

**How to cite this article:**

TOUS-ROVIROSA, A., MESO AYERDI, K., SIMELIO SOLA, N., "The Representation of Women's Roles in Television Series in Spain. Analysis of the Basque and Catalan Cases", *Communication&Society/Comunicación y Sociedad*, Vol. 26, n. 3, 2013, pp. 67-97.

**The Representation of Women's Roles in Television Series in Spain. Analysis of the Basque and Catalan Cases**

*La imagen de la mujer en series de televisión españolas. Análisis de los casos Vasco y Catalán*

ANNA TOUS-ROVIROSA, KOLDO MESO AYERDI, NURIA SIMELIO SOLA.

[anna.tous@uab.cat](mailto:anna.tous@uab.cat), [koldo.meso@ehu.es](mailto:koldo.meso@ehu.es), [nuria.simelio.sola@uab.cat](mailto:nuria.simelio.sola@uab.cat).

Anna Tous-Rovirosa. Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Faculty of Communication Sciences. Journalism and Communication Sciences Department. 08193 Bellaterra (Spain).

Koldo Meso Ayerdi. Basque Country University. Faculty of Social Sciences and Communication. Journalism II Department. 48940m Leioa (Spain).

Nuria Simelio Sola. Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Journalism and Communication Sciences Department. 08193 Bellaterra (Spain).

Submitted: April 11, 2013

Approved: May 4, 2013

**ABSTRACT:** The comparison of six Spanish television dramas has enabled us to analyse the role of women in these fictional products. In the series analysed there is a persistence of males playing the leading roles, as well as a reiteration of female stereotypes. In the case of the Catalan television dramas on TVC (*El cor de la ciutat*, *Ventdelplà* and *Infidels*) a more positive treatment of femininity could be observed in the series dealing with social customs. In the Basque productions on EITB (*Goenkale*, *Martin* and *Mi querido Klikowsky*) there is a perpetuation of the

**cliché of the Basque woman as being strong and capable of managing her home and family, as well as of her feelings.**

**RESUMEN:** *La comparación de seis dramas televisivos españoles nos ha permitido analizar la imagen de la mujer en estos productos de ficción. En las series analizadas se observa una persistencia de la imagen del hombre en los papeles principales, así como un mantenimiento de los estereotipos femeninos. En el caso de los programas catalanes de TVC (El cor de la ciutat, Ventdelplà e Infidels) constatamos un mejor tratamiento de la imagen de la mujer en los productos costumbristas. En los programas vascos de la EITB (Goenkale, Martin y Mi querido Klikowsky) observamos una perpetuación del cliché de la mujer vasca fuerte y capaz de gestionar su casa, su familia y sus sentimientos.*

**Key words:** Television series, gender, social representation, fiction.

**Palabras clave:** series de televisión, género, representación social, ficción.

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this research<sup>1</sup> is to make a comparative analyse of the point to which Catalan and Basque soap operas and television series reproduce dominant social models, and whether these respond to the desired equality between men and women or if there is a persistence of models characteristic of machismo. The Catalan productions *El cor de la ciutat* [The Heart of the City], *Ventdelplà* [the name of a fictitious village] and *Infidels* [Unfaithful] and the Basque productions *Goenkale* [the name of a fictitious village], *Martin* [Martin] and *Mi querido Klikowsky* [My Dear Klikowsky] are analysed during the 2009 season. As a starting point the importance of television fiction is considered; this occupies second place (31.4%) after news programs (38%) in the television genres in the state sphere. As a contextual element, consideration is also given to the languages and the migratory phenomenon in the autonomous communities of the TV fiction analysed.

The Spanish state is made up of 17 autonomous communities, of which Catalonia and the Basque Country are two that have the greatest history and identitarian character. Both are considered “historical nationalities” of the Spanish territory and have their own languages (Catalan and the Basque language, Euskera). The respective television corporations are: in the Catalan case *Televisió de Catalunya* (TVC –Television of Catalonia, which includes the channels TV3, Canal 33, 3/24, Esport 3, Canal Súper 3), which broadcasts integrally in Catalan; and in the Basque case *Euskal Irrati Telebista* (EITB –Basque Radio Television, which includes ETB 1, 2, 3, Canal Vasco, ETB Sat and *Betizu*), whose broadcasts employ both Spanish and Euskera. Both television corporations were pioneers in Spain as autonomous networks, as they were the first to

---

<sup>1</sup> This article results from the research project “Gizona eta emakuneen irudia Euskal Herriko eta Kataluniako telesailetan eta beren web orriak” (24/2009PRO), funded by Emakunde-Instituto Vasco de la Mujer [Basque Woman's Institute] and carried out by the researchers Koldo Meso (IP) and María Ganzabal (Universidad del País Vasco); Anna Tous and Nuria Simelio (Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona). The authors gratefully acknowledge senior lecturer Maria Ganzabal her contributions to the paper and to the research.

receive broadcasting licences, in 1983 and 1982 respectively. EITB and TVC were also the first producers of soap operas in the Spanish state, with *Goenkale* (ETB1: 1994- ), which is still broadcast today, and *Poblenou* (TV3: 1994), the first in a long list of soap operas and series on Catalan television –more than 76 to date<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Television contexts

*El cor de la ciutat* [The Heart of the City] (TV3, 2000-2009) is the longest running soap opera in Catalan serial production. Broadcast daily in the early afternoon, its audience varied significantly over its nine broadcast seasons (from 45% in the third season to 25.6% in the eighth<sup>3</sup>), as well as in the composition of its settings (the Barcelona neighbourhoods of Sant Andreu and Sants) and characters. The soap opera presents an ensemble of protagonists with multiple ramifications and relationships. Because of its proximate, realist, family and serial character, involving an ensemble of characters and dealing with social customs and the everyday life of several families in two Barcelona neighbourhoods, this long-running serial can be compared to *East-Enders* (BBC1: 1985- ) and *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1960- ).

*Ventdelplà* [the name of a fictitious village] (TV3, 2005-2010) is a serialised series, produced by Diagonal TV, which was broadcast two consecutive days per week, at prime time. It is an open serial dealing with social customs, set in a small rural Catalan village. Since January 2010 it has been broadcast on Bulgarian television with the name Вятър от долината (a literal translation of *Ventdelplà*). In 2006, the same producer, Diagonal TV, adapted the series for Galician television, with the name *Valderri*, broadcast by TVG. The plot director and screenplay coordinator is Josep M. Benet i Jornet, a Catalan dramatist responsible for many Catalan TV productions (*Poblenou*, *La Rosa*, *Nissaga de Poder*, *Zoo...*). During the first four seasons, the series had over 20% of the audience share, but in the fifth season this fell significantly (dropping to 11% on 12 April 2009, Diagonal TV).

*Infidels* [Unfaithful] (TV3, 2009-2011) is a series produced by Diagonal TV, which was broadcast one day per week at prime time. It is notable for its urban and modern character, unlike the other two serials which are more traditional (*El cor de la ciutat*) and rural (*Ventdelplà*). It is situated in the line of female seriality, with four leading female characters (like *Sex in the City* and *Desperate Housewives*), but it has even more in common with *Lipstick Jungle* (NBC: 2008-2009), created by the author of *Sex in the City*, Candace Bushell, and starring Brooke Shields. The audience figures fell over the course of its 16 broadcast episodes from an initial 18% to 14% (www.formulatv.com).

*Goenkale* [the name of a fictitious village] (ETB1, 1994- ) is an open soap opera, the oldest on all of the television networks in Spain. It is currently in its 19<sup>th</sup> season. It is broadcast on two consecutive weekdays, and has changed with time (until 2004 it was broadcast daily). At present, it is broadcast at prime time (22-23h). Its duration is currently 1 hour. Its genre is the soap opera reflecting social customs in a rural setting. Its language is Euskera. A significant number of relevant personalities from Basque

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. TOUS ROVIROSA, Anna, "Usos i actituds juvenils davant les noves finestres audiovisuals", *Alfabetització audiovisual*, 2008b, <http://www.cac.cat/web/recerca/estudis/llicitat.jsp>, accessed 7 July 2011.

<sup>3</sup> BUSQUETS, G., ARTIGAS, L., "TV3 substituirà «El cor de la ciutat» al gener per un serial ambientat a la costa", *El Punt*, 12/03/2009, <http://www.elpunt.cat/girona/article/13/20-comunicacio/13335-tv3-substituira-lel-cor-de-la-ciutat-al-gener-per-un-serial-ambientat-a-la-costa.html>

society have played a cameo role in the series. In January 2010 its audience was 10.9%, the highest since July 2003, according to the producer ([www.pausola.com](http://www.pausola.com)).

*Martin* [Martin] (ETB1, 2003-2009) is a sitcom that tells the everyday life of Martin, played by José Ramón Soroiz, a sports commentator on the local San Sebastián radio station Irutxolo. His life is the connecting thread of the series, which shows his work milieu and his relations with his family. The series is produced by Globomedia and Tentazioak (*Mi Querido Klikowsky*). It was broadcast one day per week, at prime time. The episodes last for 30 minutes.

*Mi Querido Klikowsky* [My Dear Klikowsky] (ETB2, 2005-2010) is a series with comic story lines that usually start and finish in each episode. It has a serialised nature especially because of the evolution and continuity of the characters. The series was produced by Globomedia and Tentazioak. It was broadcast once a week at prime time. The episodes last for 50 minutes, and its genre is the comedy series. Its language is Spanish. It narrates the everyday activities of an Argentinean who has settled in Eibar, and his Basque family.

### 3. Television characteristics of the products analysed

The Basque and Catalan series and soap operas analysed share some television characteristics that should be stressed, such as the importance attributed to “proximate” serial products from the very outset, with EITB and TV3 playing a pioneering role in creating the serials *Goenkale* and *Poblenou*. One of the differences is the fact that TV3 has continued to give a preeminent role to this television field. It is the network that gives most importance to its own production<sup>4</sup>.

We should mention the coexistence of several television typologies that are mutually complementary, giving the spectator an interesting and varied offer. The first of the typologies, the most long lasting and offering the greatest returns, is the open serial dealing with social customs, which can be set in a village (*Goenkale*) or in a neighbourhood (*El cor de la ciutat*).

The open serial and the series are two television categories that correspond to two of the existing television formats. The formats of television fiction, according to Buonanno (2005), are the TV movie, the mini-series, the series and the open and shut serial (Buonanno 2005: 20). Two television genres that are of special interest in relation to this question are the soap opera and the Latin American *telenovela* –a differentiation that depends on the country of broadcast– as a basic initial differentiation. They are characterised by the fact of their being open products, unlike series. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that the serialisation of plots, the presence of greater continuity and personal story lines, affect serial production as a whole. Logically, therefore, we have not worked with any closed episodes in this research.

In *Ventdelplà* and TV3: during 2008 and 2009, the audience profile of the network and the profile of the series coincided, which were in both cases rural, Catalan-speaking, over 55 years of age, women and upper-middle class<sup>5</sup>. An intermediate typology is that of urban social customs (*El cor de la ciutat*), where the action is situated in a Barcelona

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. VILCHES, Lorenzo (coord.), *Mercados globales, historias nacionales*, Gedisa, Barcelona, 2009, p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. TOUS ROVIROSA, Anna, “Usos i actituds juvenils davant les noves finestres audiovisuals”, *Alfabetització audiovisual*, 2008b, <http://www.cac.cat/web/recerca/estudis/llicitat.jsp>, accessed 7 July 2011.

neighbourhood; the case that is furthest removed is that of the urban series properly speaking, like *Infidels*. In the Catalan case, a part of the television productions has been characterised by its dealing with social customs, whose aim is “more to reflect the present than to interpret it”<sup>6</sup>.

In broad terms, the differentiation between the types of productions leads us to establish the categories: urban/series/limited leading roles (*Infidels*, *Martin*) and rural/open series/ensemble of characters (*Ventdelplà*, *Goenkale*), which, while not ceasing to be true in these cases, have nuances and exceptions, especially due to the hybridisation of genres that is affecting contemporary serial narrative.

The urban series would be equivalent to modernity, the rural and open series to tradition and social customs. The latter category, which tend to be the most long-lasting, have precedents like the *Coronation Street* and *East Enders*, mentioned above.

With regard to the spaces, we can observe that the main spaces in all the productions are the home, the office and the bar, the essential place of encounter for a large part of the characters in television serial productions. On the other hand, a work/office opposition is produced. In this sense, we should bear clearly in mind the possible influence of the U.S. series set in places of work. The work place is a space that is being increasingly serialised in audiovisual production.

