

# UNSUITABLE JOBS FOR WOMEN

A mixed methods approach  
to analyse women's employment  
and female representation  
in Italian TV crime dramas

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# aims & methodology: a two-fold perspective

## research questions

- How do crime narratives address gender equality issues from the behind-the-scenes and on-screen perspectives?
- Can a sample analysis targeting a specific case study provide general trends as analyses of broader datasets do?

This report analyses from an intersectional perspective **the portrayal of female characters and women's employment in key behind-the-scenes roles** in Italian TV crime dramas distributed from Fall 2015 to Summer 2022.

The research has **two main goals**: first, it aims at understanding how crime narratives address the gender equality issue from a two-fold perspective (behind-the-scenes and on-screen); second, it aims at understanding *if* and *how* a sample analysis, targeting a specific case study, can provide general trends such as those coming from the analysis of broader datasets.

# aims & methodology: why crime dramas

- Crime narratives provide the opportunity to analyse mainstream productions and popular narratives; as argued in *Transnational European Television Drama* (p. 223), “crime drama [...] is clearly the most popular genre across Europe” and it “serves as a lens through which to observe the local, national and even transnational issues that are prevalent in a society” (*European television crime drama and beyond*, p. 1).
- The crime genre has been investigated by a **rich tradition of feminist cultural and media studies** that have explored the role of women as creators, characters, and consumers of crime narratives. In this respect, the crime genre has represented a privileged perspective to observe changes in gender roles, both in society and fictional worlds, and particularly the relationships between the representation of female investigators and changes in female condition in the broader socio-cultural context, especially in the workplace and domestic spaces.



\* We have considered all the Italian TV series labelled as “crime” and “thriller” (or in Italian *giallo* and *poliziesco*) in the IMDb or, even otherwise labelled (e.g., “action” or “drama”), referable to “crime fiction” as a pragmatic set of features and expectations shared by producers and viewers and displayed in promotional strategies.



# aims & methodology: why 2015-2022

- The **time frame** allows comparing the evidence of this research with data provided by EAO (European Audiovisual Observatory) about the presence of women among six audiovisual professional categories in TV fiction with a first broadcast or release in the EU27 plus UK between 2015 and 2020 (G. Fontaine, *Female audiovisual professionals in European TV fiction production - 2020 figures*, EAO, 2022).
- **2015 stands out as a turning point** in the innovation processes implemented by Rai, the Italian PSB and leading provider of TV series, to respond to original productions by linear and non-linear pay-TV players (Sky, Netflix, Amazon) and to the increasing circulation of production and narrative models from other European countries, and especially Nordic countries.



# aims & methodology

## corpus

- ✓ 7 television seasons
- ✓ 62 crime dramas
- ✓ 1158 credits
- ✓ 1353 characters

## sample methodology

Sample analysis (S01E02): we focused on the **second episode of season 1**.

This choice allows focusing on the first season of each series (which stands for the “original crew”) while considering how season premieres or pilot episodes, as well as season finales, may differ from regular season norms.

### References:

M.M. Lauzen, *Boxed In 2019-20: Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television*, 2020

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, *Women Over 50: The Right to Be Seen on Screen*, 2021

# Analysed corpus

**First release:** when (before/since Fall 2015) and on which channel/platform (Rai, Mediaset, Sky, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video)

**Production and format:** if it's an international co-production, an original production, a literary adaptation (from a female or male novelist), or a remake; the episode duration (less/more than 65')

**Setting:** the period (present or past - before the 2000s) and the main location where the story unfolds

**Narrative form:** episodic or serial narrative\*

**Protagonist(s):** male-based, female-based, duo-based or team-based (ensemble)\*\*

\*The binary distinction between long-term arc storytelling and stand-alone episodes refers to the form prevailing in every TV series and doesn't strictly categorize it. In fact, in current practice, the two forms are increasingly combined, and especially the "mystery of the week" traditional model is now commonly associated with a more or less complex and relevant horizontal storyline.

\*\*The female- and male-based models do not necessarily imply the identification of a single lead character.

