

Serial Imaginaries.

Gender, Young Audiences and the Negotiation of Diversity in the European Mediascape

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Introduction

In recent years, serial drama has been increasingly credited with a meaningful role in how young Europeans encounter and make sense of gender (Díaz-Fernández, 2022; Masanet, Ventura & Ballesté, 2022). At the same time, younger generations are often described as the most open and inclusive audience for these narratives, almost as though progressiveness were a generational given (Deželan, 2024). Both observations capture something real, and both have rightly attracted growing scholarly and public attention. Yet they also invite closer scrutiny, particularly when considered together rather than in isolation. This special issue takes this interplay as its starting point, moving from the assumption that gender issues, serial dramas and young audiences are deeply interrelated dimensions of a single cultural process, in which each term takes shape through its relation to the others.

This perspective responds to a precise transformation of the contemporary European mediascape, in which serial drama has become one of the dominant forms of entertainment and, at the same time, a space where social norms are negotiated rather than simply

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transmitted (Lynch, 2021; Ragone, 2026). It also resonates with a policy environment in which the European Union has progressively come to regard audiovisual culture as a strategic resource for advancing gender equality – a framing whose considerable potential is accompanied by no less significant tensions (Ross & Padovani, 2016).

The contributions gathered in this issue originate from the international conference *GEMINI-SCAPES. Detecting the Interplay between Serial Dramas, Gender Issues and European Young Audiences* (Rome, 10–11 April 2025), which brought together scholars from cultural and media studies, television and screen studies, gender studies, audience and production studies, and media literacy. Conceived as the closing act of the GEMINI project,

¹ the conference offered an occasion to draw together the strands of three years of research and to test them against a broader, international horizon of debate – one in which Humanities and Social Sciences met around a shared object, bringing their different methods and sensibilities into dialogue. All the contributions engage with this twofold horizon: on the one hand, they explore how gendered imaginaries are produced and received within European serial culture; on the other, they reflect on the assumptions – concerning authenticity, diversity and the presumed progressiveness of the young – on which that culture, and its governance, increasingly rely.

This double movement – serial culture as a site both of representation and of reception – is condensed in the image on the cover of this issue. Its visual concept turns on the idea of *dual screening*: on one side, realistic stills from popular serial dramas appear on traditional and digital screens; on the other, the young audience is rendered through illustration, a deliberate inversion that blurs the boundary between fiction and reality and casts viewers not as passive spectators but as active participants, absorbed in the second-screen practices of smartphones and tablets. The series are not chosen at random: they are the titles most frequently named by the young participants in the project's focus groups, and, in keeping with GEMINI's intersectional approach, they hold gender-related issues together with the wider dimensions of diversity – race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, ability, age. Spanning televisions, laptops and mobile phones, the image captures the multi-platform environment in which young Europeans now negotiate gender across screens.

Gender issues, serial drama and young audiences: why it makes sense (and is necessary) to study interdependencies

The case for studying these three terms together rests on a simple observation with significant implications: each acquires its specific contemporary form through the other two. “Serial drama” is not an inert container into which gender content is poured. As Sulimma (2020) argues, gender in serial narratives is best understood not as a static attribute of characters but as a serial process – something continuously negotiated through the very affordances of the form, its extended duration, its ensemble configurations, its shifting

focalisation, its capacity to reiterate a norm across dozens of episodes and then, slowly, to bend it. The long arc that allows a character to come out, to fail, to be reabsorbed into a romance plot, or to remain unresolved is not a neutral vehicle for a gender theme; it is the gendered work of the text. This is why a representational reading – counting who appears and how they are labelled – captures only part of what serial drama does with gender (Spalletta, Hansen & Re, *forthcoming*).

Conversely, gender is one of the engines of serial drama itself. The dialectic of repetition and innovation that Eco (1984) identified as the basic mechanism of serial pleasure is, in much contemporary teen and young-adult drama, organised around the negotiation of gendered roles, desires and conflicts within a social microcosm – the school, the peer group, the family (Barra, Hipkins, O’Rawe & Renga, 2025). Gender supplies the recurring tensions that a serial form needs to keep going; seriality supplies the temporal depth that allows those tensions to be experienced as development rather than as statement. Neither term is prior to the other.