#### 4. Gender representations in television fiction

Research on gender relations in the communications field is of primordial relevance when analysing TV fiction and especially series aimed at a specifically female public. There are several studies showing the existence of marked differences in the forms in which television represents roles between men and women<sup>7</sup>. These studies demonstrate the perpetuation of gender clichés and stereotypes, amongst which the following stand out: the representation of men as dominant and women as complementary, less intelligent and dedicated to caring for others<sup>8</sup>, and the tendency to relegate female characters to the private field, leaving the field of work as a basically male bastion<sup>9</sup>. However, because of its focus on both public and private spaces and its dedication to the intimate and personal field, fiction is also one of the communication genres that provides more possibilities for showing social transformation. This can be achieved by exploiting the relation of familiarity established between characters and audience and the influence of such series as transmitters of values and models of socialization<sup>10</sup>. In

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. LACALLE, Charo, “Èxits i fracassos. Anàlisi de cas: *Temps de silenci* i *Cuéntame cómo pasó*”, *Quaderns del CAC*, 2002, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. HERRETT-SKJELLUM, J., ALLEN, M., Television programming and sex stereotyping: A meta-analysis”, *Communication Yearbook*, n° 19, 1996, pp. 157-185.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. DURKIN, K., “Television and sex-role acquisition”, *The British journal of Social Psychology*, 24 (2), 198, pp. 101-113; INGHAM, Helen “The Portrayal of Women on Television”, in <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/hzi9401.html>, accessed, 8 February 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. INSTITUTO DE LA MUJER, *Tratamiento y representación de las mujeres en las teleseries emitidas por las cadenas de televisión de ámbito nacional*, Instituto de la Mujer, Madrid, 2007; SCOTT, Amanda Marie Irene, *The roles of women in television situation comedies: a pilot study*, Thesis presented to the Faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies School of Professional Studies Gonzaga University, 2011, [http://web02.gonzaga.edu/comltheses/proquestftp/Scott\\_gonzaga\\_0736M\\_10072.pdf](http://web02.gonzaga.edu/comltheses/proquestftp/Scott_gonzaga_0736M_10072.pdf), Accessed, 8 February 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. BANDURA, Albert, “Social learning theory of aggression”, *Journal of Communication*, n° 28, 1978, pp. 12-29; MARTÍN-BARBERO, Jesús, *De los medios a las mediaciones*, Gustavo Gili, México, 1987; ANG, Ien, *Watching Dallas. Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*, Routledge, London,

this respect, fiction series can be an ideal vehicle for showing women and gender relations that are diverse and in accord with the present, making it possible to break with dominant traditional stereotypes<sup>11</sup>.

These changes seem to have come about very slowly. Davis<sup>12</sup> showed that there were no significant transformations in the representation of women in North American series between 1950 and 1980. Other studies draw attention to certain advances. Signorielli and Aaron Bacue<sup>13</sup> find a positive evolution in the female characters of North American series, since in spite of their continuing to be in a minority and stereotyped (younger and more beautiful), the percentage who have prestigious professions increased significantly from the 1960s to the 1990s. Geraghty<sup>14</sup> in her study on Anglophone soap operas argues that they are not only used to maintain the *status quo*, but also to promote change by validating the role of women in society as complex and three dimensional characters who have a useful function in the private and public spheres, even if this is traditional and conventional. The treatment of female characters is also related to the audience that is aimed at; those series with a male target audience have female characters who are more stereotyped<sup>15</sup>. In the case of series principally (but not only) aimed at a female public, we can say that there is greater heterogeneity. Thus we can find a broad range of products, from those promoting the reification of women, like *Hellcats* (The CW: 2010-2011), *Gossip Girl* (The CW: 2007-2012), *Privileged* (The CW: 2008-2009), to products that break and play with stereotypes, like *United States of Tara* (Showtime, 2009-2011) or *The Gilmore Girls* (The WB: 2000-2007)<sup>16</sup>.

In Spain, TV series started to show this evolution in the late 1990s with the incorporation of plots that referred to transformational aspects like the incorporation of women into the professional field or the difficulty of balancing work and family life, in spite of the continued appearance of gender stereotypes that were interiorized and difficult to alter<sup>17</sup>.

Thus, the feminization of work is an aspect that finds reflection in current fiction, in spite of the fact that the idea is often shown that production done by women is a type of non-work and an almost fetishistic "vocational" reward. Such is the paradigmatic case of the character of Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), columnist and writer in *Sex and the City* (HBO: 1998-2004)<sup>18</sup>. On the same line, we can situate the character of Susan Meyer (Teri Hatcher) in *Desperate Housewives* (ABC: 2004-2012) and her work

---

1996; BRYANT, Jennings, ZILLMANN, Dolf (eds.), *Media Effects. Advances in Theory and Research*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, NJ, 2002; HOFFNER, Cynthia, BUCHANAN, Martha, "Young Adults' Wishful Identification With Television Characters: The Role of Perceived Similarity and Character Attributes", *Media Psychology*, vol.7, n° 4, 2005, pp. 325-351.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. GALÁN, Elena, "Construcción de género y ficción televisiva en España", *Comunicar XV* (28), 2007, pp. 229-236.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. DAVIS, Donald M., "Portrayals of Women in Prime-Time Network Television: Some Demographic Characteristics", *Sex Roles*, vol. 23, n° 5-6, 1990, pp. 325-332.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. SIGNORIELLI, Nancy, BACUE, Aaron, "Recognition and Respect: A Content Analysis of Prime-Time Television Characters Across Three Decades", *Sex Roles*, vol. 40, n° 7-8, 1999, pp. 527-544.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. GERAGHTY, Christine, *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. EATON, Carol, "Prime-time stereotyping on the new television networks", *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, n° 74, 1997, pp. 859-872.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. TOUS ROVIROSA, Anna, "Los rostros de la mujer en la televisión de los Estados Unidos. Tradición, feminismo y postfeminismo en las series estadounidenses (1950-2010)", in LARRONDO, Ainara and MESO, Koldo, *3ª Jornadas sobre mujeres y medios de comunicación*, Servicio editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, Bilbao, 2011, pp. 187-202.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. GALÁN, Elena, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. RUIDO, María, "Just do it! Bodies and Images of Women in the New Division of Labour", 2007, retrieved from <http://www.workandwords.net/es/texts/view/501>, on 10 March 2012.

as an illustrator of children's stories. These characters' representation must be analysed from the point of view of third wave feminism (Johnson, 2007). They are "stay-at-home-moms", as Marc Cherry said about their characters<sup>19</sup>.

When women are shown in broader roles like that of the professional woman and the single mother, the focus on these latter seems to be based on patriarchal ideology: the housewife is seen positively, the woman with power is frequently the villain (as in *Damages*, FX: 2007-2012), and female characters can be intelligent or beautiful, but rarely both at the same time<sup>20</sup>. When they are, as in the character of Lynette Scavo (Felicity Huffman) in *Desperate Housewives*, they are overwhelmed by the difficulty of reconciling work and family life, which entails negative consequences for their private life.

Besides, archaic roles continue to be predominant and the modern woman is frequently contrasted, in the same series or on the same network, with woman portrayed as a sex object, victim and traditional housewife, as a commercial strategy of TV networks so as not to lose a conservative audience. Timmins<sup>21</sup> gives the examples of *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC: 2005-) and *Dexter* (Showtime: 2006-) to show this dual role of the female image in United States fictional series. In the case of Spanish fiction, García-Muñoz, Feddele and Gómez-Díaz<sup>22</sup> underscore the representation of women's work in TV series; in spite of its having evolved favourably in numerical terms, it continues to contain gender stereotypes in relation to age and the prestige of professions.

Other studies have shown the evolution of the concept of the family in TV series. In the United States there has been a move from traditional family relations to the current representation of parenthood as conflictive<sup>23</sup>, in spite of maintaining the mythification of maternity as being exclusive to women<sup>24</sup>; moreover, new models of the family are shown, such as single-parent and homoparental families<sup>25</sup>.

At the same time, the representation of women's diversity from the ethnic and social point of view has also been one of the concerns of the academic field. From the start it was shown that ethnic minorities were underrepresented in fiction series and that the interrelation of the gender, class and ethnic variables was one of the most common forms of perpetuating negative clichés in fiction<sup>26</sup>.

The age of female characters is another of the factors that have drawn the attention of researchers. In spite of audience studies showing that the public demands adult female

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. WEINRAUB, B., "How Desperate Women Saved Desperate Writer", *The New York Times*, 23-10-2004.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. INGHAM, Helen, "The Portrayal of Women on Television", 2007 in <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/hzi9401.html>, accessed, 8 February, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. TIMMINS, Kate, "The TV female Paradox", 2011, retrieved from <http://annenbergl465.posterous.com/the-tv-female-paradox-tag-dacci>, on 15 March 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. GARCÍA-MUÑOZ, Nuria, FEDELE, Maddalena, GÓMEZ-DÍAZ, Xiana, "The occupational roles of television fiction characters in Spain: distinguishing traits in gender representation", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. XXV, n° 1, 2012, pp.349-366.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. TOUS-ROVIROSA, *op. cit.*, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. MEDINA, Pilar, *et al.*, "La representación de la maternidad en las series de ficción norteamericanas. Propuesta para un análisis de contenido. Desperate Housewives y Brothers & Sisters", 2010, retrieved from: <http://www.aeic2010malaga.org/upload/ok/137.pdf>, on 25 January 2012.

<sup>25</sup> MARTINS, Aline, *A família homoparental na fillaô televisiva: as práticas narrativas do Brasil e da Espanha como relatos das novas representações afetivo amorosas*, UAB, PhD dissertation, Bellaterra, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. GERBNER, George, SIGNORIELLI Nancy, *Women and Minorities in Television Drama, 1969-1978*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1979; EATON, Carol, *op. cit.*; MASTRO, Dana E., GREENBERG, Bradley S., "Portrayals of racial minorities on prime time television", *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44, 2000, pp. 690-703.

characters with significant roles and interesting story lines<sup>27</sup>, Lauzen, Dozier and Reyes<sup>28</sup> draw attention to the fact that women over the age of 60 only represent 4% of the total characters in North American series; moreover, they are shown as not very attractive and lacking work and power –a notable exception is Patty Hewes, the protagonist of *Damages* played by Glenn Close. This is on contrast to women between the ages of 20 and 30, who seem to be living a type of eternal adolescence based on leisure and sexual relations (the abovementioned *Hellcats*, *Privileged*, *Gossip Girl*). Weitz<sup>29</sup> provides an analysis of the “*Cougar*” phenomenon. This is a term that designates women who maintain sentimental relations with younger men, which seems to have gained prominence in American fiction, such as for example in the series of that name, *Cougar Town* (ABC: 2009-) starring Courteney Cox. Weitz concludes that in spite of this being a positive advance that shows elder women as independent and having sexual desires, these characters are always middle class, slim, white and frequently treated as the butt of humour in sitcoms, and they frequently prolong the characteristics of adolescents over time. With reference to physical aspects, different studies have drawn attention to the unrealistic image of extreme slimness of women in TV series<sup>30</sup> and the tendency to represent women as sex objects and as being physically more attractive than their male companions<sup>31</sup>.

One of the positive aspects in the evolution of women's representation in fiction is the appearance of series aimed at an adolescent public where the young female characters are presented as independent and intelligent heroines, such as the case of *Charmed* (The WB, 1998-2006) or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997-2003)<sup>32</sup>. In this respect, research in fiction reflects how since the 1980s, and coinciding with the social advance of women in the western world, there has been attempt to break taboos on sexuality and show women in fields like those of friendship and cooperation with their partners<sup>33</sup>.

In any case, in spite of the proliferation of stereotypes, it is undeniable that fiction can promote positive social change, as Howard-Williams also notes (2013). Different research projects have shown that the broadcasting of Latin American *telenovelas* has helped sex education and women's control of reproduction, and has enabled a change in values based on aspects like criticizing machismo or placing emphasis on the rights of minorities and women<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. ADAMS-PRICE, Carolyn, GOODMAN, Mark, *et al.*, “An Analysis of Aging Women in Film and Television”, 2003, <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/2003/goodman.html>, accessed, 8 July, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. LAUZEN, Martha, DOZIER David, M., REYES Barbara, “From Adultescents to Zoomers: An Examination of Age and Gender in Prime-Time Television”, *Communication Quarterly*. vol. 55, n° 3, 2007, pp. 343-357.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. WEITZ, Rose, “Changing the Scripts: Midlife Women's Sexuality in Contemporary U.S. Film”, *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 14, n° 1, 2009, pp. 17-32.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. TIGGEMANN, M., PICKERING, A. S., “Role of television in adolescent women's body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness”, *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, vol. 20, n° 2, 1996, pp. 199-203; FOUTS, Gregory, BURGGRAF, Kimberley, “Television Situation Comedies: Female Body Images and Verbal Reinforcements”, *Sex Roles*, vol. 40, n° 5-6, 1999, pp. 473-481.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. GORDILLO, Inmaculada, GUARINOS, Virginia (eds.), *Todos los cuerpos. El cuerpo en televisión como obsesión hipermoderna*, Babel Editorial, Córdoba (Argentina), 2010

<sup>32</sup> This has allowed young *queers* to define and explore their sexuality and, at the same time, create an alternative sub-world of media representations and appropriation of popular culture. Cfr. DRIVER, Susan, *Queer girls and popular culture: reading, resisting, and creating media*, Peter Lang, New York, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. GREENBERG, Bradley S., BUSSELLE, Rick W., *Soap operas and sexual activity*, Michigan State University, Michigan, 1994; GALÁN, Elena, *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. FARIA, Vilmar, POTTER, Joseph E., *Television, Telenovelas, and Fertility Change in North-East Brazil*, Population Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, 1994; LA FERRARA, Eliana, CHONG,

So, to summarize, research on gender and television fiction underscores the existence of three principal periods: the first (s. XIX-XX) and second (1960-1990) waves of feminism, and the third wave or post-feminism (1990 to date) (Johnson, 2007). Researchers like Gallagher (1981) stressed the unequal representativeness of women in all communication fields, and since then there has been broad and continuous research on gender in the specific communication field of fiction series, in both the Anglophone context (Gerbner and Signorieli; Durkin, 1985; Davis, 1990; Geraghty, 1991; Eaton, 1997; Fouts and Burggraf, 1999; Driver, 2007; Ingham, 2007; Scott, 2011; Timmins, 2011), and the Spanish one (Galán, 2007; Gordillo and Guarinos, 2010; Medina, 2010; Rivadeneyra, 2011; García Muñoz and Fedele, 2012). The main problem concerning this question is the perpetuation of gender stereotypes on television, and the added advantage of these decades of study is a specialization in concrete questions like age: adolescents (Tiggenman and Pickering, 1996; Lauzen, Dozier, Reyes, 2007) and aging (Adams-Price and Goodman, 2003), racial minorities (Mastro and Greenberg, 2000), homosexuality (Driver, 2007; Martins, 2012) or television genres and formats (Scott, 2011).