# corpus | first release

time  
distribution

BEFORE

23%

fall  
2015

14

SINCE

77%

6

8

6

4

4

10

10

channel  
platform



57%



26%



11%



3%



3%

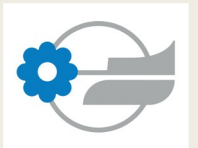


59%

50%

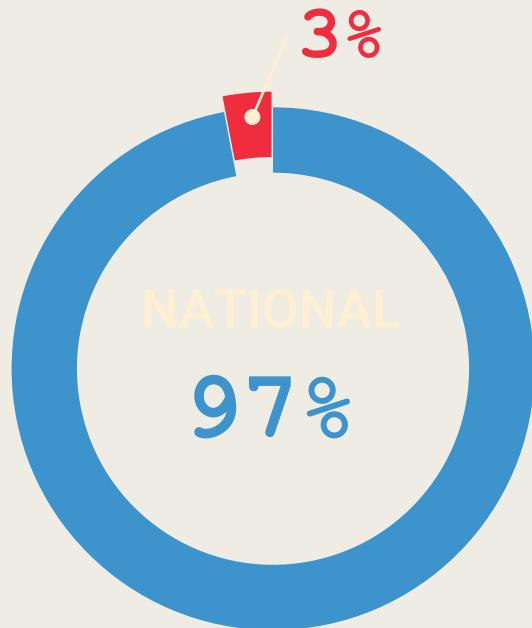
36%

23%



# corpus | production & format

## production



### CO-PRODUCTIONS



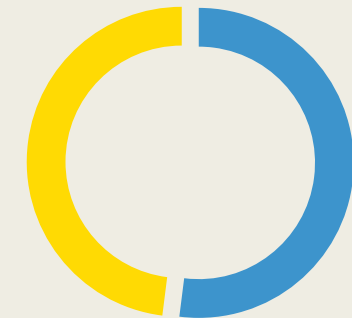
IT-FR-UK



IT-SP

## episode duration

SHORTER  
THAN 65'  
48%



LONGER  
THAN 65'  
52%

### BEFORE / SINCE 2015

29%

71%

54%

46%



# corpus | production & format

novelists

60%

ORIGINAL

35%

LITERARY  
ADAPTATION

5%

REMAKE