The third term, youth, is what turns this formal interdependence into a question of social consequence. Young audiences are more than a demographic that happens to watch a great deal of serial drama. Adolescence and early adulthood are life stages defined by intensified self-definition, moral positioning and relational experimentation, in which cultural texts function as symbolic tools for exploring values and rehearsing possible identities (Aubrey et al., 2024). Serial narratives, with their recurring characters and open-ended arcs, are unusually well suited to this work: they allow viewers to accompany figures through doubt, transformation and contradiction over time, in a rhythm that mirrors their own development. The encounter between young viewers and serial gender imaginaries is therefore not incidental to either party. It is, for a significant part of a generation, one of the ordinary settings in which gender is learned and negotiated (Driscoll, 2011; Marghitu, 2021).

Crucially, this learning is neither linear nor guaranteed. Recent European evidence complicates the comfortable assumption that younger generations are uniformly more inclusive: openness coexists with ambivalence, polarisation and backlash, and the same platforms that enable feminist mobilisation and queer affirmation also circulate anti-gender rhetoric and masculinist subcultures (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Hines, Cuthbert, Hall, & Sharon, 2024). Young audiences are not passive recipients nor automatically empowered agents, but situated interpreters – members of interpretative communities (Fish, 1980) whose readings take shape dialogically in classrooms, friendship networks, family exchanges and online interaction. The pathway from exposure to awareness, and from awareness to engagement, runs through these social settings; it cannot be read off the text alone (Spalletta, Ferrigni & De Rosa, *forthcoming*).

This is where the interdependence becomes genuinely transmedia, and genuinely European. The negotiation of gendered meaning increasingly unfolds beyond the moment of viewing, across the convergent spaces – social feeds, fan forums, short-form video, memes, peer recommendation – in which serial storylines become shared cultural references (Jenkins, 2006). And it unfolds unevenly: across the differentiated welfare regimes, educational systems, religious legacies and public discourses that make “Europe”

a stratified rather than a homogeneous cultural space (Walby, 2005; Verloo, 2007). Studying the interplay of gender, serial drama and youth thus means studying it comparatively, attentive at once to transnational convergences and to local inflections.

Two consequences follow, and they organise the theoretical sections that follow this one. First, if diversity has become the currency in which European audiovisual culture trades – valued by institutions as a democratic good and by platforms as a competitive asset – then we need to examine the conditions under which inclusion is produced, and at whose expense its appearance is sometimes secured. This is the problem of cultural diversity as a strategic asset in the platform society, to which the next section turns. Second, if young viewers reward representations that feel “unforced” and resist what they perceive as instrumentalised inclusion, then authenticity itself becomes a contested category, and the line between authentic representation and a merely cosmetic normalisation becomes one of the central analytical stakes of the field. That is the problem taken up in the third section.

Diversity on Demand: Cultural Diversity as a Strategic Asset in the Platform Society

On 11 September 2024, Ludovico Bessegato, creator and director of the Italian teen drama *Prisma* (2022-2024), announced in an emotional Instagram video that Amazon Prime Video would not renew the series for a third season. Co-produced by Amazon and the Italian company Cross Productions, and frequently compared to *Transparent* (2014-2019) and *Euphoria* (2019-), *Prisma* (De Pascalis, 2024; Vergari, D’Amelio, Re & Rossini, 2025; Barra, 2025) follows identical teenage twins, Andrea and Marco, exploring gender identity, fluid sexual orientation, and the experience of discrimination in the provincial town of Latina. The show was explicitly conceived around what Bessegato calls “Generation Prisma”: a generation for which the very concept of diversity no longer suffices to describe reality, better captured by the image of the optical prism breaking apparently white light into the spectrum of colours that composes it (Vivarelli, 2022).

