COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY

Charo Lacalle
rosario.lacalle@uab.es
Full Professor. Department of
Journalism & Communication
Sciences. Autonomous
University of Barcelona. Spain.

Beatriz Gómez
beatriz.gomez@unir.net
Lecturer. ESERP Business
School. International University
of Rioja. Spain.

The representation of women in the family in Spanish television fiction

Abstract

The rise of television drama in the late nineties challenged comedy as the most popular and resilient genre of fiction. The diversity of themes and growing complexity of new narratives have relegated family representations –key to comedy's success- to contextualize sentimental and sexual relationships and, to a lesser extent, the work sphere of female characters. This article analyses the context and family relations of 709 female characters represented, with varying degrees of importance, in 84 programs of Spanish television fiction (series, serials, TV movies, miniseries and sketches) premiered in 2012 and 2013. The approach combines quantitative (SPSS coding) and qualitative (socio-semiotics and script theory) methods. The analysis reveals that Spanish television fiction offers a complex picture of family relationships, which mixes clichés and stereotypes, while trying to capture reality. Generational conflicts are the most common misunderstandings in everyday representations of female characters, although most of the women generally have the support of their families to address problems and difficulties of their exciting fictional experiences.

Keywords
Fiction, television, family, woman, Spain, analysis

1. Introduction

From the beginning of North American radio broadcasting, the family was the preferred setting for comedy's representations and one of the keys to radio's success (Crotty, 1995; Moore, 1992) until television drama began to compete for the spotlight that had made it the most popular and enduring fiction genre in over more than four decades (Cantor, 1991). The commitment to aesthetics and to the narrative complexity of drama, intrigue and fantasy during the era Thompson termed the *second golden age* of television (1996) led to the family becoming the setting for emotional and sexual —and, to a lesser degree, professional— avatars of female characters.

The study presented here examines the representation of women in the family context in Spanish television fiction through the use of an original methodology that combines quantitative (SPSS) and qualitative

(socio-semiotic and script theory) approximations. The sample consisted of 709 female characters that appeared, to various degrees of relevance, in all premiere productions (series, serials, miniseries, TV movies and comedy sketches) broadcast on national and regional channels between 2012 and 2013.

1.1. *The family in US television fiction*

Despite the popularity of the family situation comedy (sitcom) and the importance of this setting in the narrative construction of characters in drama series, the interest of academics in the representation of the family in television fiction has been somewhat limited (Moore, 1992). At the beginning of the 1990s, producers and executives of large US channels, concerned at the gradual ageing of audiences, began to implement a "quality TV style in a massive repackaging strategy across generic lines" (Thompson, 2007, xvii). In contrast to the almost theatre-like setting of the traditional sitcom, the near cinematographic style of the most emblematic series of quality TV (Akass & McCabe, 2007) and themes associated mainly with intrigue, action and fantasy have relegated the majority of television fiction families to a primarily contextual function. At the same time, the difficulty of accommodating the icon of post-feminist women —which emerged from their representation[1] as "young, attractive and always willing to exercise their sexuality" (Gill, 2009: 98)— within the family project of the previous decades has evidently led to a decline in the interest of academics in the family setting, which in many studies is often reduced to a footnote.

Broadly speaking, studies on the social construction of the family in US television fiction can be classified into two groups. The first group considers television fiction families to be a representation of real families (Glennon & Butsch, 1982; Greenberg et al., 1980). In contrast, the second group stresses the importance of representations in maintaining traditional family values (Crotty, 1995; Olson & Douglas, 1997) or even blame fiction stories to a certain extent for the dissolution of traditional family models (Chesebro, 2007[1976]). Nevertheless, US academics coincide in determining four distinct periods in the representation of families in television fiction, spanning the beginnings of the sitcom at the end of the 1940s to the emergence of new family models in the 1990s.

The television families of the 50s and 60s, represented in what some authors refer to as "benign dramatic comedies" (Taylor, 1989), idealize the middle class *superdad*, who faithfully carries out all his duties, while portraying the lower-class father as incompetent and chaotic (Butsch, 1992; Scharrer, 2001). In general, fathers from this period have prestigious, and even glamorous, jobs that ensure a comfortable life for their family, while the few mothers who work do so for professional reasons rather than economic (Butsch, 1992).

Comedies of the 70s introduced new problems derived mainly from the relationships between parents and their children (Glennon & Butsch, 1982). However, although the middle-class family continued to be idealized and its structure remained mainly unchanged, a gradual increase in individualism was observed over the course of the decade (Chesebro, 2007[1976]).

The families of the 1980s tended to have a nuclear structure. Moreover, the middle-class shared the stage with lower and lower-middle classes (Glennon & Bustch, 1982), whose economic problems became an essential plot component. However, the balance between the middle and upper-middle classes remained the same during this period with the appearance of *black comedy*, which aimed to improve the social image of Afro-American families through generally positive representations destined to challenge the prevailing

---

[1] Post-feminist discourses construct a highly sexualized, independent woman "no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever" (Gill, 2007).

cultural stereotypes (Cummings, 1988; Scharrer, 2001). Seen as a celebration of the middle-class coloured family —paradigmatically incarnated by *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-1992)—, *black comedy* would, however, lead to the configuration of an entire sitcom subgenre that continued to enjoy success until well into the 1990s (Álvarez Berciano, 1999).