71%



29%



# corpus | setting

time

PRESENT

90%

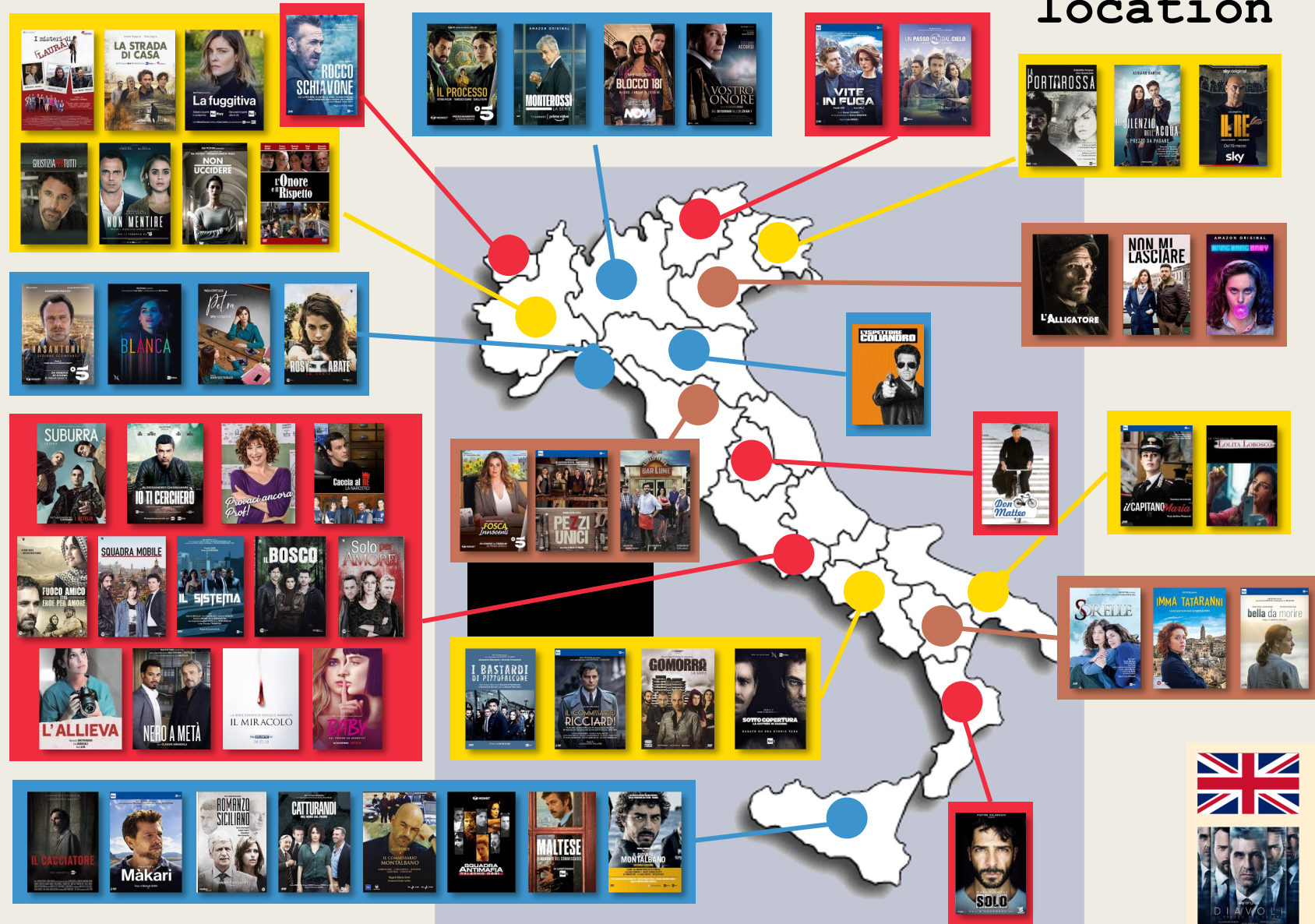
10%  
PAST

NARRATIVE  
CHOICE

REAL  
EVENTS

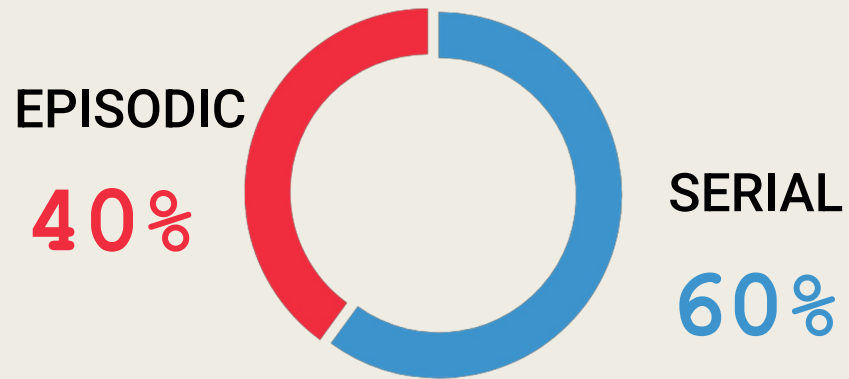


location



# corpus | narrative form & protagonist

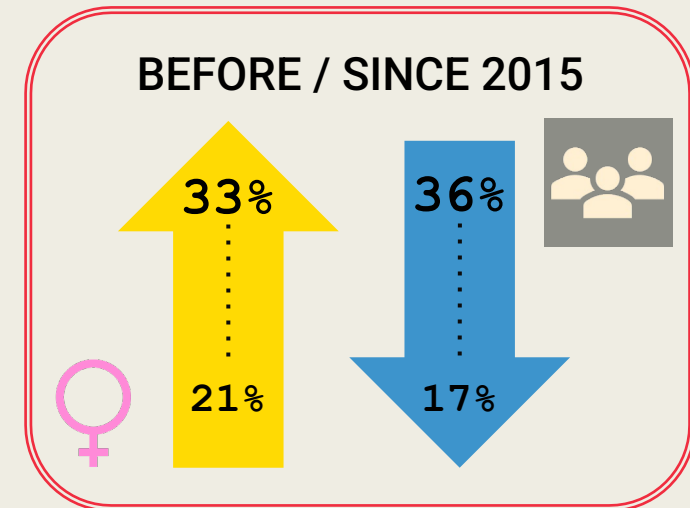
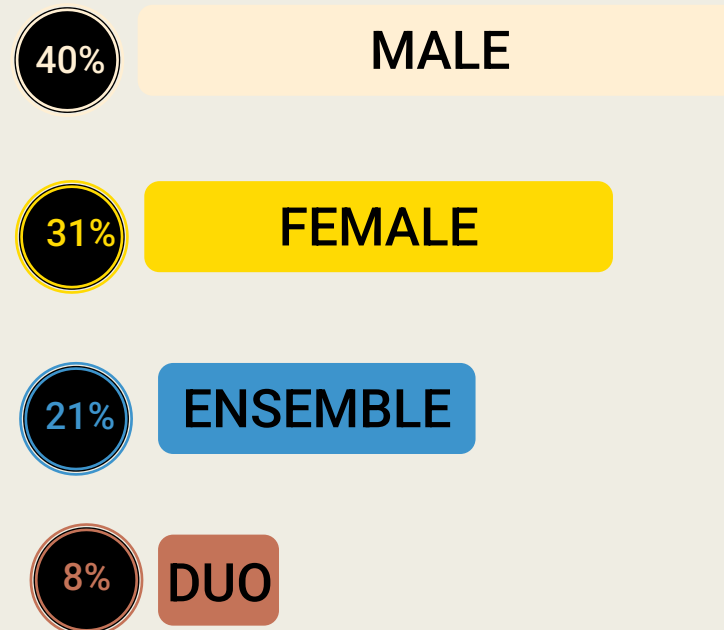
## main narrative form



BEFORE / SINCE 2015



## protagonist



# behind-the-scenes perspective

## Women's employment in the crews

At at this level of analysis, based on the interpretation of the credits, it is impossible to distinguish between sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.