The cancellation – announced while the second season’s cliffhanger remained unresolved and a fully written third season lay in a drawer – would be almost unremarkable as an industrial event. What makes it analytically valuable is the reaction it triggered. Within a short time, the hashtag #SavePrismaLaSerie was trending on X, also relaunched by lead actor Mattia Carrano, the American actor Kevin McHale and the fan account “best of heartstopper” (dedicated to the series of the same name, *Heartstopper*, 2022-24). A Change.org petition to renew the series for a third season gathered ten thousand signatures in a few hours. Crucially, fans framed their protest in explicitly moral terms: the petition asks Amazon to renew the series “so that it can continue to make a difference and challenge stereotypes”, educating the public on social issues and on the LGBTQIA+ community that other series avoid. Audiences here articulate, organically and from below, a conception of serial drama as a vehicle of social value – recognition, authenticity, education, voice in public

debate – rather than as entertainment inventory. One viral post on X described *Prisma* as the mirror of a generation, offering a representation too often denied on television; another fan recounted her mother being moved to tears by a character's coming out; comments on social media arrived from Brazil and Turkey, where LGBTQ+ viewers claimed the series as their own. At times, fans directly attacked the gap between platforms' inclusive rhetoric and their commissioning decisions, threatening to boycott Prime Video. This kind of moral battle between audiences and media companies has a long genealogy, echoing earlier conflicts over content availability and the ethical justification of digital piracy; what is new is that diversity, inclusion, and the corporate responsibility to sustain them have moved to the very centre of the struggle. The magazine *Wired Italia* also joined the conversation: journalist Paolo Armelli (2024) relaunched on social media his article "Prime Video cancella Prisma, ma in che direzione vanno le piattaforme streaming" [Prime Video cancels Prisma, but where are streaming platforms heading?] with the caption "the broken promises of streaming".

The case condenses, in miniature, the problem this section addresses: in the platform society, cultural diversity operates as a *strategic asset* of global streamers – and strategic assets are, by definition, disposable when strategies change (Re, 2026). To unpack this, it is useful to recall that cultural diversity is a multidimensional concept articulated across three interrelated dimensions (Napoli, 2011): *source diversity* (the variety of actors producing content), *content diversity* (the variety of content available), and *exposure diversity* (the variety of content actually consumed). The platform era has made the third dimension newly central: despite a growth in supplied diversity, audience attention concentrates on a handful of titles and operators, while algorithmic recommendation turns "discoverability" – the capacity of content to be found within complex information environments – into a site of political tension (Lobato, 2018; Lobato & Scarlata, 2022). The *Prisma* case touches all three dimensions at once. As source diversity: a local production whose fate depends on the portfolio logic of an American conglomerate, in a European SVOD sector where 84% of subscriptions belong to US companies (Iancu, 2024). As content diversity: a title repeatedly described as a milestone in the representation of adolescent and LGBTQIA+ experience in Italian audiovisual culture – "an Italy that exists, but that nobody tells", in Bessegato's words. And as exposure diversity: while the first season circulated globally on Prime Video, international rights for season two were transferred to Beta Film, drastically limiting its availability; fans pointedly asked how a show could be cancelled for insufficient viewership after being withheld – without English subtitles – from the international cult audience it had cultivated. Bessegato's own distinction between disappointing quantitative metrics and steadily growing social engagement exposes the pronounced asymmetry between the extensive "internal" availability of consumption data for platforms and the partial, opaque "external" availability of that data for producers, analysts, and publics.

The deeper issue, however, concerns the discursive work that global streamers perform with diversity itself. Extending Kohnen's (2015) concept of 'branded diversity' to streaming, scholars have shown how platforms – Netflix above all, as the model that competitors like Amazon emulate – valorise cultural difference as a marketing resource, exploiting the conceptual vagueness of 'diversity' to legitimise a global industrial strategy along three axes

(Asmar, Raats & Van Audenhove, 2023, 2025; Thuillas & Wiart, 2024). *Algorithmic diversity* reframes cultural pluralism as a technical functionality of recommendation systems; *globalised diversity* celebrates “local stories with universal value” while packaging local content according to globally monetisable aesthetic and narrative logics; *inclusive diversity* – assimilating the lessons of #MeToo and Black Lives Matter – turns the representation of historically marginalised groups into reputational currency and a lever for segmenting issue-sensitive market niches. Elkins (2019, 2021) has described this intertwining of progressive cultural liberalism and aggressive economic liberalism as a form of “streaming diplomacy”, a soft power agenda in which platforms operate as quasi-diplomatic enterprises. Within this regime, a series like *Prisma* is commissioned also *because* it embodies inclusive and globalised diversity – and within the same regime it can be discarded when it ceases to serve brand or subscriber objectives. European regulation, for its part, offers only partial counterweights: the investment and quota obligations of the AVMSD (Audiovisual Media Services Directive) have largely produced “strategic compliance”, whereby global platforms formally meet their obligations while integrating them into their own industrial goals, with effects of standardisation and dilution of the cultural identities those works are supposed to express.