With the arrival of the *second golden age* of television fiction, the sitcom brought about a new twist in the representation of the family in the 1990s through the introduction of problem adults —the product of the uncertainty and unpredictability of urban life (Tueth, 2000)— for whom managing their daily lives became increasingly difficult (Douglas, 1996). The families of the 1990s are unusual in that they do not necessarily share consanguinity, as typified by *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004), or do not have any human resemblance, such as the eternal Simpsons (*The Simpsons,* FOX, 1989-), "one of the most important images of the family in contemporary American culture" (Cantor, 1999: 735). However, the representations maintained "the status order of class" (Butsch, 1992: 397). On the other hand, although the relationships between siblings of the modern family tend to be more conflictive that in the past, the mother and/or father generally has a certain compensatory quality that aims to restore traditional order (Douglas & Olson, 1996).

1.2. *The family in Spanish television fiction*

After more than three decades dedicated to the adaptation of great literary works and to making dramas depicting local customs and manners, Antena3 produced *Farmacia de guardia* (Antena3, 1991-1995), which inaugurated the contemporary era of Spanish television fiction. Antonio Mercero's sitcom extrapolated to the Spanish context the essence of US TV comedy characters —a model mother and a loveable rogue of a father typical of the blue-collar sitcom[2]—, although the Spanish couple were divorced, maintaining a harmonious relationship only for the good of their children. *Médico de familia* (1995-1999)*,* Tele5's answer to their rival, revived another of the classic motifs of television comedy —the middle-class widowed father who also plays the role of mother (Moore, 1992: 52)— in a sugar-coated version produced by Emilio Aragón that nearly tripled the standard length of sitcom episodes. In contrast to *Farmacia de guardia,* the role of the dysfunctional family in *Médico de familia* was the result of an external situation (the father becoming a widower), but the emotional relationships of the parents[3] were still based on faithfulness and stability (García de Castro, 2002). *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (TVE1, 2001-), first broadcast in the early 2000s, was inspired by the dramedy[4] *The Wonder Years* (ABC, 1988-1993), with a clear commitment to the return to centre stage of the domestic space in terms of a structured habitat (Rueda Laffond & Guerra Gómez, 2009).

The clear references to US television fiction in these series strengthened, thus, their distance from the *Costumbrismo* typical of most accounts of the past, although it would, however, still live on in some series of the latter half of the 1990s, including *Hostal Royal Manzanares* (TVE1, 1996-1998) and *Menudo es mi padre* (Antena3, 1996-1998), and would even penetrate a good many of the most successful series of the 2000s, including *Los Serrano* (Tele5, 2003-2008) and *Aquí no hay quien viva* (Antena3, 2003-2006), as Álex Pina, scriptwriter of *Los Serrano,* pointed out on highlighting the anachronism of the father, Diego Serrano:

---

[2] The expression *blue collar* is used in English to define manual workers
(http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/blue-collar). By extension, it also defines working-class families who star in some of the sitcoms mentioned in this study.
[3] In the series' fifth season, the protagonist marries his sister-in-law Alicia (Lydia Bosch). They then have twins, in addition to the three children from Nacho's (Emilio Aragón) first marriage.
[4] The dramedy is mix of drama and comedy.

> Diego Serrano is a bit of an anachronistic figure, of a Spain from another time, who marries his childhood sweetheart. His wife and daughters are very liberal, very contemporary, from Barcelona, very cosmopolitan and modern, and he begins to realise that he is a bit outmoded but wants to be better than he actually is. This generates a dreadful insecurity in Diego Serrano, who is constantly trying to improve himself but always gets into all sorts of tangles (Pina, cited in Mendíbil, 2013, 215)

Between the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, certain series, including *Compañeros* (Antena3, 1998-2002), *Periodistas* (Tele5, 1998-2002), *El comisario* (Tele5, 1999-2009) and *Policías, en el corazón de la calle* (Antena3, 2000-2003) introduced two profound changes to Spain television fiction. Firstly, the nuclear family enters a crisis and the television household assimilates and evaluates new forms of family cohabitation. Secondly, as happened in US productions, domestic stories of a purely family nature give way to work-oriented stories in which the home loses its identity and becomes the setting for loneliness and the explicit sexual relationships of the characters.

The crisis of marriage as an institution and the division of work between men and women, along with the decrease in birth rate and size of the nuclear family and the rise in separations, divorces and unmarried couples is reflected in the representations of "the changing family universe" (Chicharro, 2009, 154). Thus, television fiction has gradually connected with the reality of contemporary Spanish society, representing other ways of living together that de-dramatizes the breakdown of marriage and normalises alternative models to the nuclear family: families with same-sex parents (*Aquí no hay quien viva*, Antena3, 2003-2006); single-parent families (*¡Ala... Dina!*, TVE1, 2000-2002; *Ana y los siete*, TVE1, 2002-2005); reconstructed families (separated couples, divorcees or widow(er)s who bring children to the new relationship) (*A las once en casa*, TVE1, 1998-2000; *Los Serrano*, Tele5, 2003-2008; *Vida loca*, Tele5, 2011); vertically and horizontally extended families (*Aída*, Tele5, 2005-2014; *La familia Mata*, Antena3, 2007-2009; *Herederos*, TVE1, 2007-2009; *Gran reserva*, TVE1, 2010-2013); functional families consisting of individuals with no blood relationship between them but who share a home and carry out the roles of a typical household (*Todos los hombres son iguales*, Tele5, 1996-1998; *El internado*, Antena3, 2007-2010; *Los protegidos*, Antena3, 2010-2012; *El barco*, Antena3, 2011-2013); and common-law couples, who live together but are not married (*7 vidas*, Tele5, 1999-2006; *Crematorio*, Canal+, 2011) (Carrillo Pascual, 2012).