The distinction between female/women professionals and male/man professionals was made based on the credited personal name and the sex with which this name is commonly associated in Italian culture. This choice in no way entails a binary approach to gender issues. Only further qualitative research, based on surveys and semi-structured interviews with professionals, could make it possible to investigate, also from the behind-the-scenes perspective, the relations between sex/gender identity/sexual orientation, and how these aspects impact the working conditions in the audiovisual sector.

**Above-the-line roles:** director(s), writer(s), delegate producer(s)\*

**Below-the-line roles:** cinematography, music, sound, editing, costume design, production design, make-up artist, special/visual effects, casting

**Main producer(s)**

**Producer(s) for the commissioner**

**Data source**

Opening credits, integrated when needed with final credits or the information provided by the IMDb.

**Parameters**

Total tracked credited roles (1153): how many women are overall involved in the crews in comparison with men?

All the analysed crime dramas (62): how many TV series involve women in their crews?

\* The high heterogeneity in crediting the various producer figures, which describe equally diverse production practices, made it necessary to make some methodological choices. As we wanted to focus on figures with decision-making and supervising roles, we distinguished between the main producer(s) (that is, the financial supporter[s]), his/her main delegate(s) (in Italian *produttore delegato* or *produttore esecutivo*), and the producers representing the commissioner (i.e., the channel/platform of the first release, which is also the major funder).

# behind-the-scenes perspective

overall data  
(intersex: NA)



69%



31%



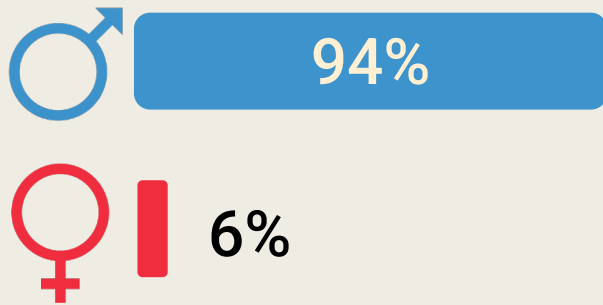
no women  
in the crew





# above-the-line roles

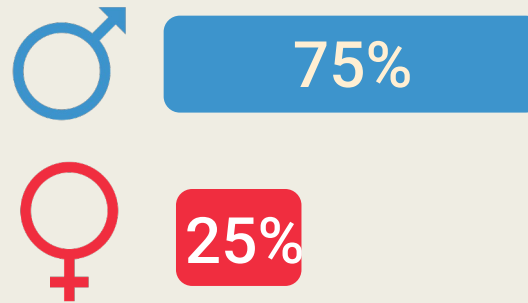
## director(s)



3 FEMALE DIRECTORS  
FOR 4 TV SERIES

3 IN 4 SERIES:  
FEMALE DIRECTOR  
+ FEMALE PROTAGONIST

## writer(s)

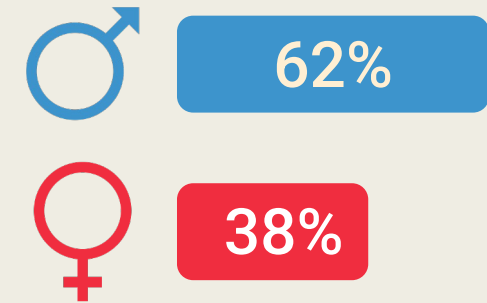


32 IN 62 SERIES:  
AT LEAST 1 FEMALE WRITERS

2 SERIES WRITTEN  
ONLY BY WOMEN

WRITING TEAMS:  
MALE MAJORITY

## "delegate" producer(s)

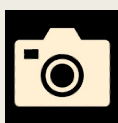
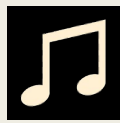


