

8. When Medical Drama Meets Teen Drama

Youth and Mental Health in Italian TV Series

Chiara Checcaglini

◀ ABSTRACT

One issue that the pandemic has helped publicly reveal as particularly pressing is mental health, which has progressively occupied more space in a variety of audiovisual narratives in recent years.

Some Italian TV series are trying to overcome stereotypical and inaccurate representation of mental health and counterpose more nuanced storyline to stereotypical and stigmatizing depiction of mental illness, through some structural and narrative recurring features: first, the Italian way to address mental health with more care and thoughtfulness is making it the main subject of the series; second, this intention is achieved by setting the stories in psychiatric hospitals; third, the preferred protagonists for this kind of stories so far are young boys and girls.

This article will focus on three Italian TV series, Mediaset *Oltre la soglia*, Rai teen series *Mental* and Netflix drama *Tutto chiede salvezza*, to reach two purposes. On the one hand, to highlight the distinguishing traits of these TV shows with respect of the three recurring features mentioned above. On the other hand, to investigate the relationship of these series to medical drama: what is consistent with the genre, and what instead is distancing these series from it, such as the unbalanced focus on patients over doctors.

KEYWORDS

Medical drama; teen drama; mental health; teenagers; TV series.

Introduction

The topic of mental health has gradually taken space in the attention of TV series creators and audiences. Over the past decade American TV shows have started incorporating mental health issues and mental disorders into different genres and different types of narratives: a relevant example is musical comedy *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (The CW, 2015-2019), but we find dramatic and emotional storylines also in the animated sitcoms *BoJack Horseman* (Netflix, 2014-2020) and *Big Mouth* (Netflix, 2017-), and teen dramas *Thirteen Reasons Why* (Netflix, 2017-2020) and *Euphoria* (HBO, 2019-); mental disorder and trauma is also central in the characterization of some female protagonists, like superheroes Jessica Jones (*Jessica Jones*, Netflix, 2015-2019) and Wanda (*WandaVision*, Disney+, 2021), and Carrie Mathison from the spy-thriller *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-2020).

Unlike American TV shows, Italian series that deal with mental health as a main narrative core usually share two features: first, the mental health topic is developed within the frame of the hospital drama,¹ or, as we will see, some variations of it; second, the characters that deals with mental disorders in serial narratives are mostly young people.

This chapter stems from two research topics combined: first, my collaboration with the University of Urbino's research unit of the Italian State-funded PRIN project (*NEAD*) *Narrative Ecosystem Analysis and Development Framework: A Systemic Approach to Contemporary Serial Products. The Medical Drama Case*, a macro-level analysis of the medical drama genre focused on the geographical areas of China, the U.S., Italy; and second, my interest in teenagers' representation in Italian teen series, specifically girls. This chapter will investigate the intersection between medical dramas and teen dramas,

¹ With some exceptions, like teen drama *SKAM Italia*'s storyline involving Niccolò's disorders.

where we find the narrativization and representation of mental health issues, recurrently associated with Italian adolescence and youth. Moreover, the hospital frame allows to reflect on the formal and content boundaries of the genre of medical drama.

I will focus on three Italian TV series that share youth's mental health as their main subject, although they differ in format, tone and, of course, plots. The TV series are: *Oltre la soglia* (Canale 5, 2019), *Mental* (RaiPlay, 2020) and *Tutto chiede salvezza* (Netflix, 2022-).

Oltre la soglia revolves around a child psychiatry Emergency Room, supervised by Doctor Tosca Navarro (Gabriella Pession), who practices an effective though unconventional approach to the care of her underage patients. Each episode features a new young patient, while also delving into the group dynamics of the ward. *Mental* follows four teenagers who are hospitalized in the same psychiatric facility: Nico (Greta Esposito), Michele (Romano Reggiani), Emma (Federica Pagliaroli) and Daniel (Cosimo Longo), all experiencing different mental health issues. *Tutto chiede salvezza* is centered on the period of forced hospitalization and compulsory medical treatment (known as TSO – Trattamento Sanitario Obbligatorio) of a young man, Daniele, after a violent outburst of rage directed at his parents.