Nevertheless, despite portraying the traditional family in a state of crisis, the new television families "continue to maintain and reinforce gender stereotypes within the heart of the family" (Belmonte & Guillamón, 2007: 118). However, it is important to point out that this desire to represent a range of family structures does not only fulfil an educative function but also responds to the needs of television narrative itself. As Gutiérrez Delgado (2008) states, family series present, to a greater or lesser degree, fallacious dramas due to pressure from the industry and audiences.

The transformation of the nuclear family has modified certain family roles while reaffirming others. Thus, although paternal authority has declined substantially (Chicharro, 2009) and mothers and fathers have become increasingly more tolerant (García de Castro, 2002), parents have continued to ban their teenage children from certain behaviours, while the latter still resort to lying in order to get away their own way (Montero, 2005). Studies similarly confirm a growing parity between gender roles, although certain behaviours of obedience and subordination by some female characters are still observed (Lacalle, 2013). Galán (2007b) states that female television fiction characters are mainly working women whose family side is only occasionally shown and who are faced with problems of juggling their work-life balance and with the difficulties experienced through their professional promotion.

Female characters of period dramas have a stereotypic narrative use. While the men portray the details of the socio-political space, the women are usually limited to the emotional universe: "romance, maternity, friendly companionship and the pain of separation are some of the emotional registers they adopt the best" (Chicharro & Rueda Laffond, 2008: 79). In terms of the daughter, mother and wife, the women portrayed in stories set in the past often defer to a male figure, usually the head of the family, and continue to be the protagonist in the private sphere, although in current fictions this subordination is significantly reduced (CAC, 2013; Galán, 2007a; García, Fedele & Gómez, 2012; Instituto de la Mujer, 2007).

García de Castro (2002) claims that all Spanish fictions set in the 1990s and early 2000s have at least one character built around a maternal role, while being unable to have biological children always represents a psychological conflict. The study carried out in 2010 by Sánchez Aranda et al. (2011) revealed that the role of the mother continues to be the most frequent traditional role, significantly above that of wife, although Lacalle and Sánchez (2015: 235) maintain that "Spanish fiction seems to have entered into a certain modernisation of the role of the mother, as confirmed by other Mediterranean-based European researchers". In general, heterosexuality constitutes the framework for reproduction and the raising of children in a setting in which very few adoptions take place (Carrillo Pascual, 2012).

2. Methods

The analysis carried out here combines both quantitative (SPSS) and qualitative (socio-semiotic and script theory) approximations with the aim of analysing the depictions of the family in Spanish television fiction. The program of choice for the statistical calculation to create a quantitative database, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), was due to its flexibility in the recoding of the various variables and entries, which allows Social Science researchers to adapt it to their needs. The socio-semiotic approximation, based on a structuralist matrix, studies the social dimension of discourse (Landowski 1997; Semprini 1990). Script theory is another important reference for those authors who, inspired by the works of L. Rowell Huesmann (1982 and 1986) on the influence of the representation of violence on viewers, maintain the importance of context.[5]

The sample consists of 709 female characters who appear, to varying degrees of protagonism, in 84 domestic fiction programmes (series, serials, miniseries, TV movies and comedy sketches) broadcast on general Spanish channels during the period 2012 to 2013. Only those secondary characters that appear in fewer than three episodes were excluded. The study was carried out in three phases: a) the viewing of the programmes and the construction of a script for the socio-semiotic analysis; b) SPSS coding of the variables identified in the analysis script and the identification of the corresponding storylines; and c) the qualitative analysis of the results. The socio-semiotic script is structured into 8 sections: programme identification; family; protagonism; emotional relationships; health and sexuality; roles and scenarios. The 40 variables used in coding the family themes consist of 4 independent variables and 36 dependent variables, 5 of which relate to data concerning the identification of the programme (name of character, programme title, channel, fiction genre and format). The independent variables concerning the construction of family relationships include: members of the family (parents, brothers/sisters, grandchildren and grandparents); relationships (support or confrontation); generational problems and other problems. The characters' ages were divided into 8 ranges designed to reduce the spread inherent to the

---

[5] Script theory was introduced initially by Silvan Tomkins in the 1950s to explain the structure of knowledge, especially in complex sequences. See E. Virginia Demos, 1995.

coding of this variable: 4-9; 10-14; 15-17; 18-23; 24-29; 30-45; 46-65 and over 65. Each variable allowed one option among a determined number of options to be chosen with the exception of the channel variables (name of character and programme title).

Thirteen researchers already familiar with the SPSS program, four of which were PhD graduates, the rest being doctoral students, took part in the coding process. The pre-analysis was divided into two phases aimed at verifying the reliability of the inter-coding and detecting any possible errors made during the data recording stage, respectively. A univariable analysis was then carried out through the nominal variables and frequency tables followed by a bivariable analysis, which allowed us to cross the four family variables and the age variable (independent) with the other variables (dependent) in order to create contingency tables and to begin the analysis of the data itself.

