat, *The Bold Type* presents a broad spectrum of sexualities (Lotz, 2001). The main plot points and resolutions are focussed on accepting one’s sexual identity and the uncertainties that arise during the recognition process. However, in the workplace and social spheres, normalization of the LGTBI+ community is assumed (Marcos-Ramos and González-de-Garay, 2021). Indeed, the plots focus on feelings, doubts, and decisions rather than community acceptance. This natural acceptance of diversity is highlighted by other male characters (often highly stereotyped), such as Olivier, the fashion director, and Andrew, the assistant director, who performs as a drag queen in his free time. Adena, Tya, and Eva, Kat’s partners, are depicted as powerful, hardworking, multiracial lesbian women.

Sexual experimentation involves two protagonists and situations: Jane, through her articles exploring sexuality, and Kat, who tries to answer her questions about her sexual identity through open, heterosexual, and bisexual relationships. In line with

Lacalle and Castro (2017), infidelity, a recurring theme in serial fiction, is portrayed in *The Bold Type* through three protagonists: Sutton and Jacqueline, with their ex-lovers, and Kat, for pleasure and experimentation. Romantic relationships are also fluid, showing complicated connections that evolve over the seasons. Despite their romantic and sexual experimentation, each character has a significant other: Jane has Ryan, Kat has Adena, Sutton has Richard, and Jacqueline has Ian.

The protagonists' high economic level promotes a consumer society through the tyranny of fashion, as seen in various serialized productions (Morejón-Llamas, 2020) and perfectly aligned with intensive neocapitalism. Jane, a journalist, and Sutton, a fashion assistant, exhibit a high standard of living that does not correspond to their incomes. In Sutton's case, this standard rises significantly after marrying Richard, a wealthy member of Safford Publishing –the parent company of Scarlet– highlighting not economic dependence, as she works, but an improvement in her financial situation.

The protagonists are portrayed as self-sufficient in their finances and work activities (Lacalle & Hidalgo-Marí, 2016). These women are successful in their jobs and grow thanks to their efforts, although it is more challenging for them to achieve success than it is for men, except in the case of Jacqueline. Additionally, they must make extra sacrifices to break the glass ceiling (Hidalgo-Marí, 2017). For example, when they reach management, they do not ascend to the next level, the Board, which has two women and approximately twenty men chair members. This is highlighted when Kat asks Jane, “What does it take to be a board member? Being bald, wearing tailored suits, juggling” (S1E6).

With respect to the attitudes of these four protagonists, there is a diversity in their behaviours, depicting a wide range of women who face life according to their resources and perceptions but always showcasing female empowerment through sisterhood. They discard the stereotype of the conflict-driven woman who needs to trample her rivals for professional advancement and who criticizes and belittles the work of other women. They even breakdown stereotypes such as victorious, arrogant, and tough women (Lacalle & Gómez, 2016).

These women are capable of marking their territory when their partners attempt to rescue, help, or defend them, deconstructing the image of the rescued-dependent woman present in patriarchal female archetypes. The help they reject from men is replaced by female solidarity, which buries the struggle exhibited in other television productions (Menéndez-Menéndez, 2014). Additionally, they are positive and proactive, solving their problems, taking the initiative, and opening debates, except for Jane, the young journalist whose life is constantly immersed in drama due to real problems –her mother's orphanhood, cancer predisposition, and double mastectomy– and who dramatized her personal and work situations. Jane fears change, doubts herself, and relies on others for reinforcement, demonstrating a reactive attitude.

In their relationships, they are inclusive, except for Sutton, who is not afraid to lie or do whatever it takes to achieve a fashion director position, including manipulation. She is also aggressive in her impositions, as nothing can stop her in her professional career, much like Kat, who aggressively fights to end social injustices, especially those concerning feminism, racism, or gender diversity. Although she always adheres to professional ethics, Jane shows self-interest when pursuing news stories. In contrast, Jacqueline, like Kat, is altruistic, inclusive, and assertive, naturally combining power and empathy, as previously mentioned.

Furthermore, there is a balance between the emotional women, Jane and Kat, and the rational women, Jacqueline and Sutton. This rationality leads them to reject love in favour of professional growth –Jacqueline with her marital crisis; Sutton, when she

decides to stay in Manhattan working, even though her fiancé Richard moves to San Francisco; or when she asks for a divorce because she does not want to be a mother.