What the *Prisma* fans intuited, in short, is the ambivalence pervading the global mediascape: diversity as a modular, commercial, and geopolitically oriented resource of global streamers – simultaneously a genuine vector of visibility for under-represented voices and an instrument of industrial expansion that abandons those voices when financial considerations take precedence. Recognising this ambiguity does not mean denying the positive effects of platform inclusion; it means interrogating the material and symbolic conditions under which it is granted, the metrics through which its value is decided, and the accountability that platforms owe to the publics their diverse stories address.

Representing gender issues: between authenticity and normalisation

As results from the GEMINI project suggest,² young European viewers prefer representations of diversity that feel unforced and authentic (Spalletta, 2024; De Rosa et al., *forthcoming*). This feeling of authenticity can be achieved when gender diversity is perceived as an embedded and natural part of the narrative, creating a sense of a normalisation of gender-related issues. Conversely, authenticity is challenged when serial dramas are perceived as overtly didactic with an overly conspicuous or forced inclusion of diversity. Young audiences do not want to feel that they are being educated, and they tend to be critical of what they perceive as excessive political correctness. Examples of serial dramas in which inclusivity is generally perceived as authentic include *Euphoria* (2019-) and *Sex Education* (2019-2023). These series were mentioned frequently across countries, highlighting how global streaming platforms create a common frame of reference. National serial dramas such as the Italian *Mare Fuori* (2020-), the Danish *Rita* (2012-2020), the Irish

Normal People (2020), and the Romanian *La Bloc* (2002-) were mentioned less frequently, but they still appear to be important for shaping more local perspectives on identity-related issues. Young viewers across Europe repeatedly argued that artificial representations of gender diversity have little impact on audiences like themselves and are often outright rejected. This suggests that authenticity is crucial when considering the influence of serial drama on young audiences' perception of gender equality.

Young people's attitudes towards gender are shaped by a complex interplay between broader contextual factors and key socialising agents, such as family, peers, and the media (De Rosa et al., *forthcoming*). While young audiences recognise the potential of serial dramas to influence collective perceptions of diversity and gender equality, it is striking that they simultaneously resist the notion that such content influences them personally. Nevertheless, the focus group data suggests more subtle forms of influence, particularly at an emotional level, as well as effects on trends, fashion, and behaviour.

To understand this discrepancy in relation to the importance of authenticity, Hansen and Jacobsen (*forthcoming*) suggest drawing on Roland Barthes' classic concept of *naturalisation* (Barthes, 1964) and Annette Hill's notion of authenticity as *emotional truth* (Hill, 2019) to extend Ien Ang's distinction between empirical and emotional realism (Ang, 1982). In her studies of serial drama and reality television, Annette Hill argues that perceptions of media content as authentic are grounded more in emotional than in factual truth. When viewers perceive emotions as genuine, they are more likely to regard a programme as authentic. The value of such content lies in its emotional significance, "where these series are meaningful to people's lives" (Hill, 2019, p. 139). The evocation of real emotions can contribute to a process of *naturalisation* (Barthes, 1964), as narratives resonate with shared understandings and experiences within a particular audience. Ang's (1982) distinction between empirical and emotional realism further demonstrates that a narrative need not appear empirically realistic to evoke authentic emotional responses. This distinction enables a differentiation between empirical and *emotional influence*, suggesting that "for young adult viewers the influence of serial drama lies less in altering explicit attitudes and more in triggering emotional responses that shape dialogue, foster identification, and inform everyday practices" (Hansen & Jacobsen, *forthcoming*). As further elaborated by De Rosa et al. (*forthcoming*), this perspective can be understood through the "minimal effects" paradigm (Klapper, 1960; Bennett & Iyengar, 2008), which suggests that media are less likely to produce substantial changes in beliefs or attitudes than to reinforce existing orientations. This also resonates with W. James Potter's (2012) concepts of *affective effects* and *emotional triggering*, according to which media influence is not primarily reflected in observable changes in beliefs or attitudes, but rather in its ability to elicit emotional responses that may subsequently shape conversations, interpretations, and everyday practices.