### 5. *Aims*

This is how we're adding to it: in spite of the existence of studies on gender and seriality in the Spanish state, besides those mentioned (Instituto de la Mujer, 2007), the present study is novel insofar as it uses content analysis to compare the social representation of women in a sample of fiction series of two of the autonomous television channels that have the greatest importance and tradition, and are also the longest running, in the Spanish state: EITB and TVC. The variables used are those that received the most emphasis in earlier studies, that is, the importance of physical appearance and age, profession, social class and geographic origin.

The purpose of the research was to analyse the value construction and value transmission in gender relations that are favoured in the soap operas and television series; and also to analyse the construction of characters on the basis of stereotypes. The type of relation favoured, the role occupied by women (from the family, social and professional points of view) and the image projected were all observed. The context of these television productions and their diachronic relation with the television genres of their respective autonomous communities are relevant elements for the analysis.

At the same time, we also propose to explore what differences and similarities exist in the treatment of gender roles amongst the different fiction products analyzed on the basis of variables of format (soap opera, open serial, sitcom), scenario of the action (rural, urban) and nationality of the production (Basque, Catalan).

### 6. *Methodology*

As the previous bibliography stresses, television is a powerful transmitter of stereotypes (Johnson, 2007), which is why we expected to find machismo in the series analyzed. The two autonomous television channels in question, TVC and EITB, were the first to produce series in the Spanish state (1994). We set out from the fact that in the Catalan series a significant tradition of equitable treatment of gender could be observed, since

---

Alberto, DURYEA, Suzanne, *Soap Operas and Fertility: Evidence from Brazil*, Bread Working Paper n° 172, Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development, London, 2008.

*Poblenou* (1994) and *La Rosa* (1995-96) and we considered that the Basque series might be more traditional in their treatment of gender.

In the present article we describe how television fiction addresses and gives meaning to social transformations; concretely, we are referring to the 180 degree turn that the role of women has undergone thanks to the advance of the feminist movement and changes that have occurred in work settings (as can be observed through the abovementioned three waves of feminism). How do these transformations influence the way women are treated in fiction? How does fiction represent changes? To answer these and other questions this article presents the results of a comparative study of six maximum audience television series that were being broadcast in the Basque Country and Catalonia at the time the study was made. The working hypothesis of the research focused on the fact that an effort is made in the fiction seriality produced by the Basque and Catalan autonomous public television corporations to avoid the perpetuation of stereotypes, but that these persist on the axiological level (the construction of values).

### 6.1. Universe to be analysed

#### 6.1.1. Basque productions

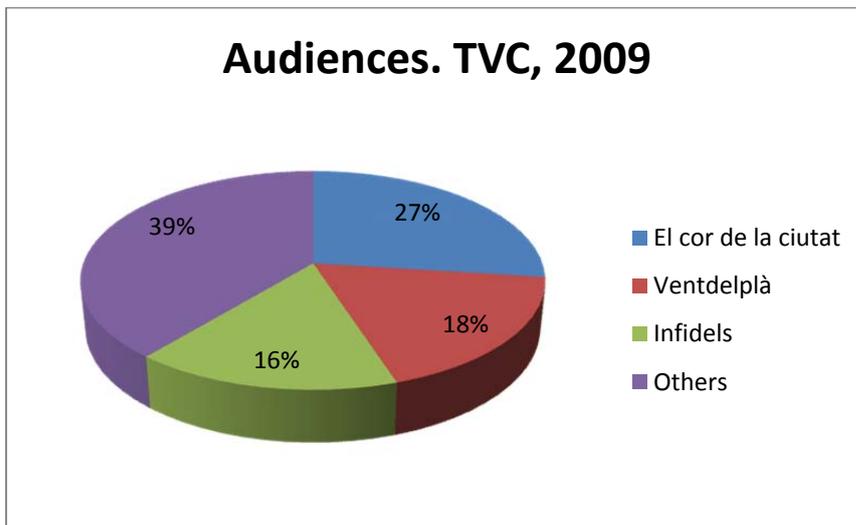
Series	<i>Martin</i>	ETB1: 2003-2009	Broadcast weekly
Soap opera	<i>Goenkale</i>	ETB1: 1994-	Broadcast twice a week. Daily repeats
Series	<i>Mi querido Klikowsky</i>	ETB2: 2003-2010	Broadcast weekly

#### 6.1.2. Catalan productions

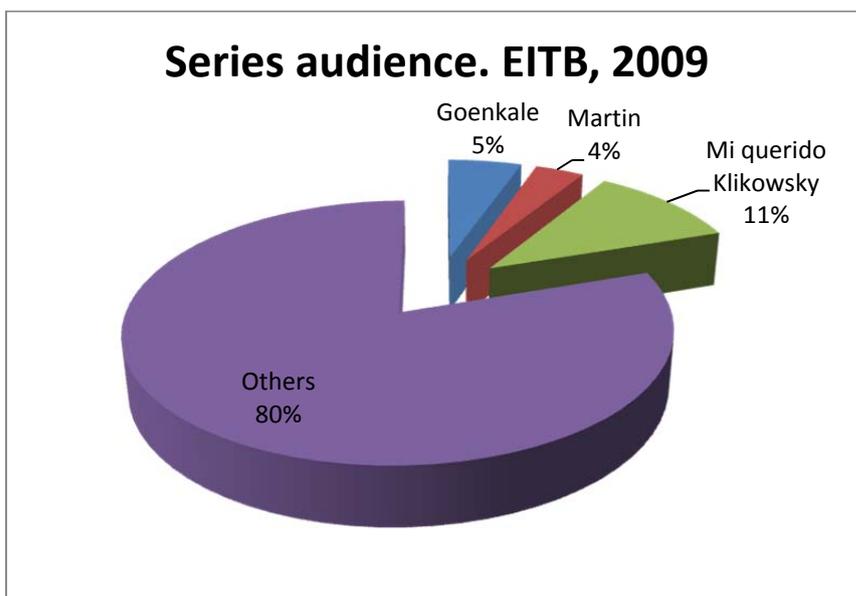
Soap opera	<i>Ventdelplà</i>	TV3: 2005-2010	Broadcast two days a week
Soap opera	<i>El cor de la ciutat</i>	TV3: 2000-2009	Broadcast daily
Series	<i>Infidels</i>	TV3: 2009-2011	Broadcast weekly

All the series were being broadcast at the time of the study. In fact, *Goenkale* is still being broadcast nowadays (April 2013). The series analysed were chosen according to audience level and the long-running character of the products, especially notable in the cases of *El cor de la ciutat* and *Goenkale*. With respect to audiences, it is worth drawing attention to linguistic differentiation in the Basque case: *Goenkale* and *Martin* are broadcast on ETB1, in Euskera, and their audience share amongst the Euskera-speaking population is not negligible. *Mi querido Klikowsky* was broadcast on ETB2 in Spanish. There is no differentiation in the Catalan case as all the programs are broadcast in the same language on TVC<sup>35</sup>. As can be appreciated in the graphs, besides the linguistic distinction, the audience figures for in-house productions are higher in the Catalan than in the Basque case.

<sup>35</sup> Although repeats are at times broadcast on Canal 33, also part of TVC, the autonomous Catalan television that broadcasts exclusively in Catalan.

**Pie chart 1. Audience figures for the series. TVC, 2009**

Elaborated by the authors. Source: FormulaTV. 2009.



Elaborated by the authors. Source: EITB

Analysis of the image of women in the six television series studied was focused on their roles, profiles, interpersonal relations and the nature of female and male characters. For this purpose 108 episodes were viewed during the year 2009. Given the differing nature of each of the products analysed and the frequency with which they were broadcast, we opted to select a longitudinal sample that would provide a homogeneous corpus of episodes to be viewed in the research. Thus, although the television serial production analysed in the case of EITB was significantly less in number than in the case of TVC<sup>36</sup>, 54 episodes were analysed on each of the networks<sup>37</sup>. The sample was analysed between January and June 2009.

<sup>36</sup> 16 broadcasts a month on EITB and 36 broadcasts a month in the case of TVC.

<sup>37</sup> 3 episodes per month and season; a total of 18 episodes per series.

The methodology is structured in four large blocks, elaborated upon the above mentioned literature review, to enable us to describe the quantity of appearances of women, how they appeared and how they were represented.

1. Quantification of women and men. Quantity of men and women according to the typology of the character (protagonists, secondary, extras).
2. Definition of the women's socio-demographic characteristics: age, marital status, geographical origin and sexual identity.
3. Explanation of the women's roles in the series analysed: their profession, role and social class.
4. Description of the women's physical characteristics (complexion, stature, relevant physical problems).

We opted for a quantitative methodology focused on content analysis, referring to the presence of women in the fictional TV series, as well on their representativeness. We fixed these questions into an analysis grid and we developed a coding book in which we defined the categories to be assessed in the items. Coding consisted in noting the presence or absence of the elements in the episodes. A common analytical file for all the episodes viewed contained questions relating to these four blocks, as well as additional elements on the axiological level, conceived from the start as items that would supplement the analysis. We opted to prioritize those elements that could be compared with social reality (quantification, but especially socio-demographic and professional characteristics and those related to social class), as well as the physical image of women in the series analysed, due to its undeniable importance in contemporary society and the disorders it can occasion, as well as the importance conceived by the prior genre studies to these questions<sup>38</sup>. We were trained to apply the analysis grid consistently, as coders. In order to carry on the current research, intercoder reliability tests based on Cohen's kappa coefficient<sup>39</sup> were performed with satisfactory results.

## 7. Results

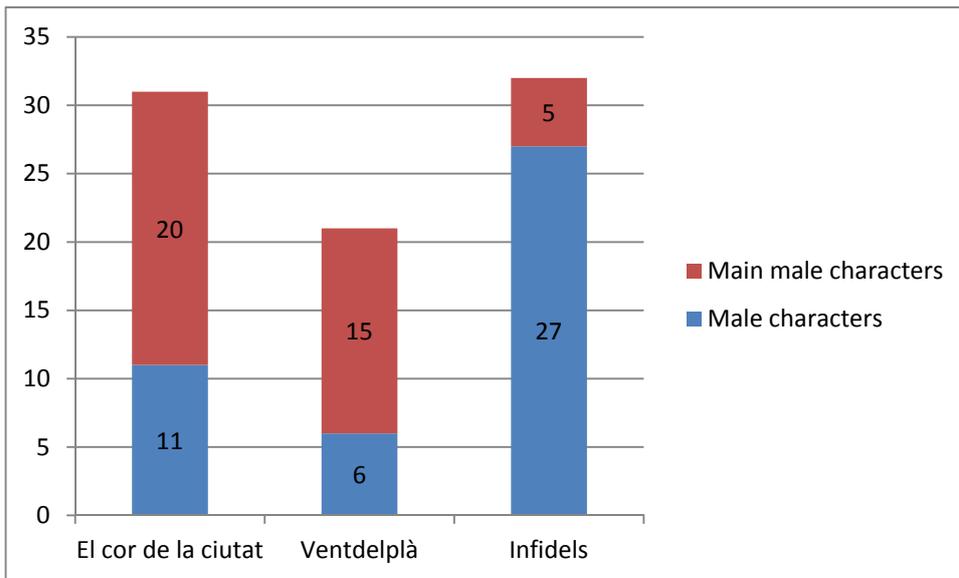
### 7.1. Quantification of women and men

With respect to quantifying female and male characters in the series analysed, it can be seen that the representativeness of men and women is equitable in both the Catalan and Basque series. Variations of great significance are not observed in the quantity of female and masculine characters. Cases like *Infidels* stand out due to the perfect correspondence of characters of both sexes, as well as *Goenkale* due to the slight numerical superiority of female characters. The case of *Martin* is also interesting, in which there are more male characters in total, but the majority of leading characters are women.