3.3. New perspectives on fourth-wave feminism

The Bold Type initiates a current debate on women’s living conditions, inequality, and the violence they face in each of its episodes, bringing to light messages framed within the fourth wave of feminism (Aguilar-Barriga, 2020), explicitly referenced in S2E8. This is also evident in the pilot episode, where the production’s intention is stated through a line from Jacqueline, the boss, about Scarlet magazine: “We are a fashion magazine that talks about jeans, but those jeans that allow you to climb the world.”

Feminism, the central axis of the series, interacts with other social issues highlighted in movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #BodyPositive, occasionally transcending the screen. Aisha Dee, the actress who portrays Kat, voiced concerns on Instagram about the lack of LGTBI+ representation and multiracial equity in the artistic and creative teams, which hinders gender advancement in the final product. Social audience pressure on networks, supported by Dee, prompted the writers to create an alternative ending for the fourth season (Mullor, 2021).

The handling of feminist themes and discourses is always conducted with an informative, educational, and preventive tone, especially regarding issues related to sexuality and women’s health. It also adopts a cautionary tone when addressing the objectification of women on social media and in the new cultural industry.

Table 4. Themes and subthemes related to feminism

Themes	Subthemes
Professional career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work-family balance – Glass ceiling – Mobbing, workplace, and sexual harassment – Social implications and activism – Political implications
Sexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exploration of female pleasure – Satisfactory relationships – Polygamy – Female pornography – Dating apps as sexual enticement – Sexual diversity – Sexual objectification of women – Naturalization of bodies – Sexual activity in old age
Positive discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Gender: parity in companies, institutions, and politics; women’s associations – Cultural Origin/Sexual Identity: multiracial and sexual inclusion in companies

Women's health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medical care for women - Pink tax - Genetic mutation and predisposition to female cancers (breast, cervical, and ovarian) - Surgical approaches (mastectomy or double mastectomy, hysterectomy) - Sexually transmitted diseases - Menstruation - Menopause - Contraceptive methods - Abortion
Motherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single parenthood - Childbearing age - Postponement or rejection of motherhood - Egg freezing - Mental load - Economic limitations
Women on social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cyberbullying - Cyber aggression - Sexting - Hate crimes - Cyber chauvinism - Freedom of expression - Female discussion forums - Social networks as a source of income - Online activism
Lifestyle habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of sports - Promotion of healthy eating

Source: own elaboration

Women in *The Bold Type* face various obstacles in their professional careers, ranging from family-work balance to seemingly unbreakable glass ceilings. These barriers include workplace mobbing and harassment perpetrated by cultural industry magnates, as well as sexual abuse in the workplace. These elements not only limit women's professional growth but also reflect a social reality where power and control are used to intimidate and silence them. Additionally, the series highlights the limitations women face in social movements and political careers, where patriarchal structures and a lack of institutional support hinder their progress and visibility.

The series examines female sexuality openly and progressively. It addresses the exploration of female pleasure and depicts satisfying relationships (Kornfield & Long, 2023). At times, it promotes polygamy, steering away from the myth of romantic love (the myth of marriage or the myth of exclusivity) (Rebollo-Bueno, 2023) and advocating for openness in romantic and sexual relationships. It also focusses on pornography aimed at female audiences and the use of dating apps as a means of sexual exploration. Furthermore, it addresses sexual diversity and the objectification of women, challenging traditional norms

and promoting the normalization of bodies and sexual activity in old age. This approach contributes to a more inclusive and realistic representation of female sexuality tied to liberal feminism.

In *The Bold Type*, positive gender discrimination is intersectional, converging with the multiethnicity and sexual diversity inherent to racial and postmodern feminism. The series advocates for parity in businesses, institutions, and politics and highlights the importance of female associationalism related to radical feminism. It also focusses on multiracial and sexual inclusion in the workplace, promoting a more diverse and equitable environment. These efforts are essential to combat inequality and create opportunities for all women, regardless of their background or identity.

The series opens a debate on various aspects of women's health, from medical assistance and the pink tax to genetic predispositions to certain cancers (such as breast, cervical, and ovarian cancer) and the necessary surgical approaches (mastectomy, hysterectomy). Topics such as sexually transmitted diseases, menstruation, menopause, contraceptive methods, and miscarriage are also discussed, although the debate on the voluntary termination of pregnancy is not open. Sexually transmitted diseases are discussed in an informative tone, as are the ailments that women suffer during menstruation or the sensations and challenges they face during menopause. This comprehensive approach allows for a greater understanding of women's unique health challenges.