20 IN 43 SERIES  
WITH DELEGATE PRODUCERS:  
AT LEAST 1 WOMAN

# below-the-line roles

mainly performed  
by men

99%



87%



ONLY 1 SERIES CREDITS  
WOMEN IN SOUND, MUSIC  
AND CINEMATOGRAPHY

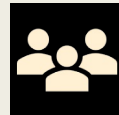
9 OF 62 SERIES:  
AT LEAST 1 WOMAN  
AS EDITOR

mainly performed  
by women

84%



75%



71%



53 OF 62 SERIES:  
AT LEAST 1 WOMAN INVOLVED  
IN COSTUME DESIGN

50 SERIES: FEMALE PRESENCE  
IN CASTING ROLES

roles  
"in transition"

32%



[21 / 62 series]

26%



[15 / 52 series]

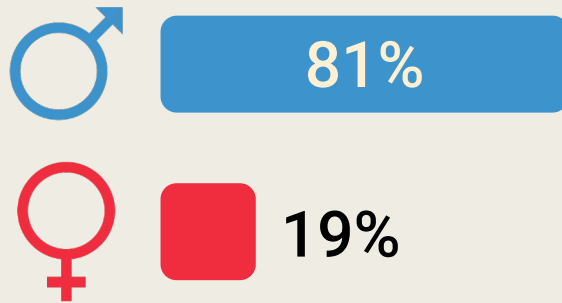
BEFORE/SINCE 2015:

PRODUCTION DESIGN:  
FROM 20% TO 35%

VISUAL/SPECIAL EFFECTS:  
FROM 0% TO 31%

# production roles

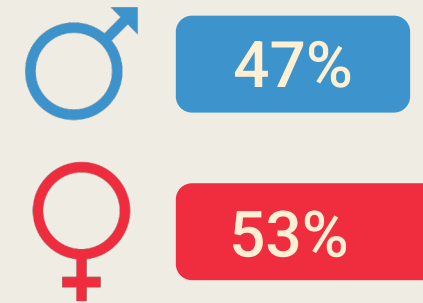
## main producer(s)



SINCE 2015:  
FEMALE MAIN PRODUCERS  
DROPPED FROM 32% TO 15%

21 IN 58 SERIES:  
AT LEAST 1 WOMAN  
AS MAIN PRODUCER

## producer(s) for the commissioner



SINCE 2015:  
FROM 71% TO 48%

34 IN 44 SERIES:  
AT LEAST 1 WOMAN  
AS PRODUCER FOR THE  
COMMISSIONER

# Data comparison (behind-the-scenes)

	Women directors	Women screenwriters	Women cinematographers	Women composers	Women producers
This study	6%	25%	1%	1%	38% delegate producers 53% producers for the commissioner 19% main producer
EAO 2022	10-15%	30-35%	0-5%	0-5%	30-35% producers
Boxed In 2019/20	30%	36%	8%	n.a.	39% producers

See: G. Fontaine, *Female audiovisual professionals in European TV fiction production* 2020 figures, EAO, 2022

M.M. Lauzen, *Boxed In 2019-20: Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television*, 2020

# On-screen perspective

**Sex:** female, male, intersex

**Gender identity:** man, woman, trans man, trans woman, genderqueer (non-binary)

**Sexual orientation:** asexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian, heterosexual, pansexual

**Age:** children (0-13), youth (14-18), young adult (19-30), adult (31-50), older adult (51-70), senior (over 70)

**Race and origin:** White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, interracial. To provide insights about the most represented race (White) in Italian society, we have distinguished based on geographical origin between Italy, Southern Europe, Western/Northern Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia, Latin America, Northern Africa and the Middle East

**Sentimental status:** happy stable relationship, troubled relationship, divorced, widowed, extramarital relationship(s), casual relationships, single

**Occupational status** (for female characters only)

**Relevance in the narrative:** recurring characters (lead[s], co-lead[s], supporting), episodic characters (major, minor) and one-line characters\*

**Role in the crime narrative:** professional detective, amateur detective, private detective, victim, criminal, coroner, lawyer/prosecutor/judge. Professional detectives have been further distinguished between main, assistant, and supervisor.

\* The main distinction between **recurring** and **episodic** characters corresponds to the distinction between serial and episodic narratives, but the increasingly complex forms of hybridization between the two narrative models make this a challenging methodological issue. **Leads** are the recurring characters from whose perspective the story is told, while **co-leads** represent important yet complementary viewpoints on the story being told. **Supporting** characters are instrumental to unfolding lead(s) and co-lead(s) storylines. For episodic characters, the distinction between **minor** and **major** corresponds to the relevance of their role in the episodic plot. Finally, every character who speaks at least one line or whose role is only instrumental in unfolding a scene is codified as **one-line**.



# On-screen perspective: methodological challenges

The sample analysis implied several challenges in coding sexual orientation, occupational status, sentimental status, and the specific role with respect to the crime narrative (e.g., the criminal, the victim, the detective).