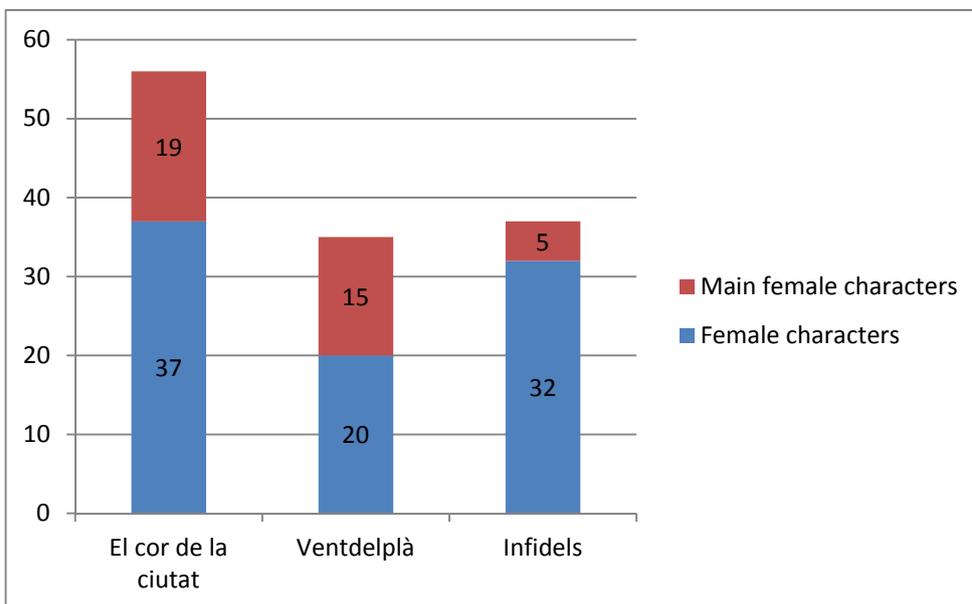
---

<sup>38</sup> TIMMINS, *op. cit.*, 2011; GARCÍA-MUÑOZ, Nuria, FEDELE, Maddalena, GÓMEZ-DÍAZ, Xiana, *op. cit.*, 2012.

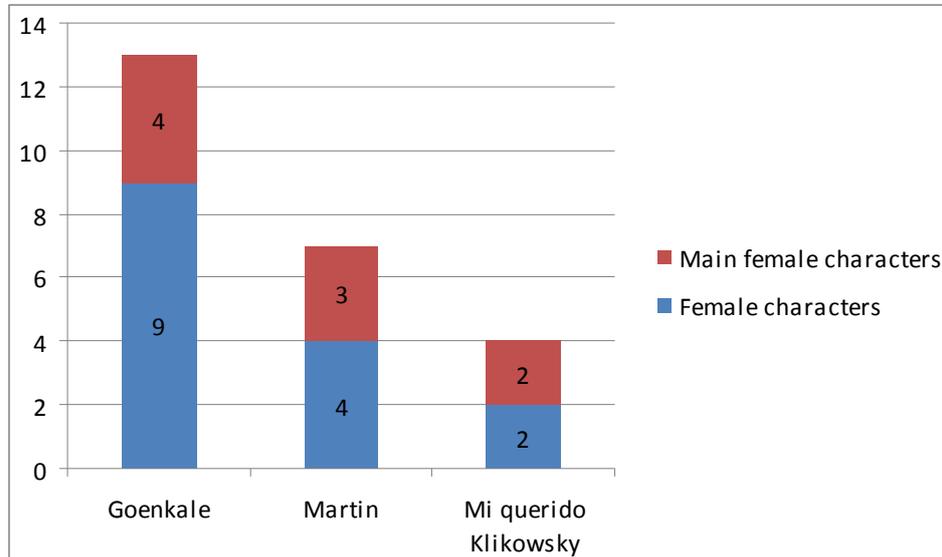
<sup>39</sup> Cfr. COHEN, Jacob, "A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales", *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 20 (1), 1960, pp. 37-46.

**Graph 1. Quantification of characters by gender. TVC, 2009**

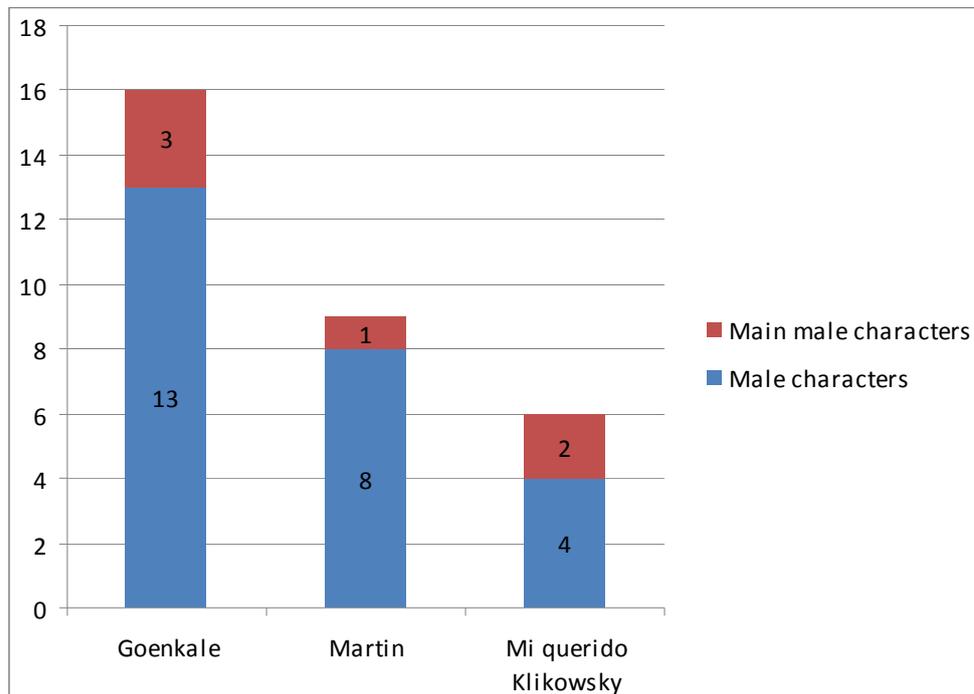
Elaborated by the authors.



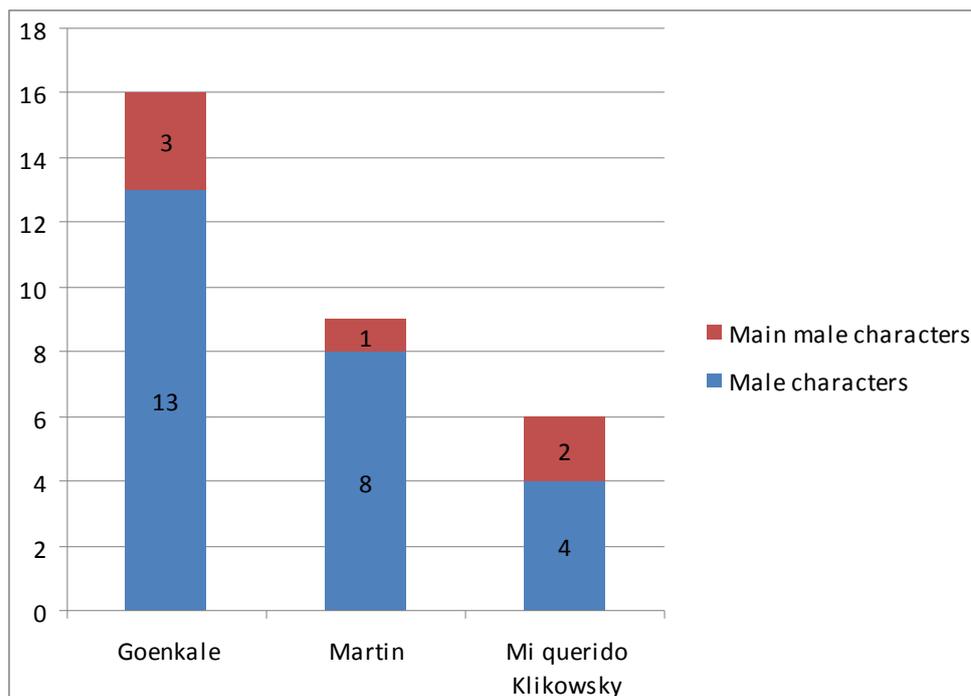
Elaborated by the authors.

**Graph 2. Quantification of characters by gender. EITB, 2009**

Elaborated by the authors.



Elaborated by the authors.



Elaborated by the authors.

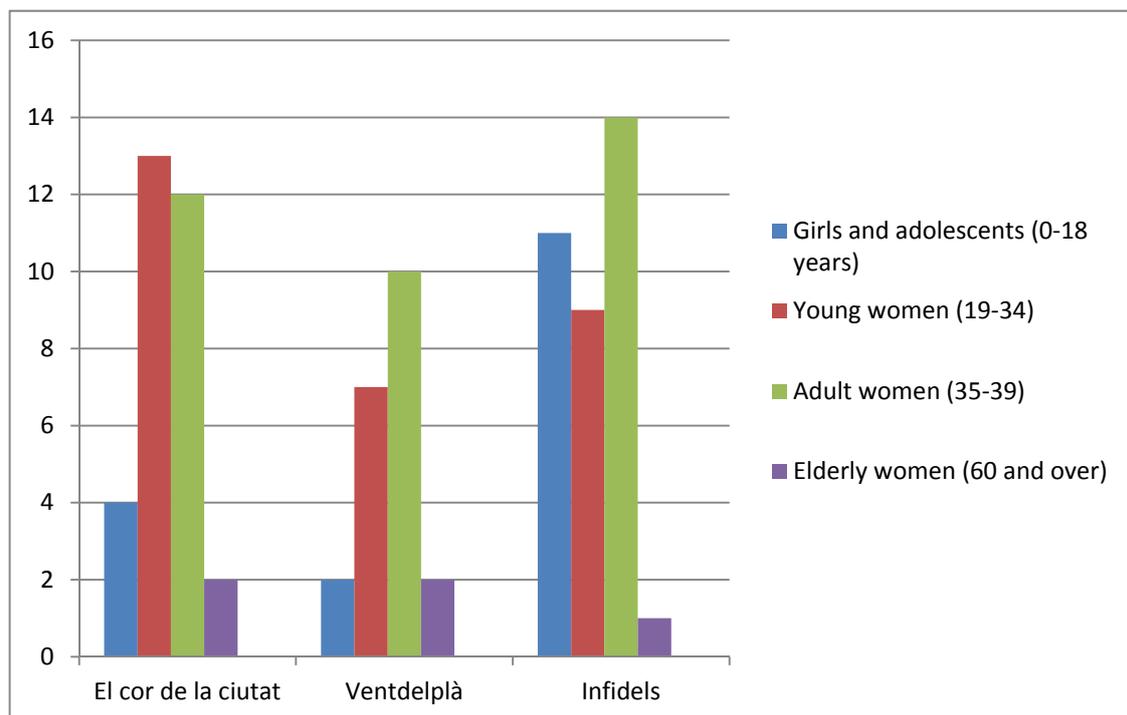
There is one series that offers surprising percentage results. *Mi querido Klikowsky* presents an image of a society based on a matriarchy and the influence of women, above all in the family and private field, but, conversely, masculine characters predominate, accounting for 45% of the total, although male and female main characters are shared out in a quantitatively similar way. The relationship of the leading character with the rest of the characters in the three Basque series should be understood in relation to the so-called *cuadrilla*, or group of friends, one of the main elements in Basque socialization. *Klikowsky* is an Argentinean individualist who is not fully integrated in his Basque *cuadrilla*, which is made up of male characters. In *Goenkale* it is also possible to observe the grouping of friends into *cuadrillas*, although in *Martin* such *cuadrillas* are less frequent. Women in the Basque series do not appear reflected in relation to the *cuadrilla* in a significant way. There is only one series where there is a predominance of women, whose ages vary considerably (the male protagonist has a mother, a wife, two daughters and female colleagues at work), and where the *cuadrilla* has a very limited importance: *Martin*.

In the Catalan case, the group attitudes of men (the Catalan *colla* has less social presence than the Basque *cuadrilla*) are of very low intensity. The Catalan series reflect the lower importance of the group and the greater importance of the individual, man or woman; this can only be compared to *Martin* in the Basque case. Where the group and fidelity are important (in clear counter-position to the title) in the female field is in *Infidels*, whose plot begins with the infidelity of one of the protagonists on her wedding day (Paula). Where the group is not given cohesion by the *cuadrilla*, this is done by the family (*Martin*) or the neighbourhood (*El cor de la ciutat*). If the question is focused around the *cuadrilla*, women become complementary, with the obvious exception of *Infidels*. In the Basque series the female role is doubly complementary due to the general plot of two of the three series analysed, which revolve around the male character who gives the product its title (*Martin* and *Mi querido Klikowsky*).