Motherhood is another crucial theme, exploring single parenthood's economic limitations and difficulties. The series delves into the pressure of the fertile age, postponing motherhood, the decision not to have children to pursue a successful career, and egg freezing as a solution to this internal debate that forces women to choose between family and work. Additionally, the emotional burden and guilt many women feel when delegating functions are highlighted. These narratives reflect the complexities and difficult decisions many women face, helping them understand low birth rates and increased maternal age.

Social media plays a significant role in the lives of *The Bold Type* characters, serving as both a platform for empowerment (cyberfeminism) and a space of vulnerability. The series addresses cyberbullying, cyber aggression, sexting, and hate crimes, as well as online misogyny. It also discusses the limitations of publishing about female bodies (such as the #FreeNipple movement) and female conversation forums. At the same time, it shows the potential of social media to economically and socially empower women, offering a platform for self-expression and connection.

Fiction promotes healthy lifestyle habits, such as exercise and healthy eating. Through characters like Jacqueline, who is often shown exercising in her office, the series emphasizes the importance of running, yoga, and Pilates. The need to maintain a balanced diet is highlighted, with frequent examples of salads and healthy meals. These habits contribute to physical well-being and reinforce the idea of self-care and personal empowerment. Despite this, during moments of emotional destabilization, the characters resort to junk food and alcohol as a means of release, another film cliché that associates binge eating with emotional problems (Hundley, 1995).

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instability, the characters turn to junk food and alcohol as a means of release, another film cliché that associates binge eating with emotional problems (Hundley, 1995).

In addition to its feminist themes, *The Bold Type* employs inclusive vocabulary, using concepts such as intersectional feminism, patriarchy, empowerment, gender issues, and new terms that appeal to identification, such as cisgender, transgender, queer, and pansexual. The challenge is reflected in the protagonists' mobilization, for example, when they expose their breasts to protest Instagram censorship in S1E6 and denounce sexual abuse and assault in S2E1, "Carry the Weight," and S2E6, "The Domino Effect." As Kat states in S1E9, "There is no feminism without intersectionality." Therefore, feminism converges with xenophobia (questioning immigration, rejecting the use of the hijab, executing deportations, granting dual citizenship, issuing work visas, stigmatization, and association with conflict, police repression attitudes) and sexual diversity (new gender identities, new sexual identities). The #BlackLivesMatter movement is also reflected, demonstrating once again the thematic intersectionality between feminism and multiculturalism (Garrido & Zapsi, 2020; Lotz, 2001).

Additionally, the series addresses the sacrifices of motherhood, the biological pressure on women, and the high cost of freezing eggs and postponing motherhood due to the labour market. Abortion is discussed from a different, more sensitive perspective. However, the conservative perspective (Hidalgo-Marí & Palomares-Sánchez, 2020) depicts involuntary pregnancy termination instead of the protagonist's voluntary decision –Sutton does not want to continue because she fears that it will hinder her professional career, so when she miscarries, she feels relieved. The innovation lies in her friends' sisterhood, understanding her, not judging her, and liberating her, portraying friendship as a safety net.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Drawing on Lotz's (2001) approach and Eagly's social role theory (1987), we consider that *The Bold Type* breaks some gender stereotypes by producing substantial changes in the roles of these women, as well as in their relationships with other women and men. It is a feminist and transgressive series in terms of how it represents its protagonists in their psychological, sociological, and behavioural dimensions, although less so in the physical dimension due to its lack of diversity, in contrast with productions such as *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-2019) (Martínez-García and Aguado-Peláez, 2017). While the protagonists are beautiful women, they do not take advantage of their looks; in fact, they worry about how others perceive their career advancements owing to their attractiveness, thereby ending the stereotype of the opportunistic sexual object. Additionally, the series' emphasis on the protagonists' high standard of living and the trivialization of consumption (Morejón-Llamas, 2020) prevent viewers from seeing women in different socioeconomic contexts and link success with wealth creation, subordinating the construction of new identities to the capitalist interests of television (Bonavitta and De-Garay-Hernández, 2019; Kornfield and Bassett, 2023).

Despite this, the series can be considered feminist owing to its narrative strategies related to issues such as sisterhood, the economic independence of its protagonists, the work context they focus on, and the protests and mobilizations that showcase a commitment to sexual and gender diversity, multiculturalism, and feminism (Garrido and Zapsi, 2021). Notably, the only lesbian relationship in the series portrays a powerful but complex couple, with the weight of all the themes introduced by

the intersectionality of third-wave feminism and the violence against women of the fourth wave falling on their characters (Garrido-Rodríguez, 2021).