Regarding this latter variable, the single episode coding could lead to erroneously codified roles especially for serial narratives, where the identity of the villain (criminal), for instance, may not be revealed until the end of the season, and the victims may increase as the episodes unfold. We therefore agreed to complement the viewing of the episode with information on the complete storyline.

The variables of sexual orientation, occupational status and sentimental status pose more complex methodological issues. In many cases, viewing a single episode does not allow one to acquire the needed information, nor can this gap be filled simply by viewing the whole season. Moreover, these variables may evolve in parallel with the plot, and this evolution doesn't always follow a linear pattern (from A to B). Consequently, we decided to exclude these variables from the quantitative analysis and to analyse them at a later stage based on a qualitative approach.

# on-screen perspective

## Sex and gender identity

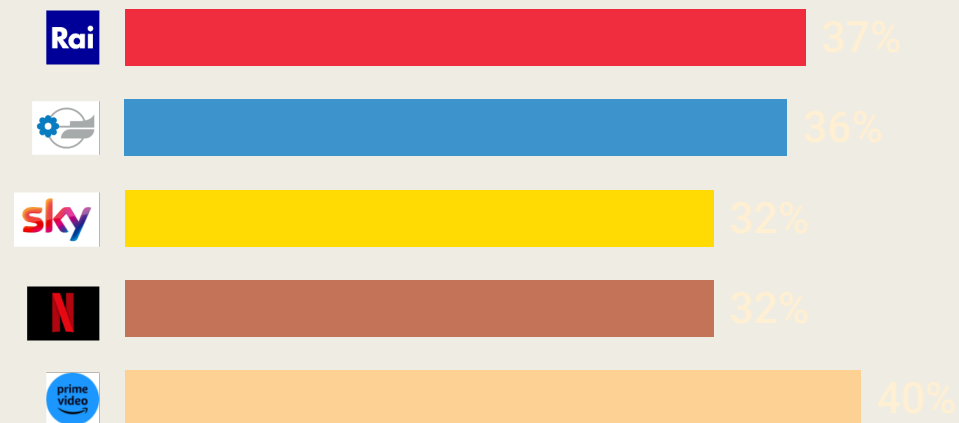
There are only two cases of trans women, while for all other characters sex matches with gender identity - with no gender transitioning represented in the corpus.

However, it should be pointed out that a strict classification of *Il commissario Ricciardi's* Babinella as a trans-woman is problematic for two main reasons: first, this character corresponds to a typical figure of traditional Neapolitan popular culture, that of the *femminiello* (literally 'little woman-man'), which is difficult and perhaps inappropriate to define based on contemporary western categories such as sexual orientation and gender identity; secondly, *Il commissario Ricciardi* is a period drama set in the 1930s fascist Italy. It is therefore problematic to use it with respect to contemporary concerns about the representation of diversity in gender identities and sexual orientation.

## overall data by sex (intersex:NA)

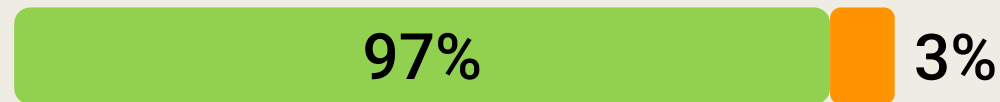


## CHANNEL/PLATFORM



# on-screen perspective

overall data by sexual  
orientation



CHANNEL/PLATFORM

Excluding characters coded as 'one-line' and characters belonging to the 'children' age group, the percentage of characters whose sexual orientation can be inferred from viewing the sample episodes is 67%. Of these, asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, and pansexual characters account for 3%.