While *Oltre la soglia* is a medical case-based drama, *Tutto chiede salvezza* is the adaptation of Daniele Mencarelli's autobiographical novel of the same name; *Mental* is the one among the three that meets the most the definition of teen drama.

The aim of this analysis is to underline recurring traits and differences in Italian series about mental health issues, stressing how the youth angle gives a specific tone to the storytelling and the development of the characters' path.

Doctors and Teen Patients

Pescatore and Rocchi (Pescatore and Rocchi 2019, Rocchi 2019) argue that medical drama, as a genre, is marked by formal and content characteristics. Formal characteristics include the environment of the hospital, that works as a microcosm, and an ensemble cast “where different characters face various situations and have to make complex choices (both on a professional and sentimental level)” (Pescatore and Rocchi 2019: 108), in a way that is similar to that of other ensemble, workplace-based genres, such as legal dramas. The environment of the hospital can be a broad,

complex setting with various sectors, or it can be limited to a specific, single hospital ward. The hospital is “a microcosm that replicates bigger social organizational systems” (Pescatore and Rocchi 2019: 108), with its own hierarchies, roles and forms of power; it also has the ability to immediately define the characterization of its protagonists: doctors, nurses, residents, patients (Rocchi 2019).

As for the content characteristics developed by the storytelling, they can be categorized based on the prevalence of medical, professional or romantic relationships in the plotlines: the medical cases plot, the professional plot and the sentimental plot (Pescatore and Rocchi 2019). This structure leaves room for variations in terms of rhythm, character development, relation to reality, as well as for the elaboration of social issues and fragments of current events through the filter of specific illnesses and conditions in patients. This description is particularly suitable for American medical dramas, that follow a structured production-distribution schedule and are often able to incorporate into the episodes relevant events happening in the present; however, some Italian medical dramas follow this model too: for instance, *Medicina generale* (Rai1, Rai3, 2007-2010), an Italian response to the *ER* model, or the recent *Doc – Nelle tue mani* (Rai1, 2020-).

Like for other televisual genres, the multiplication of serial products, and the subsequent push to diversify, produced some attempts to try to complicate narrative aspects, like the link with reality or the aim of authenticity on a narrative level. This happens in *Doc – Nelle tue mani* with its storylines about Covid-19 pandemic, but also the three series I mentioned all fit into this trend: indeed, a crucial aspect that may explain the recurring correlation between mental health stories and young characters in TV series is the alarming deterioration of young people’s mental health in recent years (Bidoli 2023). This state of events has worsened with the pandemic, a period of which much accurate data is still lacking, but studies were already signaling this worrying trend prior to 2020 (Da Rold 2022).

The representation of mental disorders in fiction is a topic that has been discussed and researched in both the field of communication (Pirkis et al. 2006) and the field of psychiatry (Benbow 2007). Researches demonstrate the influence of media in the negative perception of mental disorders and mental health professionals in the public opinion. Specifically, these studies underline how the generally stereotypical and negative depiction of the categories of characters with mental illness and of characters-psychiatrists, have contributed to foster damaging stigmas around people with mental

disorders. Schneider (1977, 1987) developed a categorization of on-screen mental health professionals that has since been referred to in many articles on the same topics. Often the problem is the recurring presence of stereotypes and simplifications for narrative and filmic purposes: Pirikis et al. argue that “various ‘framing’ techniques are used to indicate that characters with a mental illness are different from other characters” (2006: 528), such as strategies to signify the “difference” of these characters from the others, whether in negative terms – such as aggressiveness, dangerousness, self-obsession and lack of control as associated with mental illness – or positive terms – the tropes of the exceptional genius or the eccentric free spirit. In any case these characters are framed as ‘other’ from the ‘regular’ people, as separated from the social order. Another example of oversimplification in audiovisual media is the portrayal of treatments: traditionally, psychotherapy is the type of therapy that is represented the most in film and TV series, while drug therapy and medications have been traditionally invisible in fiction or associated with problematic behaviours.