In this sense, *The Bold Type* offers a multifaceted conception of female representation, with an unwavering sisterhood as the central theme (Cuenca-Orellana and Martínez-Pérez, 2020) in both personal and professional terms. The protagonists are able to balance their families and personal and professional lives in line with new serialized productions (Lacalle and Hidalgo-Marí, 2016), although they are not portrayed as tireless superwomen (Hidalgo-Marí, 2017), as they sometimes sacrifice their family or relational lives to focus on their work. The workspace ultimately behaves as a key place for female empowerment, even if it requires, or the protagonists choose, sacrifice in certain areas of their private lives (Fegitz, 2023). In this context, Jacqueline embodies one of the most transgressive characters; despite being the magazine's editor, she is not depicted as a perfect woman who manages everything. This is reflected in the series through a marital crisis, her husband's ability to commit to her dedication to work, and her lack of presence at important family moments.

Although progress is evident, there are still stereotypical relationships, such as the impossibility of friendship between men and women, the association of success with infidelity, or relationships between an older man and a younger woman. As a result, some romantic relationships remain toxic and complicated. These women are portrayed as sexually liberated, with an active sex life not always tied to romantic relationships and seduction, as shown in other content (Lacalle & Castro, 2017). However, they still desire to be loved, professing the "myth of romantic love" (Cambra-Badii et al., 2019), an issue already noted by Gavilán et al. (2019), whose interviewees criticized the protagonists' need to resort to romantic relationships as a source of happiness. This is also seen in series aimed at adolescents, portraying female characters with self-perception issues (Valenzuela-Monreal et al., 2023: 16).

The themes introduced in *The Bold Type* surpass those of previous productions by addressing issues through dissemination and prevention, for example, when they expose one of the protagonists to breast cancer (Lacalle & Gómez-Morales, 2018) or other sexual health issues, such as sexually transmitted diseases, menstruation, contraceptive methods, egg freezing, or abortion (Hidalgo-Marí & Palomares-Sánchez, 2020). Other topics related to sexuality, such as female pleasure, sexual boundaries, experimentation, pornography, and dating apps, as well as those denouncing sexual assault, abuse, and rape, are also addressed. The series portrays sexual predators and the bravery of victims with great honesty. It provides information and encourages debate through dialogues and storylines highlighting reproductive rights, the importance of consent in relationships –promoting a culture of respect and open communication– and the power of cyberfeminism to amplify voices and create networked support.

The storylines are contextualized by fourth-wave feminism and characterized by the fight against violence towards women (Donstrup, 2022). This is evident when situations arise where the protagonists must deal with inappropriate behaviour in the workplace, illustrating not only the personal and professional impact of harassment but also the importance of solidarity and mutual support among women to confront and overcome these situations. The series portrays the abuse of power in all spheres while showing how the protagonists navigate these dynamics, seeking justice and holding their harassers accountable. This is closely related to the social and political activism in the series (Kornfield & Long, 2023), which aims to raise awareness and mobilize through collective action to eradicate violence against women.

The series also reflects gender parity, emphasizing equality in the workplace. The storylines highlight the protagonists' efforts to achieve equal pay and parity in leadership roles. This includes fighting against glass ceilings and promoting an inclusive and equitable work environment, demonstrating that feminism is practised in and through work: "They strengthen the cultural discourse that work is meaningful and, thus, sacrificing one's private life in labour –and time– intensive careers is not only worthwhile but also morally preferable" (Fegitz, 2023:13). *The Bold Type* strives to represent women in positions of power and leadership, highlighting the ability and competence of women in roles traditionally dominated by men. This approach not only challenges gender stereotypes but also inspires female viewers to aspire to similar roles. It addresses intersectionality by showcasing the diversity among its female characters, including women of different racial backgrounds, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic contexts, characteristic of postmodern feminism (Donstrup, 2022).

The need to monitor the evolution of women in serialized productions is undeniable, as is examining new masculinities, which introduce a renewed worldview featuring "sensitive, understanding, advisory, caregiving, affectionate, patient men who also engage in domestic work" (Contreras & Alfaro-Beracoechea, 2021: 303), which is also observed in *The Bold Type*. Despite the limitations of this study, we foresee a female projection free of stereotypes on and off screen, owing to the inclusion efforts in casting and creative and technical teams, contributing to new and positive modelling of roles and stereotypes for audiences.

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6. Conflict of interest

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