## 7.2. Definition of the socio-demographic characteristics of the women

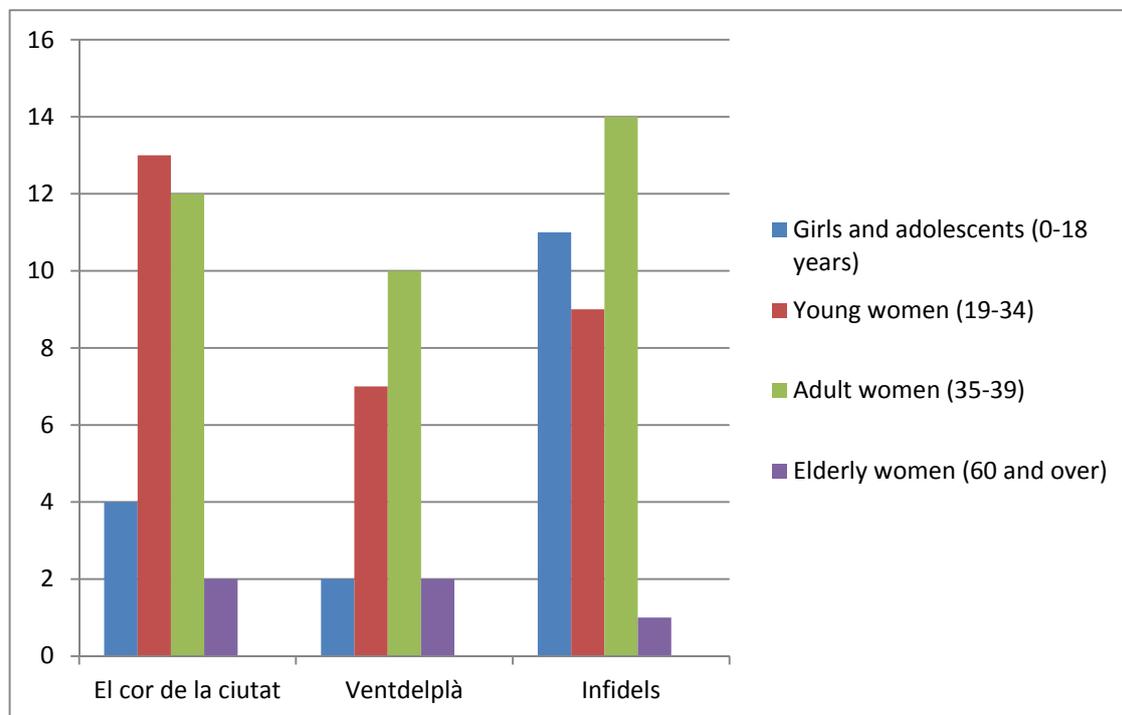
With respect to age, marital status, geographical origin and sexual identity, our focus is on the geographical origin of the women represented, but beforehand we will briefly comment on the age of the women represented, as it has been a concern of interest to previous studies<sup>40</sup>.

**Graph 3. Age of female characters. TVC, 2009**



Elaborated by the authors.

<sup>40</sup> Tiggeman and Pickering, 1996; Adams-Price and Goodman, 2003; Lauzen, Dozier, Reyes, 2007.

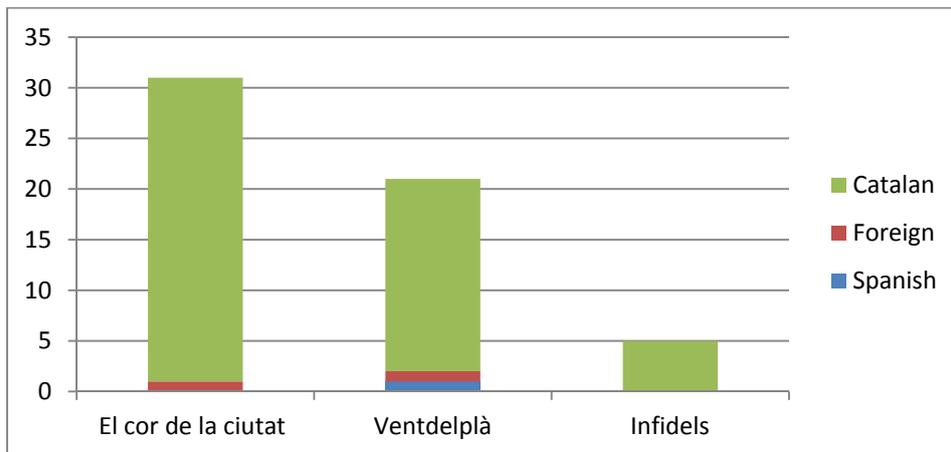
**Graph 4. Age of the female characters. EITB, 2009**

Elaborated by the authors.

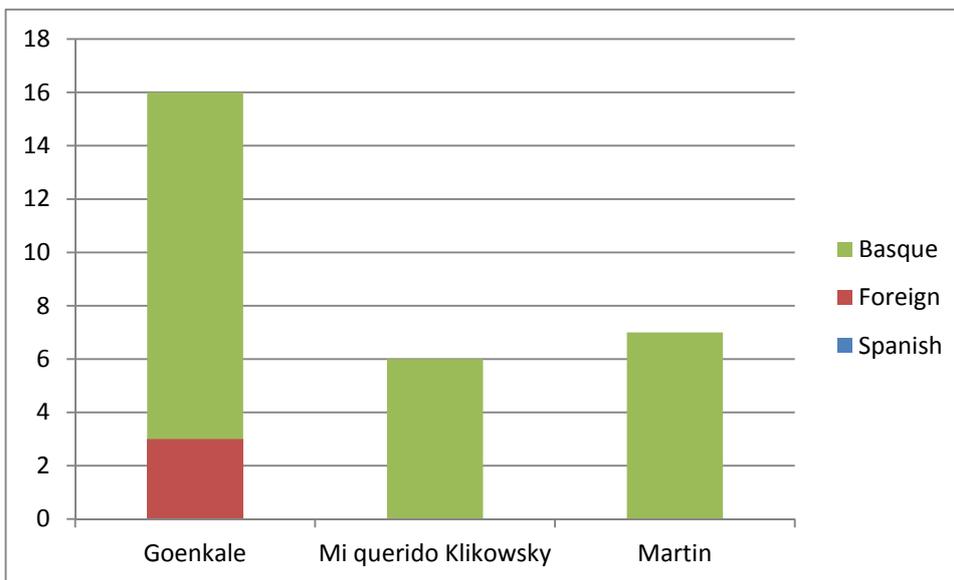
With respect to sexual identity, we must mention that one of the couples in *Infidels* was homosexual (Dani and Arlet), but did not appear in the sample analysed. The age groups with the greatest presence in the Catalan series are 19-59, while in the Basque series the presence of young characters is far higher, especially in *Goenkale* and *Mi querido Klikowsky*.

Concerning age, another relevant aspect of *Infidels* with respect to the physical image of women is the portrait of the character of Lidia, a psychiatrist and widow, who is the oldest of the group (49 years old). She takes care of her physical appearance and has relationships with men, at times younger than her, as in the case of her partner during the first season analysed (Toni, played by Julio Manrique). At no point are these characteristics presented as subject to parody, as happens in the abovementioned *Cougar Town*.

In the Catalan series *Ventdelplà* and the Basque series *Goenkale*, there are immigrant women, in the first case these are both Spanish –the bar keeper, who speaks in Catalan, and her husband, who is free of complexes but has a strong Spanish accent and lexical influences– and Latin American. In the Basque series there are no Spaniards (whose language is always dominant, unlike the Catalan case) but there is a Cuban bar keeper, who speaks Basque with a Caribbean accent –a circumstance based more on wishful thinking and the projection of an ideal image than on an abundance of real cases. But, in general, and with respect to geographical origin, we find a limited representativity of immigrant women.

**Graph 5. Geographical origin of women represented. TVC, 2009**

Elaborated by the authors.

**Graph 6. Geographical origin of women represented. EITB, 2009**

Elaborated by the authors.

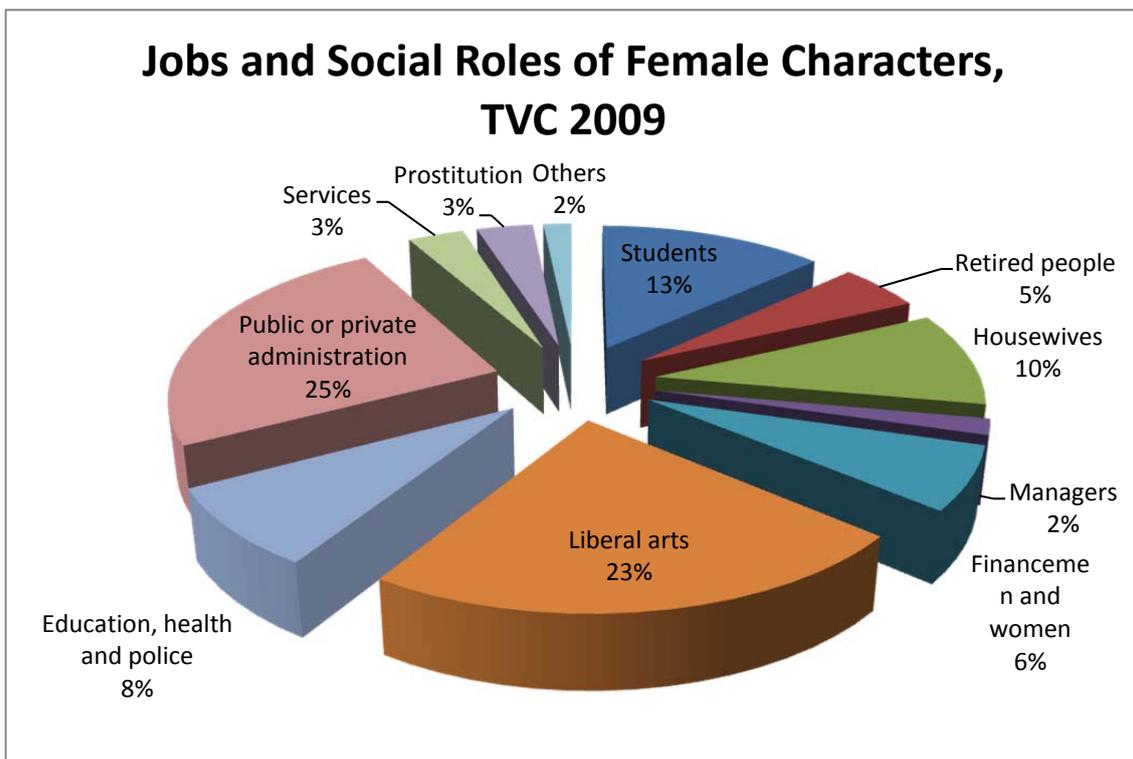
Attention can be drawn to the limited representativeness of immigration in the set of series analysed, and to the fact they were broadcast in 2009, a year when the presence of immigrants in both Catalonia and the Basque Country was still very significant; this was at the start of the economic crisis that has had so much repercussion on the return of this collective to their countries of origin. We should draw attention to some of the products, like *Martin*, in which the women represented are Basque, live in the Basque Country and speak Euskera. *Infidels* follows this pattern in the episodes analysed, obviously involving Catalan women. So, this leads us a little bit away from gender and racial minorities studies<sup>41</sup>. An interesting differentiation to note is the presence of immigrant characters in long running seriality, i.e. *Goenkale*, *El cor de la ciutat* and *Ventdelplà*. In

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. GERBNER, George, SIGNORIELLI Nancy, *op. cit.*, 1979; EATON, Carol, *op. cit.*; MASTRO, Dana E., GREENBERG, Bradley S., *op. cit.*, 2000.

these three products, a certain longevity coincides with the treatment of questions of social interest<sup>42</sup> that are not observed, or more rarely so, in series that ran for fewer seasons, like *Martin* and *Infidels*. The case of *Mi querido Klikowsy* deals with immigration, focusing on the male protagonist, a male Argentinean.

### 7.3. Explanation of women's roles in the series analyzed: profession, role and social class of the women.

With respect to the professions represented in the Catalan and Basque series, and to the social roles performed by the female characters, it is liberal professions of some prestige that are most present in the three Catalan series, only surpassed by administrative professions in the private or public sectors, a reflection of Catalan society itself. Students and housewives are other important sectors, while there is a limited representation of marginal sectors like prostitution. As Ruido states, there is a "potential effectiveness of the representation as a contribution to the social valorisation of some activities (...) defined as work"<sup>43</sup>.



Elaborated by the authors.