Contemporary series seem to actively distance themselves from such overgeneralized representations to give a more authentic and accurate depiction of the experiences of the symptoms, the diagnostic process and the medical procedures, as well as the relationship between doctors and patients, and therapy. Medical treatments are much more present, discussed and problematized in Italian series too: both *Mental* and *Oltre la soglia* involve storylines about the use of psychotropic drugs as an essential part of the treatment, and about the dangers of suddenly quitting it.

The three TV series in question share an aspiration for authenticity, that has a concrete, practical consequence in the employment of consultants: Doctor Stefano Vicari, head of Child Neuropsychiatry at Ospedale Bambin Gesù in Rome, served as a consultant for *Oltre la soglia*; the Ospedale Bambin Gesù is also the set of *Mental*, written with scientific advice from resident psychiatrist Doctor Paola De Rose; Doctor Peppe Dell’Acqua, who collaborated with Franco Basaglia in drafting 1978 Law 180, worked with *Tutto chiede salvezza*’s writers.

Regarding the presence of teenage characters in these series, *Oltre la soglia* screenwriter Laura Ippoliti provides a starting explanation in an interview by Fabio Guarnaccia. Ippoliti argues that adolescence is a liminal moment, where girls and boys are still in time to prevent the disease from becoming chronic: “la mente è ancora in formazione, fluida, puoi confondere i

sintomi, alcune cose partono in un modo e diventano altro”² (Guarnaccia 2019). Ippoliti also mentions “protection factors” or “risk factors” that may influence the deterioration of a young person’s mental state: “una malattia mentale può non scatenarsi mai se viviamo in un ambiente sano, ricco di reti sociali che funzionano. Viceversa, ci sono ambienti che sin dall’infanzia traumatizzano, e l’assenza di assistenza affettiva e sociale può rendere manifesta la malattia nascosta”³ (Guarnaccia 2019). From Ippoliti’s words we see that, at least in the intentions of the writer, the connection between symptoms, social context, and disease development is quite clear.

Adolescence is also a challenging age: teenage life has been recurrently exploited for narrative purposes. It is a critical moment and a window where identity is still in the making, an age that traditionally provides many narrative possibilities in the form of the coming-of-age story.

As Catherine Driscoll points out, teen film as a genre is “popularly understood as a checklist in which few components are absolutely required but others are very common indeed” (2011: 65). It is filled with recurring tropes, like high-school setting, popular music, parties, peer groups, sexual or romantic interests, and features recurring categories of conflict and problems, such as struggle with parents, drug use, sex and virginity. The teen genre is easily contaminated with other genres, especially in serial narratives, and vice versa. In teen hybridisations with other genres some teen tropes may be maintained, others may be dropped, others may be rearticulated and repurposed.

Oltre la soglia, *Mental* and *Tutto chiede salvezza* include storylines and conversations about romance and sexuality; the high school environment is often addressed, although indirectly, as a tangle of social anxieties that trigger the mental distress of the characters: *Mental*’s Nico experiences several crisis that are revealed to be intertwined with the trauma of a sexual assault at a party with her schoolmates (01x06, *Risvegli*); *Oltre la soglia*’s Silvia explodes with rage that turns out to be a consequence of constant bullying and harassment at school, orchestrated by an “evil schoolmate” that will soon end up in the same psychiatric E.R. (01x03, *Silvia*).

² “The mind is still in formation, fluid, you may confuse the symptoms, some things start one way and become another” (my translation).

³ “A mental illness may never be triggered if we live in a healthy environment, full of functioning social networks. Conversely, there are traumatizing environments from childhood, and the absence of emotional and social support can make the concealed illness manifest” (my translation).