The data matrix is composed of 709 analysis units (cases), one for each character in the sample. Crossing the four family variables and the age variable with the 36 dependent variables yielded 180 contingency tables. The quantitative database was completed by a qualitative database created in parallel to the SPSS coding process. This database consists of the main storyline on family issues of each of the 498 female characters (70.2%) related to the family setting. The contingency tables allowed us to structure the qualitative analysis, which was carried out in the third study phase and which was designed to examine the most relevant results from the variables cross in relation to the corresponding storylines. Six of the researchers who had participated in the construction of the quantitative (SPSS) and qualitative (storylines) databases also took part in this latter study phase, as they were familiar with the application of script theory to the analysis of television (Huesmann, 1982 and 1986; Kelly, 2010). The preference for a unit of narrative content (*the script* or *storyline*) over other technical units such as the scene (Al-Sayed & Gunter, 2012) was due to the greater thoroughness with which the analysis of serial narratives can be carried out (Kelly, 2010).

3. Results

The multiple possible narratives of the domestic scene, together with the interest of Spanish channels in maximizing prime time audiences and bringing together the various generational perspectives, has converted the nuclear family into the focal point of numerous plots and an important component in the contextualization of female characters.

43.5% (N = 309) of the female characters analysed live with their biological families (nuclear or extended), which was the usual form of cohabitation of characters from all age ranges, although for 29.8% of these (N = 211), only their parents (or at least one of them) are represented. The presence of the father and/or the mother is most frequent in the lower age ranges: 4-9, 10-14 and 15-17 years old. From 18 years onwards, the representation of parents gradually decreases until their complete disappearance for the over-65 age range.

Table 1. Presence of parents of the female characters analysed

	4-9	10-14	15-17	18-23	24-29	30-45	46-65	+65	Total
No parent	0.0%	18.2%	20.7%	59.6%	60.0%	75.1%	94.1%	100.0%	70.2%
Both parents	63.2%	63.6%	62.1%	22.1%	15.7%	10.5%	0.7%	0.0%	15.0%
Father	15.8%	9.1%	3.4%	7.7%	13.9%	6.6%	2.2%	0.0%	6.9%
Mother	21.1%	9.1%	13.8%	10.6%	10.4%	7.8%	2.9%	0.0%	7.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration

In single-parent families, the presence of the mother is slightly greater than the father (7.8%, N = 56 vs. 6.9%, N = 49), although the opposite is the case in period dramas, in which

the parent in single-parent families tends to be a widowed father (42.9%, N = 21 single fathers vs. 35.7%, N = 20 single mothers). Living with the new spouse of one of the parents, usually the father, is most common in period dramas and is generally the cause of problems. Dramas set in the present day also convert the death of the mother into a narrative motif that conditions the family structure and, therefore, the development of the characters.

In complete contrast to the traditional family that prevails in period dramas, the de-structured family is a recurrent representation in contemporary dramas. These families usually portray the parents as being argumentative or in the process of getting divorced, a situation that particularly affects 4-9 years old girls and 10-14 years old young adolescent females. Nevertheless, unlike the trauma brought about by the death of the mother or the father, the trivialization of separation and divorce in comedies, a genre that stands out for presenting a wide range of alternative family structures, diminishes their significance, though it also reflects the complications that divorce introduces into the lives of female characters with dependent children.

Older relatives are represented by only 14.1% (N = 100) of the women analysed, equally divided between period (51%, N = 51) and modern dramas (49%, N = 49). As before, the representation of older relatives is much greater for the younger ages: 4-9 (57.8%, N = 11), 10-14 (63.6%, N = 7) and 15-17 (48.2%, N = 14), while from 18 years on the presence of parents and grandparents is nominal. In contrast, a large number of female characters between the ages of 30 and 45 (41.3%, N = 133) have children, while fewer women in the older age ranges have offspring (26.1%, N = 84, for 45-65 year old women and 9.3%, N = 30, for over-65s). As occurs with older relatives, drama periods depict an equal number of female characters with children (47.5%, N = 153) as those series set in the present (51.6%, N = 166). The remaining 0.9% corresponds to 3 female characters appearing in fictions with no temporal references.

The presence of sisters and/or brothers of the characters analysed is low (23.7%, N = 168) and inversely proportional to age. As for the representation of parents, the presence of sisters and/or brothers is most frequent in the lower age ranges: 63.2% (N = 12) of girls aged 4 to 9, 54.5% (N = 6) of 10 to 14 year old girls and 69.0% (N = 20) of older adolescent girls (15 to 17 years old). From 18 onwards, the presence of sisters and/or brothers notably decreases, culminating with a complete absence of these figures for female characters over 65 years of age. Despite the current low birth rate, the greater number of sisters and/or brothers represented in present day dramas (58.3%, N = 98) compared to period dramas (40.5%, N = 68) is determined mainly by the configuration of new family structures following separation or divorce.