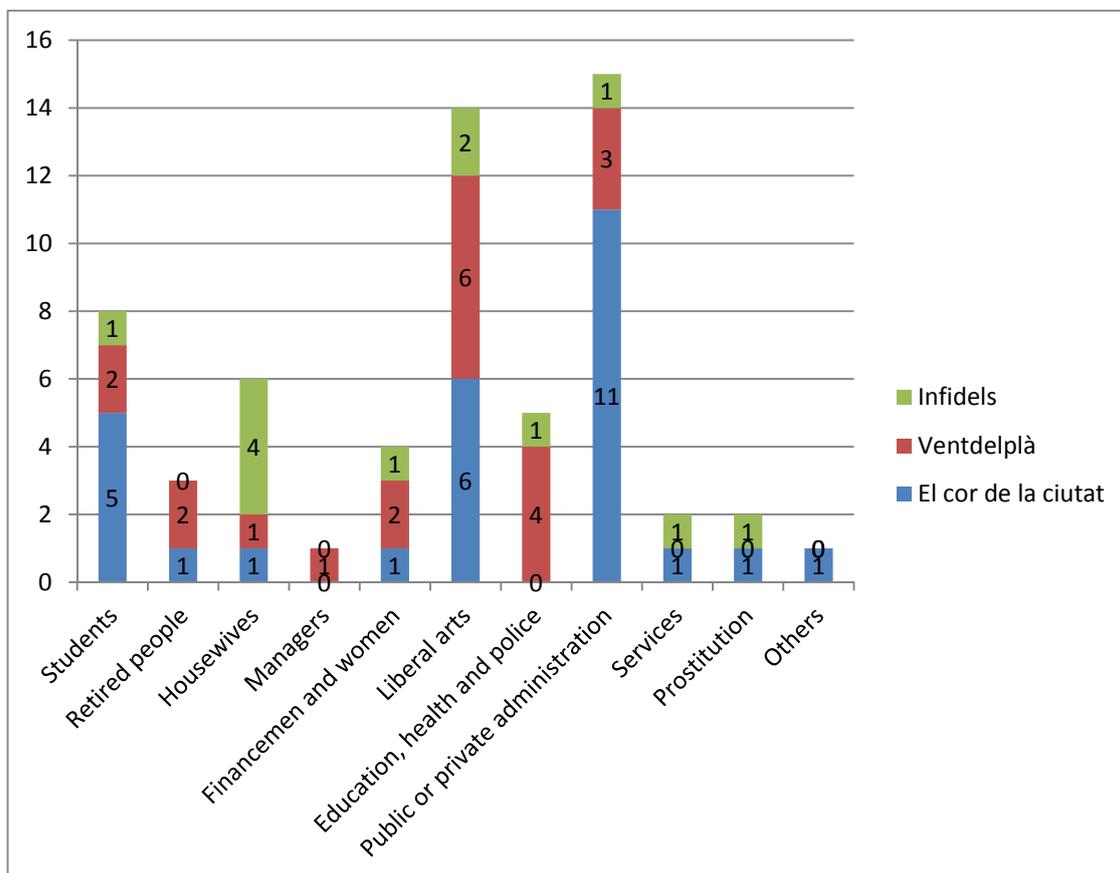
We will now make a more detailed analysis of each of the three series of TVC that have been studied. It is worth stressing that *Ventdelplà* and *El cor de la ciutat*, set in a village in the interior of one of the provinces (Breda in Girona) and in popular neighbourhoods of the capital (set in the Barcelona neighbourhoods of Sant Andreu and Sant)

<sup>42</sup> In *El cor de la ciutat*, not only is immigration dealt with but also other questions of social interest, like domestic violence, maltreatment and harassment at school.

<sup>43</sup> RUIDO, María, *op. cit.*, 2011.

respectively, give much more weight to female characters. They are dedicated to the sector of the liberal professions in one case, and to the administrative sector in the other. The fictional village of Ventdelplà has a mayoress, although she is a secondary character; the protagonist, Teresa (played by the actress Emma Vilarasau) is a doctor. The male characters cover a wide range of professions, from the businessman Fornàs to the farmer Jaume. *Infidels*, on the contrary, although it is an urban series set in the capital, situated in the middle and upper classes of Barcelona in a milieu that could be described as bourgeois and progressive, gives more weight to housewives. It must be said that the four friends who are the protagonists are a housewife, a psychiatrist, a schoolteacher and an executive. The mixture of prestigious professions and of mothers and housewives caring for others in *Infidels* is a reproduction of the difficulties of combining work and family life, without showing parodical stereotypes as in the abovementioned case of Lynette in *Desperate Housewives*. Elisabet, a property agent and single mother in *Ventdelplà*, would be a non-parodical representation.

**Graph 7. Representativeness of professions or social roles of female characters, by series. TVC, 2009**

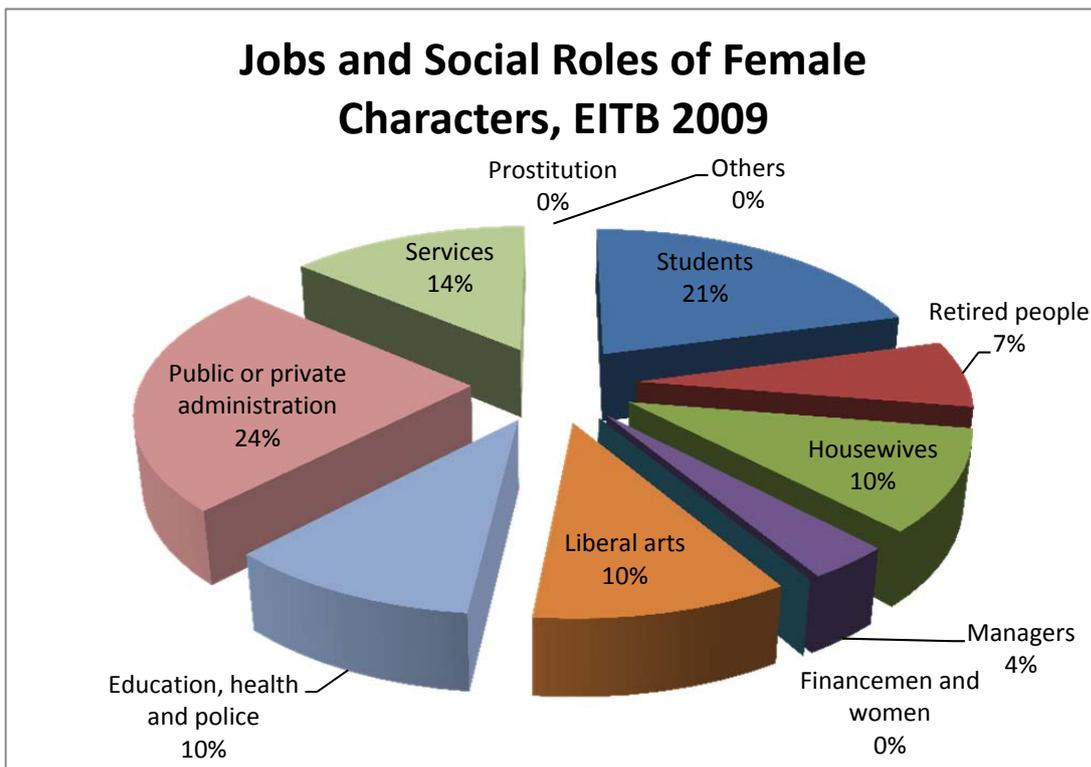


Elaborated by the authors.

For their part, the Basque series reflect a different portrait: as corresponds to Basque society itself, there is a great weight of the administrative sector, while the importance of the liberal professions is considerably lower; other professions are more equally distributed than in the Catalan series, and marginal sectors like prostitution appear to an even lesser extent. The profession of waitress also appears to a greater degree than in the Catalan series, a fact that is congruent with the greater presence of the bar as a space of sociability in the Basque series than in the Catalan ones, and also congruent with the

typical representativeness of women at the service of others. The importance given to students stands out; the majority of young female characters do not work but study. We are facing a portrait of Catalan society more homogeneous than it is in reality, where it is worth stressing the demographic weight of Barcelona with respect to the other three provinces. The province of Barcelona exceeds 5 million inhabitants (the capital has 1,621,000 inhabitants), while none of the other three provinces reaches one million<sup>44</sup>.

**Pie chart 4. Representativeness of professions or social roles of female characters. EITB, 2009**



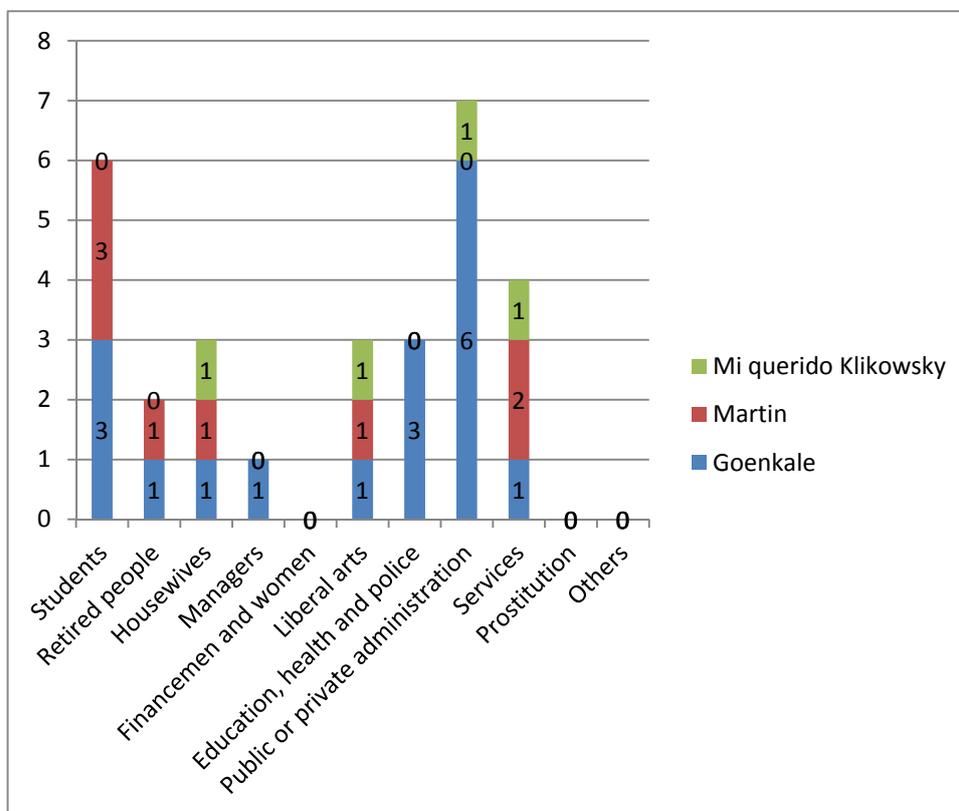
Elaborated by the authors.

Once again, as in the case of the Catalan series, it is worth breaking down these data by series. It should be borne in mind that, as occurs with the Catalan audiovisual productions studied, the setting is varied as we mentioned above: *Goenkale* and *Mi querido Klikowsky* are set in medium-sized villages or towns, like *Ventdelplà*. In one case this is a town where the majority is Euskera-speaking, in the other (Eibar) the majority is Spanish-speaking; while *Martin*, a Basque language series, is set in San Sebastián, the only one of the three provincial capitals of the Basque Autonomous Community that conserves a native use of Euskera, although it is not the majority language of the inhabitants. The series thus reflects a certain sector of that city, and not the city's population as a whole like the Catalan series *Infidels*. On the other hand, this is a sector that is not dominant in the urban nucleus, and *Martin* is therefore much more a reflection of the middle-middle class than *Infidels*. This is also apparent in the linguistic variety and register employed in *Martin*. The fact is that in *Goenkale* the majority of the characters are administrative workers (in second place there is a certain presence of doctors, teachers and police, in an attempt to give a good image of the

<sup>44</sup> Idescat, "Població. 1900-2012. Províncies, Padró Municipal d'Habitants", <http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=acc&n=245&lang=es>

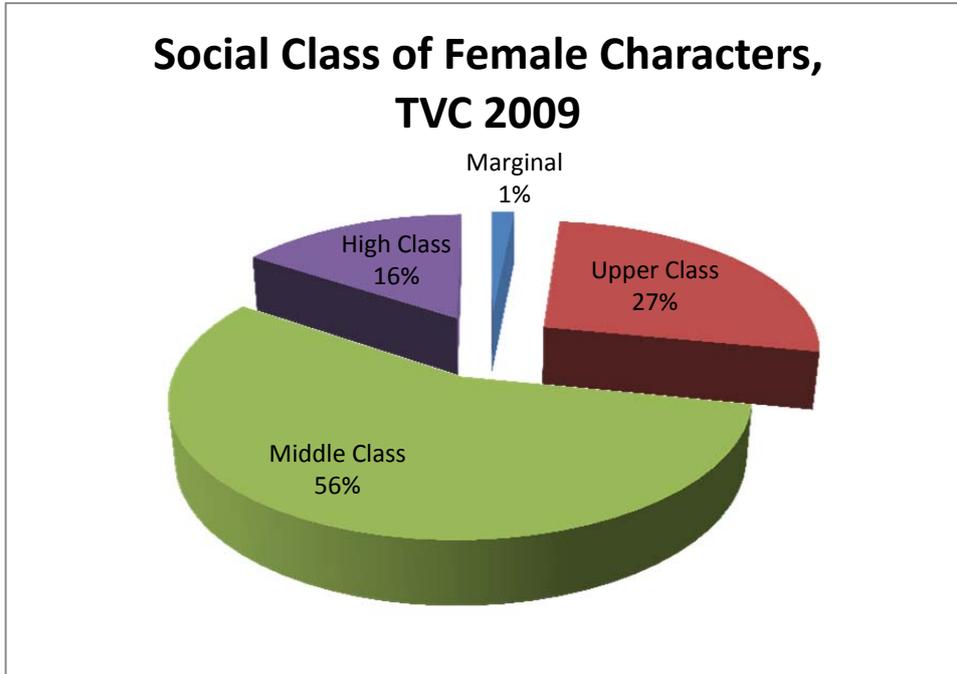
Basque police corps, the Ertzaintza), and in *Martin* the majority are students (with a similar percentage to that of *Goenkale*). This must be related to the fact that it is precisely the young population –which, irrespective of area of origin and the real presence of Euskera there, has been educated in that language– that is most represented, at least its female sector. Therefore the daughters of the protagonist stand out and, as corresponds to the reality of the native Euskera-speaking population, they employ a more cultured register than the adult characters. It thus seems clear that the strategy is not to ignore the adult public but to make a clear gesture towards younger spectators, even to children: the youngest daughter of the protagonist is Janis (Amaia Iraundegi), who is underage. The producers and the networks sought interlocution with younger sectors amongst television viewers as we can see with Janis' blog and the Facebook profile of Arlet (Aina Clotet), the youngest of the leading characters of *Infidels*.