# characters overview

## race & origin

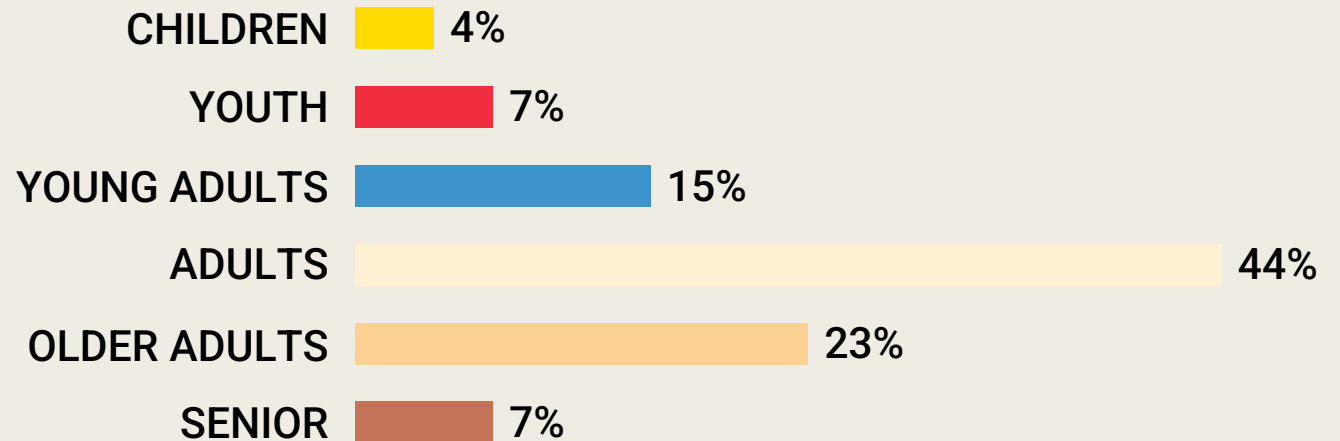
98% WHITE

93% ITALY

BLACK OR ASIAN PERSONS  
IN RELEVANT ROLES:  
ONLY 2+2 SERIES

OTHER ORIGINS: EASTERN  
EUROPE/RUSSIA AND  
WESTERN/NORTHERN EUROPE

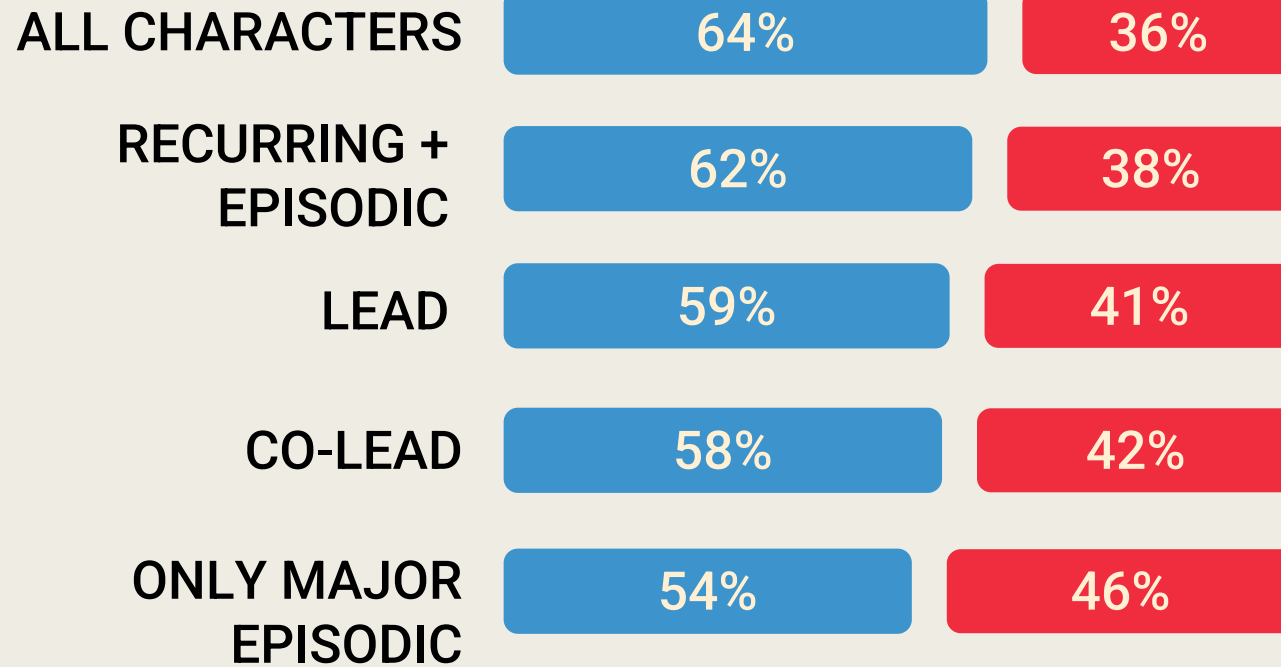
## age



MALE OLDER ADULTS VS.  
FEMALE ONES: 28% VS 16%

FEMALE YOUTH AND YOUNG  
ADULTS: 10% AND 17%  
(4% / 13%)