Table 2. Presence of brothers/sisters of the female characters analysed

	4-9	10-14	15-17	18-23	24-29	30-45	46-65	+65	Total
No	36.8%	45.5%	31.0%	74.0%	71.3%	78.2%	89.7%	100.0%	76.3%
Yes	63.2%	54.5%	69.0%	26.0%	28.7%	21.8%	10.3%	0.0%	23.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration

3.1. *Family relationships and problems*

The relationships of the women studied here with their families are usually much more harmonious (42.9%, N = 304) than conflictive (26.1%, N = 185), both in period dramas (44.5%, N = 136) and contemporary stories (41.9%, N = 165), although the type of family relationship is unknown for 31.1% (N = 220) of the characters due to its minor narrative relevance. The support provide by the family to the female characters is a generalised pattern of behaviour in all age ranges, although it has greater importance for girls aged 4 to 9 (78.9%, N = 15) and

10 to 14 (72.7%, N = 8). This is in line with the greater dependence on adults by both groups of female characters, whose relationship with their elders is mainly based on obedience. Furthermore, conflicts are mainly the result of confrontations between parents, especially those going through the process of separation or divorce. In contrast, most older adolescent girls aged 15 to 17 have confrontational relationships with their relatives (31%, N = 9), mainly due to issues associated with the rebelliousness typical of this stage of life. The rebellious nature of older adolescent girls also explains why they represent the group with the greatest number of conflicts among siblings (24.1%, N = 7), although this is a problem of little relevance in Spanish television fiction (10.4%, N = 74). Moreover, this age group is one of only two in which generational problems are prevalent (44.8%, N = 13).

Table 3. Family relationship of characters analysed

	4-9	10-14	15-17	18-23	24-29	30-45	46-65	+65	Total
Confrontational	15.8%	9.1%	31.0%	23.1%	25.2%	26.5%	27.2%	36.8%	26.1%
Supportive	78.9%	72.7%	51.7%	42.3%	42.6%	37.4%	43.4%	47.4%	42.9%
Unknown	5.3%	18.2%	17.2%	34.6%	32.2%	36.2%	29.4%	15.8%	31.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration

Another significant cause of generational conflicts is the objection of parents to their daughter's choice of loved one in drama periods. In certain instances, this hostility even becomes a relatively important narrative motif, following in the footpath of the not-so-distant past in which the choice of spouse for the daughters and/or sons obeyed political or socio-economic interests. Unlike period dramas, modern day series do not portray objections to a young girl's romantic relationships as a family problem, among others reasons because the humble background of most characters is not addressed from the perspective of social class. In this latter genre, family opposition has become a cause of daily conflicts far removed from the dramatism with which they are addressed in period dramas.

The confrontation of women between 18 and 65 with their families is not observed very often, since, as discussed previously, they are generally supported by their family and, moreover, the family relationships of the secondary characters prevalent in the 46-65 year old and over 65 age ranges are unknown. Girls between 18 and 23 (23%, N = 24) and 24 and 29 (25.2%, N = 29) usually still suffer the consequences of conflicts experienced as teenagers, although certain nuances generally come into effect that notably modify the relationships of this group of characters with their families. Thus, these women frequently combine the rebelliousness of their adolescence with relationship problems, which are interwoven with other problems derived from divorces, breakdowns in relationships or the economic precariousness experienced by many young adult women.

The everyday conflicts of female characters aged 30 to 45 years old (26.45%, N = 68) and 46 to 60 (27.2%, N = 37) are narrative anchor points rather than real disagreements and are, therefore, often resolved in the same episode or, in the case of serials, within a short narrative cycle. As occurs with the youngest women, the causes of confrontations of adult women vary notably both in terms of the fiction genre and the period in which the narrative is set.

Consistent with the emotions they evoke, drama series use tragedies, sentimentalism and social catastrophe to bring the storyline to a climax. In this regard, the breakdown in relationships, a traditional narrative motif in dramas, has become the occasional cause of family conflict. Conflicts also arise due to lack of money, problems relating to family businesses and the neglect or lack of interest of parents for their sons and/or daughters. However, despite the myriad problems that liven blood relations, Spanish

fiction tends to restore family harmony towards the end of the storyline, especially in dramas.

Finally, characters older than 65 present the highest percentage of family confrontation (36.8%, N = 14), another indication of the unattractiveness with which this group of female characters is portrayed in television fiction. Although the older woman usually takes on the role of the advising mother or grandmother, there are also numerous examples of female characters over 65 who are a burden or a problem for the rest of their family. This explains why, along with adolescent girls aged 15 to 17 years old, older women are more affected by generational problems (39.4%, N = 15), an issue generally avoided by Spanish television fiction (19.1%, N = 136).

3.2. *The home*

The domestic setting plays a decisive role in the construction of television families, since it is the focal point of most scenes associated with this issue. 27.9% (N = 198) of the women analysed carry out chores related to care of children and the home, including cleaning, cooking, shopping and organising the house. Chores are activities determined mainly by social class, since 42.1% of working class women (N = 61) carry out these types of activities compared to only 18.0% (N = 25) of upper class female characters. This difference is accentuated in fictions set in the past, when enjoying the benefits of badly paid domestic service or even slaves (in fictions set in the Roman) were privileges of the middle-upper and upper classes. Finally, it should be mentioned that Spanish television fiction also tends to associate domestic roles with adult women since these parts are played by only 14 (23.7%) of the 59 girls aged 4-9 years old (15.8%, N = 3), 10 to 14 years old (27.3%, N = 3) and 15 to 17 years old (27.6%, N = 8).