The pressures and expectations from family, and from adults in general, in the life of these teenagers are also explored in various cases in *Oltre la soglia*. Some psychotic episodes at the center of the medical case plots are found to be the result of symptoms' denial, often self-imposed, or to be triggered by the need to hide them in fear of the parents' reaction (01x02, *Dora*; 01x08, *Adila*). The connection between the adult world and the teenage world is often fractured, nonlinear, and marked by the adults' absence or incompetence. In *Mental*, for instance, the adults seem particularly distant and unaffectionate: Emma's unsympathetic mother (Milena Mancini) constantly minimize her daughter's troubles and blame her for them; Michele's reckless, immature father (Marco Cocci) is a liar and an irresponsible parent; but even the psychiatrist, Doctor Giulia (Anna Bellato) is distracted by her own mourning and personal problems. Driscoll also stresses the trope of crucial events as rites of passage in teen life:

The rite of passage operates in two ways for teen film. The first is as a ritual marking passage between different social states, like graduation ceremonies, or indicating an immanent change of this kind, like 'the prom'. And the second does not depend on any literal 'rite' and might be more properly called an 'experience of limits' (2011: 66).

On the one hand, passage in the age of adolescence is conceived as a sort of codified, institutional door from a state to another; on the other hand, passage is an area that deals with limits, boundaries, and their crossing.

Both versions of rites of passage are meaningful for these TV series. For the characters who experience a crisis that bring them to become patients, the rite of passage between social states corresponds to the passage from a state of uncertainty and danger – because there is no diagnosis yet – to one of confinement – because of the actual harm and pain the characters may suffer, or cause; again, a passage occurs from a state of constraint and rebuttal, to one of acceptance of their unique mental condition and multilayered identity, with the essential help of the surrounding characters, both doctors and other patients.

The passage as experience of limits also adequately describes one of the core themes of these series, that is the effort to stretch the boundaries between these young characters and an outside world that has a different conception of what is acceptable, functional, and what is not. Emphasis is indeed placed on the teaching-learning part of the relationship between doctors, caregivers, and patients: one of the characters' aims in all the three

series is to learn some strategies to function in a social system that is clearly not built to accommodate citizens with mental disorders.

As Timothy Shary argued about the cinematic image of young people in “youth films” of the 90s, also quoted by Driscoll (2011) and O’Rawe (2020), “the imaging of contemporary youth has become indicative of our deepest social and personal concerns” (Shary 2002: 1). Social and personal concerns resurface in the inner and external conflicts of the young protagonists of *Oltre la soglia*, *Mental* and especially *Tutto chiede salvezza*: all three series deal with exclusion from society, stigmatization, the difficulties in building social relations, but they also try to narrate from a sympathetic perspective what it means to live lateral, divergent emotional experiences, although with different ambitions and outcomes. Particularly *Tutto chiede salvezza* stands out as an in-depth exploration of the sudden extraction from a society in which the protagonist thought to be a functioning subject, and the story subsequently plays on the fear attached to the loss of control and tries to deconstruct it.

I will now examine in more detail the three series *Oltre la soglia*, *Mental* and *Tutto chiede salvezza* to highlight the specifics of each, as well as recurring patterns and differences.

***Oltre la soglia*: Blurring the Line Between Doctor and Patients**

Produced by Paypermoon Italia, created by Laura Ippoliti and directed by Monica Vullo and Riccardo Mosca, *Oltre la soglia* is set in the fictional hospital Riccardo Cervi in Rome. It features an ensemble cast but the main character is Dr Tosca Navarro: besides being a capable psychiatrist with unconventional methods, Tosca suffers from schizophrenia, a detail she keeps hidden from her colleagues, apart from his friend and psychiatrist Dr. Alessandro Agosti (Paolo Briguglia). In the series, her condition is represented quite didactically by a psychotic projection of her fifteen-year-old self (played by Arianna Becheroni). The presence of Tosca’s teenage version provides a further connection point with her young patients: like them, Tosca discovered her mental disorder during adolescence, and the series suggests that Tosca is able to better understand them because she experienced the same struggles with ordinary life and social relationships. However, while her patients undergo a positive path of acknowledgment

and therapy, fifteen-year-old Tosca drives adult Tosca to erratic and dangerous behaviour.