# relevance in the narrative



NO MALE OR FEMALE  
SENIOR LEADS

NO YOUTH MALE LEADS

NO FEMALE OLDER ADULTS  
LEADS

ADULT LEADS: 54% VS 46%

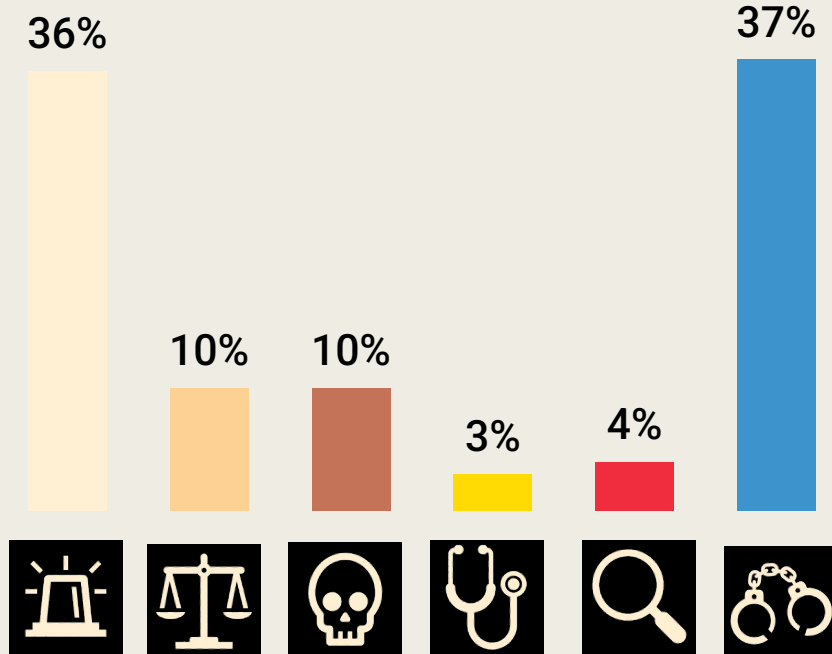
YOUNG ADULT LEADS:  
43% VS 57%



# female crime characters

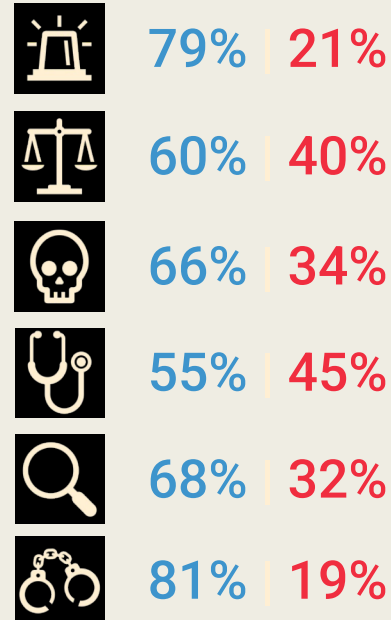
45%

CRIME CHARACTERS



25%

ONLY FEMALE ONES



professional  
detectives

22%

MAIN

57%

43%

63%

ASSISTANT

83%

15%

SUPERVISOR

94%

# Data comparison (on-screen)

	Female characters	Male characters
This study	36%	64%
Boxed In 2019/20	43% [all programmes]	57%
Rai 2021	41,9% [Rai TV fictions]	58,1%
Netflix 2021	41,1% [TV series]	58,9%

See:

M.M. Lauzen, *Boxed In 2019-20: Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television*, 2020

S.L. Smith et al., *Inclusion in Netflix Original US Scripted Series & Films*, 2021

Rai, *Monitoraggio sulla rappresentazione della figura femminile*, 2022

	Female leads/co-leads	Male leads/co-leads
This study	41,5%	58,5%
Boxed In 2019/20	45% (major characters)	55%
Rai 2021	47,1% (central roles) 36,5% (relevant roles) [all programmes]	52,3% 62,3%
Netflix 2021	54,5% (of TV series)	55,5%
EAO 2022	43% (European average)	57%

# five takeaways

## Gender equality and diversity in Italian TV crime dramas

1. **Behind-the-scenes employment:** despite some positive trends, strong gender inequalities persist, especially in top positions - women only 19% of main producers.
2. **On-screen representation:** substantial lack of diversity regarding gender identity, race, origin, and age - gendered ageism. Shares of female and male leads/co-leads aligned with the international scenario, yet in crime narratives leadership positions and power continue to be almost exclusively held by men.
3. **Sample methodology:** most data and trends consistent with analyses of larger datasets. Original findings may extend beyond the boundaries of the crime genre.
4. **Diversity & inclusion behind-the-scenes:** further qualitative research is needed to investigate the relations between sex/gender identity/sexual orientation, and how these aspects impact the working conditions in the audiovisual sector.
5. **Diversity & inclusion on-screen:** further qualitative research is needed to investigate how sexual orientation, occupational status and sentimental status are represented in TV dramas.



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