Table 4. Female characters that do domestic chores

	4-9	10-14	15-17	18-23	24-29	30-45	46-65	+65	Total
No	84.2%	72.7%	72.4%	76.0%	74.8%	72.8%	65.4%	65.8%	72.1%
Yes	15.8%	27.3%	27.6%	24.0%	25.2%	27.2%	34.6%	34.2%	27.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis carried out here reveals that Spanish television fiction projects a complex image of the family that combines clichés and stereotypes but which also attempts to reflect the society from which it is constructed. The various types of family identified mark a clear distancing from extended families (Galán, 2007b), which were overrepresented in the past due to their multiple possible narratives (Carrillo Pascual, 2012), though they lack statistical relevance these days. Nevertheless, the 12.9% (N = 92) of the female characters that cohabit with an extended family consisting of parents, children and grandparents amply exceeds the 396,400 Spanish households (2% of the total) that include more than one nuclear family in its makeup (INE, 2015).

Domestic fiction from the period analysed also attempts to overcome other clichés that contradict the structure of current Spanish households. In contrast to the results obtained by Carrillo Pascual, who in 2012 highlighted the leadership of the male figure in single-parent families, our investigation reveals that these family structures are headed more by female characters than male, a result which is in line with the reality of current Spanish society (INE, 2015). In fact, although the statistical difference between real single-parent families —82% headed by women and 17.3% by men—, is much higher than that of the

families analysed, the situation is reversed in period dramas probably because the widowed father helps to represent the patriarchal values of the past.

More than half of the female characters portrayed do not have children (53.8%, N = 382) and those women who do opt for motherhood only have one or two (Galán, 2007b). However, siblings in contemporary families are comprised of a greater number of brothers or sisters than their peers from period dramas due to new family structures caused by the union of divorced parents. In parallel, the analysis carried out here shows a significantly reduced presence and scarce prominence of babies and children under 5 years of age, an observation corroborated by Martínez Otero (2006).

The qualitative analysis reveals the overrepresentation of divorce, as well as the trivialization of certain attitudes related to the family, such as the romantic relationships of parents and faithfulness, which has been confirmed in other Spanish investigations (Martínez Otero, 2006: 430-432). The tendency to de-dramatize marriage breakdowns and their causes is explained partly by the increasing "normalisation" of divorce, both on and off the screen – a consequence of the gradual increase in marriage breakdowns, which in 2014 alone grew by 5.6% over the previous year (INE, 2015). However, most of the problems experienced by young girls and teenagers are related to their parents' separation and/or divorce and become, consequently, victims of adults' problems. The "wicked" stepmother (generally younger than the husband) and the daughters, who fear losing their inheritance and power, are similarly recurrent female figures in the storylines analysed here.

The minimal presence of older people in the representation of the family —confirmed by academics including Martínez Otero (2006)—, in addition to the secondary roles they play (López Téllez & Cuenca García, 2005), often results in their practical invisibility. Occasionally, grandparents and other elderly relatives in Spanish fiction constitute a fundamental mainstay in helping their children and caring for their grandchildren (Rueda Laffond & Guerra Gómez, 2009), or acting as advisors to or protectors of the family household (López Téllez & Cuenca García, 2005). By contrast, on other occasions, elderly relatives play the part of active opponents who hamper the plans of other characters, or else passive figures who are a burden on the family (López Téllez & Cuenca García, 2005). Thus, a considerable number of female characters over the age of 65 are one of the groups to suffer the greatest number of family problems and generational conflicts.

Generational conflicts represent the most frequent form of disagreement between parents and children, especially among 15 to 17-year-old female characters and their parents. The prohibitions imposed by the adults and the lies their children tell to get round them (Montero, 2005), together with the great value placed on friendship rather than the family and their strong desire for independence (Guarinos, 2009), creates a network of family relationships with frequent daily arguments. In this regard, it could be said that democratic behaviours within the domestic setting have in no way diminished the concept of generational conflict and frequently continue to characterise the relationships between parents and children, which is at variance with claims made by Chicharro (2009: 154). In contrast to what would be expected, household chores are not a cause of conflict, probably because they are usually done by women older than 30.

In general, 15 to 17-year-old female teenagers are presented as the cause of frequent problems: carefree, irresponsible, selfish and capricious. Stories set in past also portray some adolescent girls as rebels, although their characterisation is usually more dramatic and their representation is radically different from those of the present day. In these cases, it is not usually a case of "rebel without a cause" but rather a nonconformist young girl who wants more from life and does not conform to the rules of femininity of their era, or else who feels misunderstood by her family.

Lastly, the results corroborate the fact that the home continues to be the "symbolic reference of private life" (Chicharro & Rueda Laffond, 2008: 74) and a recurrent setting in

the representation of emotional relationships, both familial and romantic. It is a symbolic space that played a decisive role in representations in Spanish fiction throughout the 1990s and survived the erosive effects of the rise in profession-based series at the end of the 1990s to continue to be the setting for the emotional and sexual relationships of its inhabitants (García de Castro, 2002 and 2008).

This work contributes to the study of Spanish television fiction through the application of an original methodology that combines quantitative and qualitative approximations to address the analysis of large samples, an unusual approach in Spain in this field of study. Consequently, the greatest difficulty encountered was in the comparison of the results with those obtained in other studies that used much smaller sample sizes.