The teenage patients are equally protagonists: depending on the length of their hospitalization, some patients recur in many episodes, while others' storylines are resolved in just one episode. This configuration provides time to develop different relationships and emotional connection in the viewers.

Of the three series examined here, *Oltre la soglia* is the one that most incorporates formal and narrative structures from the medical drama. Each episode begins with a teaser introducing the medical case: screen time is dedicated to the investigation of the symptoms and the formulation of a diagnosis, with Tosca Navarro and the other doctors frequently brainstorming, writing the symptoms of the newly admitted young patients on an iconic, omnipresent investigative tool: the board. Indeed, screenwriter Laura Ippoliti confirms that the character of Dr. Gregory House, played by Hugh Laurie (*House M.D.*, Fox, 2004-2012), has been quite influential in the writing of Tosca (Guarnaccia 2019). This link is even more significant because of the reversal of some gender conventions and the reestablishment of others. Tosca is a woman who embodies some characteristics usually attributed to men, like toughness and harshness; however, contrary to House, even though Tosca is a no-nonsense character, tough and direct, she is also absolutely capable of instant empathy towards her young, damaged patients. Moreover, House experiences his own issues with addiction and the deterioration of his mental state. Not surprisingly, in the same interview Ippoliti also mentions Carrie Mathison, played by Claire Danes (*Homeland*), as another source of inspiration. In *Homeland* Carrie suffers from bipolar disorder while working as a Homeland security agent. Both *Homeland* and *Oltre la soglia* require a suspension of disbelief towards the implausible circumstance that Carrie and Tosca are able to work sensitive jobs hiding their mental conditions. This is played out as a source of inner conflict within the two series, which ask viewers to sympathize with two very skilled "difficult women"⁴ in roles of leadership, threatened by their own mental state, because their neurodivergence is incompatible with their line of work.

⁴ As opposed to the "difficult men" investigated by Martin (2013).

Mental: Teenagers on the Edge

As mentioned before, of the three TV series, *Mental* is the one that leans more toward teen drama than medical drama, if we consider its narrative frame and the centrality of the four main teen characters. Produced by Rai Fiction and Stand By Me, directed by Michele Vannucci and written by Laura Grimaldi and Pietro Seghetti, *Mental* is based on the Finnish format *Sekasin* (Yle Arena, Yle TV2, 2016), thus joining other Italian teen dramas adaptations from Scandinavian products, such as *SKAM Italia* (TIMVision, Netflix, 2018-) and *Nudes* (RaiPlay, 2021).

Compared to *Oltre la soglia* and *Tutto chiede salvezza*, *Mental* is less ambitious in narrative terms. The episodes are shorter (25 minutes) and it is mainly set in one place, the psychiatric facility where the four protagonists are hospitalized, each one experiencing different symptoms and disorders: Nico often suffers from hallucinations and from panic attacks; Emma suffers from eating disorders and has a complicated relation with her body image and sexuality; Michele has symptoms of borderline personality disorder and is addicted to narcotics; Daniele is bipolar and has obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Mental is completely centered on the four teenage characters, with the exception of a nurse and a doctor, the latter slightly more multifaceted and provided with a hint of backstory (although her personal trauma is not particularly explored). This central core is reflected in the formal style of the series, constructed around close-ups and visual effects, as well as the use of a very mobile camera to enhance the feeling and the visualisation of obsessive thoughts and psychotic behaviours. The result is a series of episodes that are fast-paced and seemingly designed for binge watching – in fact *Mental* was released all at once on RaiPlay. If we consider *Mental* plot turns and situations, realism does not seem to be a priority for the authors, compared to emotional and visual incitements: the adults are kept out of the picture or described as particularly irresponsible and unable to care for their children; the four girls and boys are constantly plotting and manage to escape more than once, as if there were no control systems – while in *Oltre la soglia*, for instance, monitoring systems and rules are often shown or referred to. The characters' intertwined storylines evolve following a linear cause-effect progression, from past trauma to psychotic episode, to treatment: this structure better highlights the series' focus on emotions and reactions, but it leaves out the possibility of a systemic discourse about institutional and social failures of the healthcare system.