**Graph 8. Representativeness of professions or social roles of female characters, by series EITB, 2009**



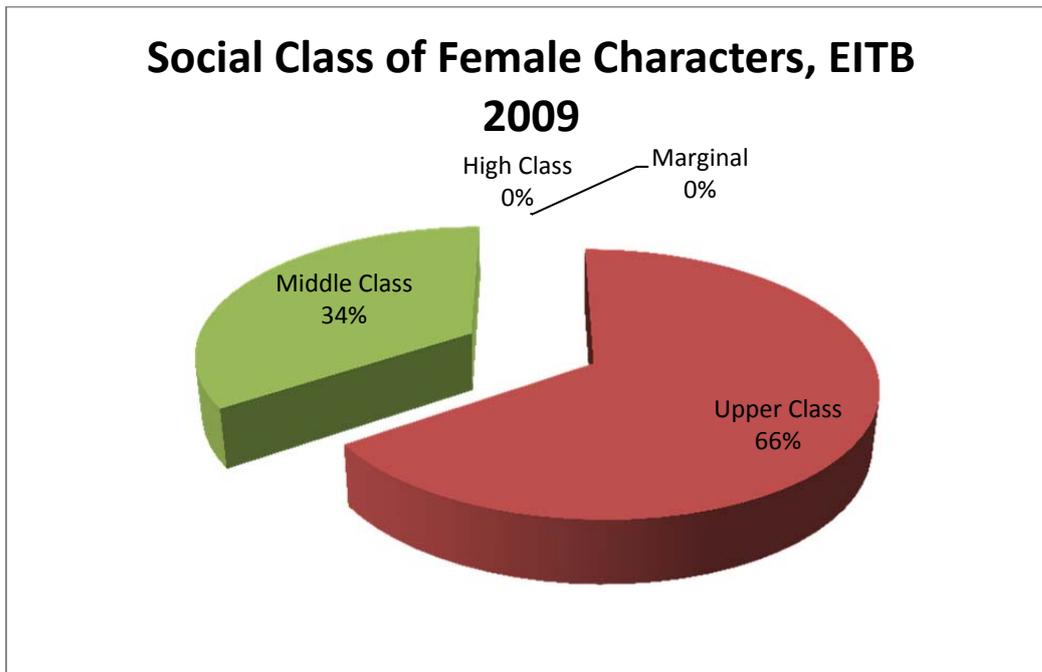
Elaborated by the authors.

We have already mentioned some features that define the importance given to social class. We will now focus on this in more detail. The Catalan series concede a majority presence to the middle class, above all *El cor de la ciutat* (which is much more middle-middle class than is the case of one of its referents, the British series *East Enders*).

**Pie chart 5. Representativeness of the social class of female characters. TVC, 2009**

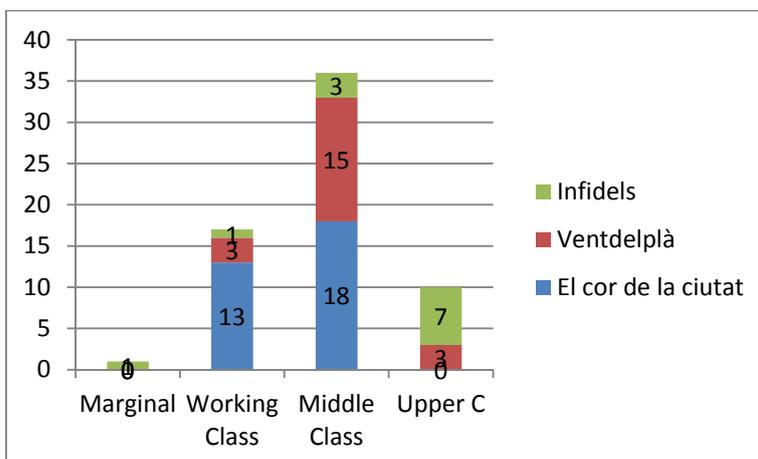
Elaborated by the authors.

On the contrary, the social class that receives by far the greatest representation in the Basque series is the working class, when Basque reality is very different: it is a society where there is a clear predominance of services and therefore a predominance of the middle class. The working class has an even greater weight than the class that predominates in the Catalan series. While in the Catalan case the most represented class rises to 56% of the presence of female characters, in the Basque case the most represented class has a weight that is ten points higher (66%). Only one-third of the female characters in the Basque series is middle class. In the Catalan series the weight of working class female characters is nearly three times less in percentage terms than in the Basque series, not reaching a third of the total.

**Pie chart 6. Representativeness of the social class of female characters. EITB, 2009**

Elaborated by the authors.

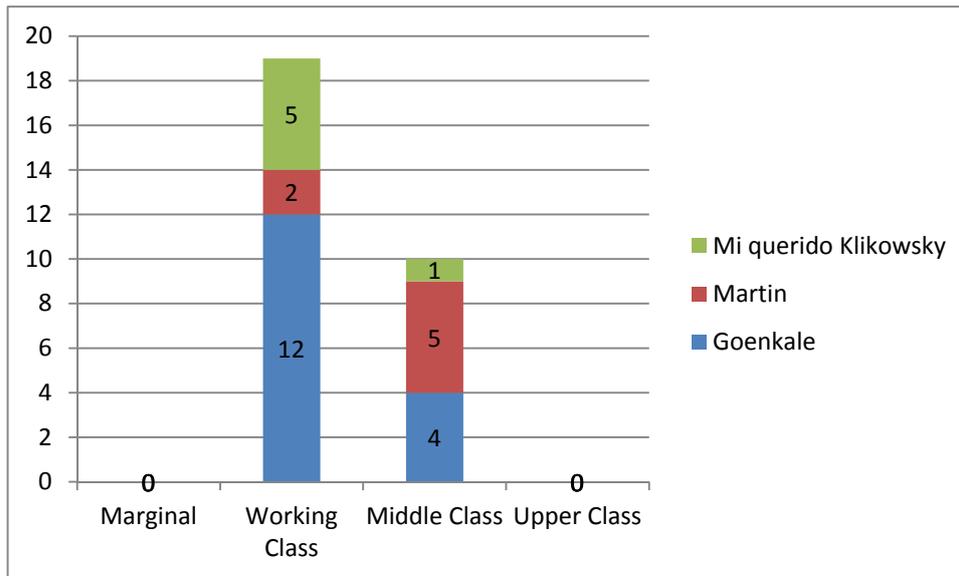
Another very evident feature is that while the Catalan series reflect a greater variety of social classes, both upwards (upper class) and downwards (marginal female characters), the three Basque series studied practically lack female characters from these two strata. Furthermore, the presence of upper class characters in the Catalan series, nearly a sixth of all the female characters, is a notable feature. By series in the Catalan case, the urban series *El cor de ciutat* presents a picture that is mainly composed of middle or working class characters. In *Ventdelplà* there is an overwhelming majority of female characters from the middle class and, as we have seen, from the liberal professions. *Infidels* gives more importance to upper class women, although –and this is not a contradiction, or at least it is only one in appearance– there is a notable presence of well-off housewives, as we have seen.

**Graph 9. Representativeness of the social class of female characters, by series. TVC, 2009**

Elaborated by the authors.

In its turn, Basque television makes the majority of the characters of the rural *Goenkale* (a fictitious fishing village that could well be Orío, for example) working class, while in the series set in the medium-sized inland town that we identify with Eibar (a traditional factory enclave full of workshops, an arms producing town) the women are middle class. The same is true of *Martin*, where the Euskera-speaking woman from San Sebastián is represented as belonging to this social stratum.

**Graph 10. Representativeness of the social class of female characters, by series. EITB, 2009**



Elaborated by the authors.

The immense majority of female characters have paid work or are students (teenagers or of university age), while there is a more limited presence of housewives and retired people. In this respect one can speak of a suitable representation of social reality and of the presence of women on the labour market. However, if we pause to consider what these professions are, we find that the focus does not attempt to break with schemes and stereotypes and that the majority of women work in professions considered female in the service sector, such as shop assistants or bar keepers, or which have become feminized in recent years, like health professionals. The women under consideration are involved in professions dedicated to caring for others, whether this is in health, education, beauty or hostelry. Thus, women are represented as carers and servants, and models of femininity are offered that do not break with the patriarchal tradition of the myth of servitude and self-sacrifice.

#### 7.4. Description of the physical characteristics of the women (complexion, stature, relevant physical problems)

With respect to physical characteristics, we can draw attention to the exaltation of beauty, attention to physique and youth in *Infidels*, in keeping with the television series that are its precedent (*Sex and the City*, *Lipstick Jungle*) and unlike the rest, in which the physical representativeness of women is much more heterogeneous. One interesting

aspect is that the meeting place in *Infidels* is the swimming pool, where the protagonists practice sport (aquagym), instead of the traditional meeting places in soap operas, as mentioned above. *Ventdelplà* includes two young people with serious health problems: a paralyzed female character (Mònica, a writer) and an HIV carrier (Cristina, a student). An elderly person, Dora, discovers that she is developing Alzheimer's disease. One of the protagonists of *Infidels*, Paula, has a brain tumour that conditions her approach to life. In *El cor de la ciutat*, Sandra is a youth who lost a hand and spends her time drawing. This is the dominant trend in the majority of cases: young people who have had accidents or diseases that they have overcome in order to lead a normal life.

## 8. Conclusions

In the case of the Catalan productions, both *El Cor de la Ciutat* and *Ventdelplà* share positive features for promoting gender equality, the personality traits of the female characters break with stereotypes and the image of women that they offer is a good reflection of real life. The women are strong and independent; they take decisions; they undertake actions and are involved in different story lines, without necessarily being linked to their relationship with men. They are also multidimensional characters; these women are supportive of each other and are not subjected to a submissive focus. In the two soap operas we find a group of women of different ages and of realistic and varied appearance, and we can affirm that there is no exaltation of either youth or beauty. In the two soap operas the women have relations and socialize in the same spaces as the men, whether this is in bars, streets, shops or the domestic setting. We find well developed story lines that are handled respectfully and that especially affect women, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment in *El Cor de la Ciutat*, or the specific problems of women's health in *Ventdelplà*.

*Ventdelplà* also positively reflects the social reality of women in the work setting, with women engaged in very different professions that are important in the public space, like doctors, a mayoress, writers, entrepreneurs or police. The female characters in *El Cor de la ciutat* are also inserted in the world of work, although there is an excessive emphasis on *feminized* professions, related to care and serving others.

On the negative side, neither of the two series shows the diversity of women who proceed from numerous geographic origins and social conditions and form part of the plural Catalan citizenry, and heterosexuality is the dominant norm, with other sexual identities being shown in a minority way.

The series *Infidels* does not try to be realistic, nor to reflect social diversity. In spite of the seemingly positive feature that the protagonists of the series are women, these characters conduct their lives entirely on the basis of their relations with men. In reality, it is the series that most reproduces gender stereotypes as it shows some women who are incapable of realizing themselves in any other than the sentimental aspect, and who are desperately seeking the myth of romantic love. Moreover, this series does not reproduce Catalan social diversity, either in terms of age, social class or geographical origin, and their professions are not the most important aspect of the plot. Physically, there is an exaltation of youth and beauty.

On the positive side, the importance of female solidarity and friendship amongst women is shown in the series; in spite of these characters being strongly individualistic, they also claim the right to decide on their own lives, to be free and to avoid social conventionality. With respect to the differences observed between the traditional serials

(*El Cor de la Ciutat, Ventdelplà*) and the modern and urbanite *Infidels*, it should be recalled that Catalan seriality of the traditional type has shown a special concern for the treatment of gender from the outset (*Poblenou*, TV3: 1994).

With respect to the Basque productions, in general and at the quantitative level the number of women and men in the three Basque series analysed is balanced. Neither in the leading and secondary roles, nor in those of the extras, are there significant differences in the number of men and women who play the different characters.

Nonetheless, we cannot overlook the fact that the titles of two of the three Basque series analysed bear the name of their male protagonists: that is, *Martin* and *Mi querido Klikowsky*, and only in the case of *Goenkale* is allusion made to a fictional Basque village. The female roles thus gravitate around these men and their lives, and the women are never the main protagonists of the TV productions.

We have thought it important to stress the reiteration of certain stereotypes associated with the female gender and that are above all repeated in the field of work. It is at the very least curious that the women protagonists of the three Basque television series analysed basically work in bars and/or as housewives. Women's access to higher education is a well-established fact in Basque society (as it is in Spanish and Catalan society) and their access to jobs of different types is a reality, however this does not find reflection in these programs. Neither in the roles of the women protagonists of the soap operas and series, nor in the secondary female roles, can women's incorporation into specially qualified work be observed. The women appear as a secretary (*Goenkale*) or as a bar keeper (*Goenkale Martin* and *Mi querido Klikowsky*). In terms of work, the role of men as protagonists is always superior. They are thus engaged in professions like radio journalist (*Martin*), carpenter (*Mi querido Klikowsky*) or entrepreneurs (*Goenkale*).