Analyses of gender representation in serial drama, with a particular focus on the naturalised inclusion of diversity, are further developed in the special issue of *Academic Quarter*, "Gender Equality Training through Serial Drama" (2025). The issue examines series such as *Prisma* (2022-2024), *Un Professore* (2021-), *Sex Education* (2019-2023),

Derry Girls (2018-2022), *Normal People* (2020), *Euphoria* (2019-) and *Zusa* (2022-2024), among others, exploring their potential as pedagogical resources for fostering awareness of and reflection on gender equality. Several of these series are discussed further in the book *Young Adults, Gender Issues and Serial Dramas: Research-Action Approaches to Consumptions, Patterns and Teaching in the European Mediascape* (Spalletta, Hansen & Re, *forthcoming*), which also includes analyses of *SKAM Italia* (2018-2024), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), *Wednesday* (2022-), *Rita* (2012-2020) and others.

By bringing together concepts of naturalisation, authenticity, and emotional influence, the impact of serial drama on young audiences' perceptions of gender can be understood as a process in which it is crucial to resonate with their experience of authentic emotions while avoiding overly deliberate representations of diversity. Otherwise, representations of gender, sexuality, diversity, and equality risk being perceived as forms of instrumentalised inclusion, which often provoke irritation and resistance among audiences. Consequently, strategies for creating authenticity are highly dependent on the specific cultural and contextual characteristics of a target audience. This presents a significant challenge for practitioners, who have increasingly turned to co-creation processes as a means of understanding their audiences and producing content that conveys a genuine sense of authenticity (see also Redvall, 2024; Christensen, 2024; Jensen, Redvall & Christensen, 2023).

About this issue

The eighteen contributions gathered in this issue approach the interplay of gender issues, serial drama and young audiences from complementary angles. Rather than grouping them by national context – a choice that would have obscured the transnational circulation at the heart of the phenomenon – we have organised them into four movements that broadly follow the conceptual arc of this introduction: from questions of gaze and reception, through the politics of representation, to diversity within the platform economy, and finally to adolescence and the generational settings in which serial gender imaginaries are negotiated.

Gaze, reception and the European frame

The issue opens on the side of reception and the gaze, with studies that treat the encounter between viewers and serial narratives as an ethical and political process, not only an aesthetic one, and that read it against the differentiated map of European media systems. What is at stake here is how serial narratives invite identification, sympathy or distance, and how the audiences they imagine – together with the real young viewers who answer back – are shaped by nation, language and platform. Together these contributions establish the

comparative ground on which the rest of the issue builds, and a first reminder that ‘the young European audience’ is always a situated, plural construction.

Jono Van Belle and Maria Jansson ask how fiction may foster or diminish solidarity in the welfare state, analysing three Swedish crime series produced for different platforms – public-service SVT, commercial TV4 and Netflix. Drawing on feminist and cognitive film theory, they read structures of sympathy and the positioning of the gaze to reconstruct the audience each series imagines and the political work it performs in the streaming era.

Cathrin Helen Bengesser and Pia Majbritt Jensen focus on young audiences in the small Danish market, drawing on two qualitative audience studies to show how children’s and young adults’ tastes are at once highly personalised and markedly gendered. They reveal how individual preferences and the dynamics of co-viewing shape what young Danes choose to watch, and what this means for domestic producers competing with global platforms.

Raluca-Nicoleta Radu draws on focus groups with Romanian teenagers and interviews with upper-secondary school teachers to examine how international serial dramas reshape symbolic gender boundaries in a conservative Eastern European context. She finds that young viewers hold markedly more open views on gender than their families or communities – views fed largely by social media and streaming drama, in the absence of spaces to discuss these issues openly.