***Tutto Chiede Salvezza:* The Experience of Entrapment**

In *Tutto chiede salvezza* the day-to-day difficulties of healthcare workers are often referenced, along with the main storyline involving Daniele's treatment. Produced by Picomedia, *Tutto chiede salvezza* shows some distinguishing traits compared to the other two series: the author of the book that provided the source material, Daniele Mencarelli, was also involved in the writing of the series, along with Francesco Bruni, known for his film *Scialla! (stai sereno)* (2011) and for his work as screenwriter for Paolo Virzì's films; moreover, the main character, Daniele, is older than the teen patients of *Mental* and *Oltre la soglia*: being twentysomething, he is put in a different social position within the process of growing up, as well as within society, as evident at the beginning of the series.

Tutto chiede salvezza departs from medical drama characteristics both in contents and form, although it involves also doctors and nurses as secondary, and yet relevant, characters. First, the series has a definite structure composed by one episode for each of the seven days of Daniele's compulsory permanence in the psychiatric facility; second, the series focuses on Daniele's journey and his emotional bonding with the other patients, with little screentime dedicated to doctors and medical diagnosis others than Daniele's. More screentime is dedicated to therapy sessions, and to a romantic storyline that involves Daniele and a girl admitted to the women's ward of the same facility, Nina (Fotini Peluso).

Tutto chiede salvezza's storyworld develops almost entirely in the room where Daniele is confined, and from that room to a space of imagination where he and the other patients can evade their physical reality. Daniele shares the room with five other patients of various ages: Mario (Andrea Pennacchi), Gianluca (Vincenzo Crea), Madonnina (Vincenzo Nemolato), Giorgio (Lorenzo Renzi) and Alessandro (Alessandro Pacioni). The details about their diagnosis are scattered along the episodes and, deliberately, not always exhaustive: for instance, we know little about Madonnina's story. However, the thematic core is Daniele's relationship with the other patients and, consequently, with himself: Daniele's confinement starts with a furious distancing from his roommates, because Daniele's traumatic awakening triggers a violent denial, as he keeps repeating "I'm not like them"; over the course of the episodes, he proceeds to bond more and more with them as the story delves into every one's fragility and personal trauma.

Of the three series *Tutto chiede salvezza* is the one that presents more elements that are in line with the “quality drama” category: a structure that develops mostly horizontally; a crude depiction of the less visible and shocking aspects of the experience of TSO (compulsory treatment); some distinct visual and narrative concepts, like the use of lights and colors and the visionary segment “la nave dei pazzi” (“ship of the crazy”, in episode 01x04, *Mercoledì*). In parallel, the series also tries to give some insight into the structural problems of psychiatric wards: the lack of resources, the exhausting routines of doctors and nurses, the risks of such a controversial measure as TSO. About TSO, a review in a specialized website celebrated the series, but also underlined that it fails to depict the long-term trauma of the compulsory treatment, which does not end after a few days, when the patient settles in, nor with the end of the restriction; on the contrary, it stays with the patients much longer (Femia 2023).

Conclusions

The formula that joins mental health, medical drama and teen/youth narratives provide a frame for well-defined stories that encompass emotional and educational purposes, rather than the long-term involvement of purer forms of medical dramas: specifically, the aim to substitute a stereotypical, damaging audiovisual representation of mental disorders with a sympathetic, accurate one, that even if not always codifiable as realistic, it is certainly believable.