References

Al-Sayed, R. & Gunter, B. (2012). How much sex is there in soap operas on British TV? *Communications 37*(4), 329–344. DOI: 10.1515/commun-2012-0019.

Akass, K. & McCabe, J. (2007). Introduction: Debating Quality. In K. Akass & J. McCabe (Eds.), *QUALITY TV Contemporary American Television and Beyond* (pp. 1-12). New York: Tauris.

Álvarez Berciano, R. (1999). *La comedia enlatada: de Lucille Ball a Los Simpson*. Barcelona: Gedisa.

Belmonte, J. & Guillamón, S. (2008). Co-educar la mirada contra los estereotipos de género en TV. *Comunicar 31*, 115-120. DOI: 10.3916/c31-2008-01-014.

Butsch, R. (1992). Class and gender in four decades of television situation comedy: Plus ça change... *Critical Studies in Mass Communication 9*, 387-399.

CAC. Consell Audiovisual de Catalunya. (2013). *La representació de les dones a la televisió. Informe sobre la diversitat i la igualtat a la televisió*. Informe 29, Barcelona. Retrieved from http://www.cac.cat/pfw_files/cma/actuacions/Continguts/i29_2013_INFORME_DIVERS ITAT_I_DONES.pdf

Cantor, M.G. (1991) The American family on television: from Molly Goldberg to Bill Cosby. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies 22*(2), 205-216.

Cantor, P.A. (1999). *The Simpsons*: Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family. *Political Theory 27*(6), 734-749.

Carrillo Pascual, E. (2012). La representación de la familia en la ficción televisiva española. In B. Puebla Martínez, E. Carrillo Pascual & A. Íñigo Jurado (Eds.), *Ficcionando. Series de televisión a la española* (pp. 135-155). Madrid: Fragua.

Chesebro, J.W. (2007[1976]). Communication, values, and popular television series: A four-year assessment. In H. Newcomb (Ed.), *Television: The Critical View* (pp. 197-225). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chicharro, M. (2009). Familia y televisión. Algunas representaciones de la familia española en la pequeña pantalla. *Doxa Comunicación 8,* 145-162.

Chicharro, M. & Rueda Laffond, J.C. (2008). Television and Historial Fiction: Amar en tiempos revueltos. *Communication & Society 21*(2), 57-84.

Comstock, J. & Strzyzewski, K. (1990). Interpersonal interaction on television: family conflict and jealousy on primetime. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 34*(3), 263-282.

Crotty, M. (1995). Murphy would probably also win the election: The effect of television as related to the portrayal of the family in situation comedies. *Journal of Popular Culture 29*(3), 1-15.

Cummings, M.S. (1988). The Changing Image Of The Black Family On Television. *Journal of Popular Culture 22*(2) 75-85.

Demos, E.V. (Ed.) (1995). *Exploring Affect. The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Douglas, W. (1996). The fall from Grace: The modern family on Television. *Communication Research 23*(6), 675-702.

Douglas, W. & Olson, B. (1996). Subversion of the American family: An examination of children and parents in television families. *Communication Research 23*, 73-99. DOI: 10.1177/009365096023001003.

Freed, R. (1996). The gripes of wrath: Roseanne's bitter comedy of class. *Television Quarterly 28*(1), 30-40.

Galán, E. (2007a). Construcción de género y ficción televisiva en España. *Comunicar*, 28, 229-236.

Galán, E. (2007b). *La imagen social de la mujer en las series de ficción*. Cáceres: Servicio de Publicaciones Universidad de Extremadura.

García, N., Fedele, M. & Gómez, X. (2012). The occupational roles of television fiction characters in Spain: distinguishing traits in gender representation. *Comunicación y Sociedad 25*(1), 349-366.

García de Castro, M. (2002). *La ficción televisiva popular. Una evolución de las series de televisión en España*. Barcelona: Gedisa.

García de Castro, M. (2008). Los movimientos de renovación en las series televisivas españolas. *Comunicar 30*, 147-153.

Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies 10*(2). Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2449/. DOI: 10.1177/1367549407075898.

Gill, R. (2009). Supersexualise me! Advertising and the midriffs. In F. Attwood & R. Cere (Eds.), *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualisation of Culture* (pp. 93-110). London: Tauris.

Glennon, L. & Butsch, R. (1982). The family as portrayed on television 1946-1978. In J.B. Lazar, L. Bouthilet & D. Pearl (Eds.), *Television and behavior: ten years of scientific progress and implications for the eighties (vol. 2)*, (pp. 264-271). Washington DC: Department of Health and Human Services.

Greenberg, B., Buerkel-Rothfuss, N., Neuendorf, K. & Atkin, C. (1980). Three seasons of television family role interactions. In B. Greenberg (Ed.), *Life on television: Content analyses of U.S. TV drama* (pp. 161-172). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Guarinos, V. (2009). Fenómenos televisivos «teenagers»: prototipias adolescentes en series vistas en España. *Comunicar 33*, 203-211.

Gutiérrez Delgado, R. (2008). La falacia dramática y representación de la familia en la ficción televisiva. Comparativa poética entre *Médico de familia*, *Los Serrano* y *Cuéntame cómo pasó*". In M. Medina (Ed.), *Series de televisión. El caso de Médico de familia, Cuéntame cómo pasó y Los Serrano* (pp. 165-193). Madrid: Ediciones Internacionales Universitarias.