Although the male role in performing household tasks has been introduced into these series, in others like *Mi querido Klikowsky* the classic stereotype of the housewife represented by a woman continues to be perpetuated, although treated in a humorous way. We would draw attention to the presence of characters like Koldo or Kándido in *Goenkale*, or Martin in the series of that name, who help in household tasks and in caring for and bringing up the children. Although there is a perpetuation of the cliché of the Basque woman as being strong and capable of using good criteria in managing her home and her family (matriarchy) and of being able to control her feelings, on many occasions this latter facet seems to prevail over the women. Feelings both towards their family and towards the lover/husband of the women in the Basque productions analysed often play too prevalent a role in their lives, frequently going beyond what is rational.

As a final conclusion to the study, we would underscore that a certain perpetuation of gender clichés and stereotypes can be observed in the series analysed, especially with respect to the following questions:

-The complementarity of women

*Martin* and *Mi querido Klikowsky* are two examples of serials that focus on male characters, around whom the plot revolves. Their titles indicate the importance of this fact. A series like *Infidels*, which has a much more modern aesthetic than the other two Catalan products, presents female characters who are highly dependent on the male ones, which is normal according to romantic love.

-Women caring for the rest

The stereotype of the woman-career is perpetuated, especially in social and professional roles, as shown by the female characters in the series analyzed being assigned to jobs related to service and caring for others (administrative employees, nurses, bar keepers).

-Reification of women

This is not found in all the series, but in some of them (especially *Infidels*) the female protagonists adhere to the existing canon of beauty, slimness and body care prevalent in contemporary society. *Infidels* contrasts especially with *El cor de la ciutat*, in which women appear represented in a much more heterogeneous way with respect to their physical appearance and ages, and where a much broader representativeness is sought (Trini and Remei are overweight; the characters range from teenagers to elderly women over 60, including young women and women of around 40).

We must also mention some more positive conclusions of the analysis of the representation of women in the series analysed.

-Women's incorporation into the world of work. In the six series analysed there is a predominance of women who work, while, in the second place, there is a limited representation of young female students and unemployed or retired women.

-Prestigious professions. Some of the female characters of the series analysed have prestigious professions (Isabel, the mayoress, and Teresa, the doctor in *Ventdelplà*; Lidia, the psychiatrist, Cruz, the bank manager, Paula, the journalist and writer, in *Infidels*), and social roles and categories are heterogeneous in the case of both male and female characters, although to a lesser extent in the Basque series.

-Reconciling work and family life. This question is shown in several series and characters (for example Elisabet, a property agent and single mother in *Ventdelplà*), without showing parodic stereotypes as in the previously mentioned case of Lynette in *Desperate Housewives*.

-There is only a limited representation of immigrant women in these productions, but where they are shown is in the more long-running seriality (*Goenkale*, *El cor de la ciutat*, *Ventdelplà*), in which other questions of social interest also appear and where the representativeness of age and physique is broader than in the series that ran for fewer seasons. This more heterogeneous representativeness can be seen in the social classes and ages found in the Catalan series portraying local customs, far higher than the representativeness of the Basque series, which do without upper and marginal classes.

-The Catalan-produced fiction series focus on characters that are more individualistic than those in the Basque series (with the exception of Martín). Besides, in these latter, female characters tend to be more complementary and secondary than in the Catalan series.

What we found in the Catalan case is that some apparently modern and urban series show models of women who give great importance to their physical appearance and depend sentimentally on men (*Infidels*); these series are more stereotyped than some series dealing with social customs (*El cor de la ciutat*, *Ventdelplà*), in which equality of men and women is promoted and many female characters have prestigious jobs (a mayoress and a doctor in *Ventdelplà*). In the case of the Basque series we found the traditional aspect we had expected to encounter, as well as a representation of women in jobs bearing little resemblance to reality, with an emphasis above all on service jobs (waitresses). We also observed the weight of matriarchy in Basque society and that the management of emotions was basically in the hands of women.

The results of this content analysis make it possible to lay a foundation so that future research on proximate fiction can take account of the point to which gender representations form part of these products. In recent decades, the role of women has undergone certain changes thanks to the advances of the feminist movement and changes that have taken place in work settings. Basque and Catalan fiction has certainly shown this evolution and made efforts to avoid the perpetuation of stereotypes, but it has been seen how these still persist. It is therefore necessary to analyze these

stereotypes in greater depth together with how they are transmitted, especially amongst the young and adolescent population.

### References

- ADAMS-PRICE, Carolyn, GOODMAN, Mark, *et al.*, "An Analysis of Aging Women in Film and Television", 2003, <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipasa/2003/goodman.html>, accessed 8 July 2011.
- ANG, Ien, *Watching Dallas. Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*, Routledge, London, 1996.
- BANDURA, Albert, "Social learning theory of aggression", *Journal of Communication*, n° 28, 1978, pp. 12-29.
- BRYANT, Jennings, ZILLMANN, Dolf (eds.), *Media Effects. Advances in Theory and Research*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, NJ, 2002.
- BUSQUETS, Gemma, ARTIGAS, Lourdes, "TV3 substituirà «El cor de la ciutat» al gener per un serial ambientat a la costa", *El Punt*, 12/03/2009, <http://www.elpunt.cat/girona/article/13/20-comunicacio/13335-tv3-substituira-lel-cor-de-la-ciutat-al-gener-per-un-serial-ambientat-a-la-costa.html>, accessed, 8 July 2011.
- COHEN, Jacob, "A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales", *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 20 (1), 1960, pp. 37-46.
- DAVIS, Donald M., "Portrayals of Women in Prime-Time Network Television: Some Demographic Characteristics", *Sex Roles*, vol. 23, n° 5-6, 1990, pp. 325-332.
- DRIVER, Susan, *Queer girls and popular culture: reading, resisting, and creating media*, Peter Lang, New York, 2007.
- DURKIN, K., "Television and sex-role acquisition". *The British journal of Social Psychology*, 24 (2), 1985, pp. 101-113.
- EATON, Carol, "Prime-time stereotyping on the new television networks", *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, n° 74, 1997, pp. 859-872.
- FARIA, Vilmar, POTTER, Joseph E., *Television, Telenovelas, and Fertility Change in North-East Brazil*, Population Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, 1994.
- FOUTS, Gregory, BURGGRAF, Kimberley, "Television Situation Comedies: Female Body Images and Verbal Reinforcements", *Sex Roles*, vol. 40, n° 5-6, 1999, pp. 473-481.
- GALÁN, Elena, "Construcción de género y ficción televisiva en España", *Comunicar XV* (28), 2007, pp. 229-236.
- GALLAGHER, Margaret, *Unequal Opportunities: The Case of Women and the Media*, Unesco, Paris, 1980.
- GARCÍA-MUÑOZ, Nuria; FEDELE, Maddalena, GÓMEZ-DÍAZ, Xiana, "The occupational roles of television fiction characters in Spain: distinguishing traits in gender representation" *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. XXV, n° 1, 2012, pp. 349-366.
- GERAGHTY, Christine, *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.
- GERBNER, Goerge, SIGNORIELLI Nancy, *Women and Minorities in Television Drama, 1969-1978*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1979.
- GORDILLO, Inmaculada, GUARINOS, Virginia (eds.), *Todos los cuerpos. El cuerpo en televisión como obsesión hipermoderna*, Babel Editorial, Córdoba (Argentina), 2010.
- GREENBERG, Bradley S., BUSSELLE, Rick W, *Soap operas and sexual activity*, Michigan State University, Michigan, 1994.
- HERRETT-SKJELLUM, J., ALLEN, M., "Television programming and sex stereotyping: A meta-analysis", *Communication Yearbook*, n° 19, 1996, pp.157-185.
- HOFFNER, Cynthia, BUCHANAN, Martha, "Young Adults' Wishful Identification With Television Characters: The Role of Perceived Similarity and Character Attributes", *Media Psychology*, vol. 7, n° 4, 2005, pp. 325-351.

- HOWARD-WILLIAMS, Rowan, KATZ, Elihu, "Did Television Empower Women? The Introduction of television and the changing status of women in the 1950s", *Journal of Popular Television*, vol. 1, n° 1, 2013, pp. 7-24.
- IDESCAT, "Població. 1900-2012. Províncies, Padró Municipal d'Habitants", in <http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=245&lang=es>, accessed 6 March 2013.
- INGHAM, Helen, "The Portrayal of Women on Television", in <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/hzi9401.html>, 2007, accessed, 8 February, 2012.
- INSTITUTO DE LA MUJER, *Tratamiento y representación de las mujeres en las teleseries emitidas por las cadenas de televisión de ámbito nacional*, Instituto de la Mujer, Madrid, 2007.
- JOHNSON, Merri Lisa, *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane Puts it in a Box*, IB Tauris, New York, 2007.
- LACALLE, Charo, "Èxits i fracassos. Anàlisi de cas: Temps de silenci i Cuéntame cómo pasó", *Quaderns del CAC*, 2002, pp. 37-49.
- LA FERRARA, Eliana, CHONG, Alberto, DURYEA, Suzanne, *Soap Operas and Fertility: Evidence from Brazil*, Bread Working Paper n° 172, Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development, London, 2008.
- LAUZEN, Martha, DOZIER David, M.; REYES Barbara, "From Adolescents to Zoomers: An Examination of Age and Gender in Prime-Time Television", *Communication Quarterly*, vol. 55, n° 3, 2007, pp. 343-357.
- MARTÍN-BARBERO, Jesús, *De los medios a las mediaciones*, Gustavo Gili, México, 1987.
- MARTINS, Aline, *A família homoparental na fillaô televisiva: as práticas narrativas do Brasil e da Espanha como relatos das novas representações afetivo amorosas*, UAB PhD dissertation, Bellaterra, 2012.
- MASTRO, Dana E., GREENBERG, Bradley S., "Portrayals of racial minorities on prime time television", *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44, 2000, pp. 690-703.
- MEDINA, Pilar, et al., "La representación de la maternidad en las series de ficción norteamericanas. Propuesta para un análisis de contenido, *Desperate Housewives y Brothers & Sisters*", 2010, retrieved from: <http://www.aeic2010malaga.org/upload/ok/137.pdf>, on 25 January 2012.
- RIVADENEYRA, Rocío, "Gender and Race Portrayals on Spanish-Language Television", *Sex Roles*, 65, 2011, pp. 208-222.
- RUIDO, María, "Just do it! Bodies and Images of Women in the New Division of Labour", 2007, retrieved from <http://www.workandwords.net/es/texts/view/501>, on 10 March 2012.
- SCOTT, Amanda Marie Irene, *The roles of women in television situation comedies: a pilot study*, Thesis presented to the Faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies School of Professional Studies Gonzaga University, 2011, [http://web02.gonzaga.edu/comltheses/proquestftp/Scott\\_gonzaga\\_0736M\\_10072.pdf](http://web02.gonzaga.edu/comltheses/proquestftp/Scott_gonzaga_0736M_10072.pdf), accessed, 8 February, 2012.
- SIGNORIELLI, Nancy, BACUE, Aaron, "Recognition and Respect: A Content Analysis of Prime-Time Television Characters Across Three Decades", *Sex Roles*, vol. 40, n° 7-8, 1999, pp. 527-544.
- TIGGEMANN, M., PICKERING, A. S., "Role of television in adolescent women's body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness", *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, vol. 20, n° 2, 1996, pp. 199-203.
- TIMMINS, Kate, "The TV female Paradox" 2011, retrieved from <http://annenbergl465.posterous.com/the-tv-female-paradox-tag-dacci>, on 15 March 2012).
- TOUS ROVIROSA, Anna, "Los rostros de la mujer en la televisión de los Estados Unidos. Tradición, feminismo y postfeminismo en las series estadounidenses (1950-2010)", in LARRONDO, Ainara and MESO, Koldo, *3ª Jornadas sobre mujeres y medios de comunicación*, Servicio editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, Bilbao, 2011, pp. 187-202.

- TOUS ROVIROSA, Anna, *El text audiovisual. Anàlisi des d'una perspectiva mediològica*, Doctoral thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, 2008<sup>a</sup>, retrieved on 7 July from: [www.tdx.cat](http://www.tdx.cat).
- TOUS ROVIROSA, Anna, "Usos i actituds juvenils davant les noves finestres audiovisuals", *Alfabetització audiovisual*, 2008b, <http://www.cac.cat/web/recerca/estudis/llistat.jsp>, accessed 7 July 2011.
- WEITZ, Rose, "Changing the Scripts: Midlife Women's Sexuality in Contemporary U.S. Film." *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 14, n° 1, 2009, pp. 17-32.
- VILCHES, Lorenzo (coord.), *Mercados globales, historias nacionales*, Gedisa, Barcelona, 2009.
- WEINRAUB, B., "How Desperate Women Saved Desperate Writer", *The New York Times*, 23-10-2004.