Romana Andò and Danielle Hipkins read the mother-daughter relationship as a cultural construction rather than a natural bond. Setting interviews with Italian adolescent girls – who idealise the mother as strong, present and authoritative – against Italian films and series in which mothers appear absent or fragile, they trace how layered media models have redefined what mothers and daughters are allowed to be.

Representing girlhood and femininity

A substantial body of work concentrates on the representation of the feminine across the life course, where the tension between authentic representation and cosmetic normalisation is at its most visible. Moving from adolescent girlhood to mature adulthood, these contributions show femininity less as a theme that serial drama depicts than as a terrain it continuously reworks – across genres, platforms and generations, and increasingly beyond the screen, in the discursive spaces where women contest and rewrite the models offered to them.

Maria Elena D’Amelio and Nicoletta Marini Maio examine how three Italian teen dramas – *Baby*, *Skam Italia* and *Nudes* – construct girlhood as a mediated performance organised by shame. Combining production history with close textual analysis and feminist affect theory, they argue that the adolescent girl’s affective precarity is not incidental to platform culture but constitutive of its commercial logic.

Paola Brembilla and Stefano Guerini Rocco compare how girlhood is represented across Rai’s linear prime-time television and its digital-first platform RaiPlay. They show how prime-

time productions remain bound to co-viewing and pedagogical imperatives, while RaiPlay enables more youth-centred, intersectional and empowerment-oriented narratives addressed to Gen Z audiences.

Antonella Mascio and Simona Tirocchi trace the growing complexity of female characters across *Orange Is the New Black*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Fleabag* and *Bridgerton*, focusing on the figure of the anti-heroine. They show that female representation follows no linear path of emancipation, and that serial drama works as an informal pedagogical device calling for a critical gender media literacy.

Paola De Rosa and Anne Marit Risum Waade, reading *Borgen – Power & Glory* (Netflix–DR, 2022) within the Nordic noir tradition, trace the trajectory of Birgitte Nyborg as she returns to high office in her fifties. Through her story they detect how the legitimacy of female leadership is narrated at the intersection of gender and ageing, under conditions of overlapping crises.

Silvia Pezzoli, Marina Brancato and Niccolò Sirleto examine how voluntary non-parenthood is constructed across television series and digital communities, analysing a corpus drawn from TV-related subreddits and r/childfree. They find that serial narratives still frame non-motherhood as lack or failure, whereas online childfree communities function as counter-spaces in which it is named and normalised as a positive biographical choice.

Diversity, platforms and transnational circulation

A third movement turns to diversity as it is produced and circulated within the platform economy – the problem foregrounded in the second section of this introduction. Here diversity appears not as a self-evident good but as a contested category: claimed in promotional discourse, unevenly distributed across the screen and behind it, and shaped by the asymmetries of a system that presents itself as global. These contributions ask who is made visible, on whose terms, and at what cost to the structural inequalities that visibility can obscure.

Mariagrazia Fanchi, Guglielmo Pescatore, Valerio Moccia, Greta Iapalucci, Chiara Giaculli and Lorenzo Cattani present the *E|Quality* project, a multi-level, mixed-methods study of exclusionary dynamics in the Italian screen industries across labour structures, on-screen representation and audience reception. Analysing funding calls, production companies and over twelve thousand television episodes, they show how a persistent gender gap survives behind a surface of “precarious diversity” and performative inclusion.

Massimiliano Coviello and Arianna Vergari analyse the representation of disability – at its intersection with gender – in Rai productions between 2015 and 2022, reading the series *Blanca* and Federico Bondi's film *Dafne*. Drawing on feminist disability studies, they show how disabled female subjectivity becomes a terrain on which public service media stage competing models of legitimacy, authenticity and social responsibility.

Ariela Mortara and Geraldina Roberti examine *Nudes*, the Italian adaptation of a Norwegian format produced by Rai Fiction, as a case study in how serial drama narrates

non-consensual intimate images and digital violence. They show how the unauthorised circulation of intimate content carries sharply gendered consequences, exposing a double standard that turns young women's bodies into objects of constant self-monitoring – in dialogue with the reading of the same series offered earlier by Marini Maio and D'Amelio.