Huesmann, L.R. (1982). Television, violence and aggressive behavior. In D. Pearl, L. Bouthilat & J. Lazar (Eds.), *Television and behavior: ten years of programs and implications for the 80's* (pp. 126-137). Washington: Government Printing Office.

Huesmann L.R. (1986). Psychological processes promoting the relation between exposure to media violence and aggressive behavior by the viewer. *Journal of Social Issues 42*(3), 125-139. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.1986.tb00246.x.

INE. Instituto Nacional de Estadística. (2015, April 17). Encuesta continua de hogares. Retrieved from http://www.ine.es/inebaseDYN/ech30274/ech_inicio.htm

Instituto de la mujer. (2007). *Tratamiento y representación de las mujeres en las teleseries emitidas por las cadenas de televisión de ámbito nacional*. Madrid: Instituto de la Mujer. Retrieved from:
http://www.inmujer.gob.es/areasTematicas/estudios/serieEstudios/docs/estudios_99.pdf

Kelly, M. (2010). Virginity Loss Narratives in 'Teen Drama' Television Programs. *The Journal of Sex Research 47*(5), 479-489. DOI: 10.1080/00224490903132044.

Kim, H.L., Sorsoli, C.L., Collins, K., Zylbergold, B.A., Schooler, D. & Tolman, D.L. (2007). From Sex to Sexuality: Exposing the Heterosexual Script on Primetime Network Television. *Journal of Sex Research 44*(2), 145-157. DOI: 10.1080/00224490701263660.

Lacalle, Ch. (2013). *Jóvenes y ficción televisiva. Construcción de identidad y transmedialidad*. Barcelona: UOC Press.

Lacalle, Ch. & Sánchez, M. (2015). La representación de la madre en la ficción televisiva española. In M. Visa (Ed.), *Padres y madres en serie. Representaciones de la parentalidad en la ficción televisiva* (pp. 227-238). Barcelona: UOC Press.

Landowski, E. (1997). *Présences de l'autre: essais de socio-sémiotique II*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Larson, M.S. (1989). Interaction between siblings in prime time television families. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media 33*(3), 305-315.

López Téllez, J.A. & Cuenca García, F.A. (2005). Ficción televisiva y representación generacional: modelos de tercera edad en las series nacionales. *Comunicar 25*, 231-236.

Martínez Otero, J.M. (2006). Cómo educa la ficción televisiva: trampas en las series españolas de mayor audiencia. *IV Congreso Internacional de Ética y Derecho de la Información*. Valencia: Fundación COSO para el Desarrollo de la Comunicación y la Sociedad, 423-439.

Mendíbil, A. (2013). *España en Serie. Cada serie cuenta una historia. Todas juntas cuentan nuestra historia*. Madrid: Aguilar.

Montero, Y. (2005). Estudio empírico sobre el serial juvenil *Al salir de clase*: sobre la transmisión de valores a los adolescentes. *Comunicar 25*. Retrieved from: http://www.revistacomunicar.com/verpdf.php?numero=25&articulo=25-2005- 070.

Moore, M.L. (1992). The family as portrayed on prime-time television, 1947–1990: Structure and characteristics. *Sex Roles 26*(1-2), 41-61.

Oliver, C. (1994). Family affairs: fashions in family sitcoms swing between nasty and nice. *Reason 58-59*. Retrieved from: http://www.unz.org/Pub/Reason-1994jul-00058?View=PDF.

Olson, B. & Douglas, W. (1997). The family on television: Evaluation of gender goles in situation comedy. *Sex Roles 36*(5-6), 409-427.

Rueda Laffond, J.C. & Guerra Gómez, A. (2009): Televisión y nostalgia. "The Wonder Years" y "Cuéntame cómo pasó". *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social 64*, 396 -409. DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-64-2009-831-396-409.

Sánchez Aranda, J. J. (Dir.), Fernández Gómez, E., Gil Gascón, F. & Segado Boj, F. (2011). *Las mujeres en la ficción televisiva española de prime time*. Logroño: UNIR.

Sandell, J. (1998). The personal is professional on TV: I'll be there for you: *Friends* and the fantasy of alternative families. *American Studies 39*(2), 141-155.

Scharrer, E. (2001). From wise to foolish: The portrayal of the sitcom father, 1950s-1990s. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 45*(1), 23-40. DOI: 10.1207/s15506878jobem4501_3.

Semprini, A. (1990). Introduzione. In A. Semprini (Ed.), *Lo sguardo sociosemiotico. Comunicazione, marche, media, pubblicità* (pp. 15-30). Milano: Angeli.

Skill, T.; Robinson, J. & Wallace, S. (1987). Portrayal of families on prime-time TV: Structure, type and frequency. *Journalism Quarterly 64*(2-3), 360-398.

Taylor, E. (1989). From the Nelsons to the Huxtabtes: Genre and family imagery in American network television. *Qualitative Sociology 12*, 13-28.

Tompson, R.J. (1996). *Television´s second golden age. From Hill Street Blues to ER.* New York: Continuum.

Thompson, R.J. (2007). Preface. In K. Akass & J. McCabe (Eds.), *QUALITY TV Contemporary American Television and Beyond* (pp. 1-12). New York: Tauris.

Tueth, M.V. (2000). Fun City: TV's urban situation comedies of the 1990s. *Journal of Popular Film and Television 28*(3), 98-107.