Mental health area is used as a filter to address teenage issues and social issues: peer pressure, bullying, expectations projected by adult authorities (usually parents who are not particularly sensitive to the emotional world of their children); but also the sense of belonging in a new community of peers, after being excluded and, in some cases, attacked and abused by the external world. Among the three series we analysed, *Tutto chiede salvezza* is also an in-depth exploration of the sudden extraction from society and how to re-enter it after the cure.

In conclusion, it is worth asking whether this formula works and whether it resonates with the audience.

Oltre la soglia had a complicated release process on Canale 5, with changes in programming slots and days caused by its declining ratings. The episodes were aired two at a time, as is the custom on Italian generalist television: the first episode (01x01, *Jacopo/Dora*) gained 2,3 million viewers and

11.3% share; by episode 01x04 (*Diego/Adila*) viewers had dropped to 1,8 million. But the series was already deemed a failure, as demonstrated by the decision to move it from Wednesday prime time to Sunday prime time (01x05, *Emmal/Marica*), leading to even air the last episode (01x06, *Lea/Valeria*) in the late-night slot, a choice that further doomed the visibility of the series (Anon. 2019). On December 14, 2019 lead actor Gabriella Pession commented with bitterness the shift in programming, underlining in a Facebook post the disappointing change of schedule and supporting once again the series' brave efforts (Pession 2019).

As for Raiplay *Mental* and Netflix *Tutto chiede salvezza*, it is difficult to have access to actual numbers, but we can derive some observations from other sources. On Instagram for instance, neither series has a dedicated profile (contrary to *Oltre la soglia*), but they are referenced in RaiPlay and Netflix profiles respectively. RaiPlay Instagram profile shared an image gallery to launch *Mental*, but it had very few likes, and the attached social media campaign around the hashtags #davicinonessunoènormale #èoknon-essereok, #fuoridime and #mental doesn't seem to have taken root: in fact, we find #davicinonessunoènormale also attached to *Tutto chiede salvezza* contents, probably because the famous Franco Basaglia quote "Da vicino nessuno è normale" easily adapts to all the products that exhibit a sensitive approach to mental health and psychiatry.

As for *Mental*, it was awarded with a Special Mention in the Web Fiction category at the 73rd edition of Prix Italia, as well as with a prize assigned by a jury of students (Anon. 2021). From my own on-field experience with focus groups in high schools, about teenagers' reception of Italian teen dramas, it appears that *Mental* has been mostly ignored by young viewers (even though certainly not exhaustive), who appear to not even consider RaiPlay in their viewing habits.⁵

Tutto chiede salvezza seems to have been more successful, and able to insert in the public discourse, as demonstrated by a more consistent press coverage; this is confirmed by the recent surprise announce of a second season for a series that was originally conceived as a miniseries (@netflixit 2023).

The unsatisfactory results of the Rai and Mediaset series can possibly be attributed to poor distribution and promotional decisions: in the first case, a lack of confidence in a product that differs from the more traditional mélo

⁵ These findings will be further explored in future publications.

characteristics of other Mediaset programs, that is also manifested in the re-scheduling of a series that, in all, with double episodes, engaged only six evenings; in the second case, a lack of commitment in exploiting the product's strengths, like its formal and distribution specificities, and its placement on the free online platform RaiPlay. While *Tutto chiede salvezza* probably benefited from the Netflix showcase and from the success of *SKAM Italia*, that made Federico Cesari a star, the cases of Rai *Mental* and Mediaset *Oltre la soglia* demonstrate an apparent top-down inability to exploit marketable elements like novelty and differentiation. Therefore, some reasons for the different outcomes for the three series can probably be traced to marketing choices, different social media strategies and decision-making processes that differ in complexity and priorities, between established broadcasting company Rai and Mediaset, and a platform-based company like Netflix.

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