Ilaria A. De Pascalis and Lucia Tralli follow queer coming-of-age narratives across European television, focusing on the *SKAM* format and on *Un professore*, the Italian adaptation of the Catalan *Merli*. They show how national specificities shape representation while queer experience works as a unifying framework, allowing viewers to form intimate publics that cross linguistic and national borders.

Camilla Folena and Valeria Donato examine the transnational circulation of non-Western dramas on Netflix, where gender operates not as a thematic layer but as a deep narrative dimension of power. Adopting a deliberately de-Westernised, intersectional approach, they resist measuring gendered “progress” against implicit Western benchmarks, attending instead to subjectivities embedded in different models of authority and belonging.

Adolescence, generations and the negotiation of meaning

The issue closes by returning to the young audiences at the centre of the GEMINI project, and to the settings in which they make serial drama their own. If adolescence is a condition of transition and uncertainty, serial form – open-ended, repetitive, unresolved – is uniquely suited to inhabit it. These contributions explore the sense of connection that serial narratives offer to young people, and how both young people and their elders negotiate gender through them.

Marta Boni turns to the French series *About Sasha* (Chair tendre, 2022), reading adolescence through queer theory as a non-linear “becoming” made of awkwardness and “minor feelings” rather than tidy progress; her analysis foregrounds characters who resist binary norms and the “sideways growth” through which serial narrative and adolescence share a common uncertainty.

Emiliano Ilardi and Alessio Ceccherelli read the teen dramas of the last fifteen years as the record of a “spatial withdrawal” of adolescence, in which the street gives way to bedrooms, school corridors and platform interfaces. Tracing this shift through the digital mediasphere and the early capture of youth by informational capitalism, they treat the adolescent imaginary as a symbolic infrastructure that renders new conditions of growing up narratively plausible.

Stefania Antonioni and Chiara Checcaglini examine how contemporary teen dramas increasingly hybridise with other genres and adopt intergenerational frameworks, in a partial industrial retreat from youth-centred storytelling. Drawing on focus groups with high-school and university students, they show that young viewers – particularly girls – are critically aware of the adult gaze embedded in series ostensibly made for them.

Silvia Leonzi, Giovanni Ciofalo and Lorenzo Ugolini close the sequence by asking how “old” series and “young” generations meet in the re-figuration of gender values. Situating

popular culture within processes of deep mediatization and platformisation, they interrogate its waning capacity to sustain the construction of collective identities, intergenerational dialogue and a shared “we-sense”.

Taken together, these contributions confirm the premise from which this issue set out: that gender issues, serial drama and young audiences cannot be understood apart from one another. Read across the four movements, they show serial culture as a space in which gendered imaginaries are at once produced, circulated, contested and reworked – by industries and platforms, by narratives, and by the young viewers who are too often imagined as their passive or progressive recipients. What emerges is neither a celebration of serial drama as an engine of equality nor a dismissal of it as a vehicle for soft normalisation, but a more demanding picture, in which authenticity, diversity and inclusion are contested achievements rather than settled goods, unevenly realised across Europe’s differentiated media ecologies. If the young are indeed the drivers of change that policy discourse hopes for, these essays suggest that the change runs through the serial narratives they watch, share and argue over – and that taking those narratives seriously, in all their ambivalence, is one of the tasks this field can no longer postpone.

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Notes

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can contribute to gender equality, and sought to empower young people to become, in the project's own terms, 'gender equality ambassadors' in everyday life. The project was deliberately designed around young audiences as its protagonists, both reflexively (what they think about gender, and through which representations they form their attitudes) and actively (young people as drivers of change), within an overall research-action approach that progressively translated research findings into educational practices. It was carried out by a consortium spanning four European geographical and socio-cultural areas (Mediterranean, Northern, Anglo-Saxon and Eastern Europe), which allowed the project to treat Europe not as a single market for gender-equality messaging but as a differentiated terrain in which shared commitments are translated, negotiated and at times resisted within distinct institutional ecologies. More information in <https://gemini.unilink.it>.

² This conclusion is based on findings from a qualitative empirical study comprising 15 focus group interviews conducted across four participating countries – Ireland, Italy, Denmark and Romania – involving 190 upper secondary school students aged 15-20. For further information, see Spalletta 2024 and De Rosa et al., *forthcoming*.