

Representation of women and work in the most popular series in the UK and Spain

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Abstract. Introduction. This study provides a portrait of the occupational roles in the series most watched on the generalist DTT channels in the United Kingdom and Spain. The media representations of gender role attitudes in the workplace, especially in fiction, influence the popular culture and social imaginary of the audiences. **Objectives.** In this context, the study of the series with the largest audience is important to discover the patterns that these fictions show about work environments. **Methodology.** This article analyzes 40 popular series broadcasts on generalist television channels in the United Kingdom and Spain. A sample of more than 400 characters reveals the representation of women and men in the workplace, highlighting the similarities and differences regarding job profiles, leadership, and prestige. **Results and conclusions.** The comparison between both markets allows us to find relevant concepts on the current representation of women and work. While in the UK the differences are minor, the results in Spain confirm the differences between male and female characters associated with various aspects of the workplace such as the prestige and positioning of the most qualified jobs.

Keywords: Gender studies, Occupational roles, Series, Television, Fiction, Popular culture.

[es] Representaciones de las mujeres y el trabajo en las series más vistas en el Reino Unido y España

Resumen. Introducción. Este estudio ofrece un retrato de los roles ocupacionales de las series más vistas en los canales de TDT generalistas de Reino Unido y España. Las representaciones mediáticas de las actitudes de los roles de género en el lugar de trabajo, especialmente en la ficción, influyen en la cultura popular y el imaginario social de las audiencias. **Objetivos.** En este contexto, el estudio de las series con mayor audiencia es importante para descubrir los patrones que muestran estas ficciones sobre los entornos laborales. **Metodología.** Este artículo analiza 40 series populares emitidas por canales de televisión generalistas de Reino Unido y España. Una muestra de más de 400 personajes revela la representación de hombres y mujeres en el ámbito laboral, destacando las similitudes y diferencias en cuanto a perfiles laborales, liderazgo y prestigio. **Resultados y conclusiones.** La comparativa entre ambos mercados nos permite encontrar conceptos relevantes sobre la representación actual de la mujer y el trabajo. Mientras que en el Reino Unido las diferencias son menores, los resultados en España confirman las diferencias entre personajes masculinos y femeninos asociadas a diversos aspectos del lugar de trabajo como el prestigio y el posicionamiento de los puestos de trabajo más cualificados.

Palabras clave: estudios de género, roles ocupacionales, series, televisión, ficción, cultura popular.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Occupational roles on Television. 3. Methodology. 4. Results. 4.1. Occupational areas and prestige by gender. 4.2. Leadership's portrayal. 5. Discussion and conclusions. References. Funding.

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1. Introduction

With the increase in the discussions around gender equality in the European public sphere in recent years, considerations of gender representation in the media have greatly affected the audiovisual industry and its content. Popular culture conveys social models that influence the construction of identities (Czarniawska,

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Eriksson-Zetterquist, & Renemar, 2013; Traube, 1992). The more popular the cultural product, the greater the impact on the audiences, whether they are local or global. In this context, serialized fiction is the current dominant genre in the consumption of audiovisual content, only surpassed by some live special events.

Television series were clearly one of the most popular genres during the analog era and they are even more so in the digital age. All fiction genres, whether sitcom, series or soap opera, are highly watched products as revealed by the data of audiences (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2020). In addition, the proliferation of series production in the last decade and its diffusion through general and thematic linear channels, Video on Demand (VOD) platforms and social networks continue to make serial fiction a unique genre suitable for the study of the social models represented. The analysis of gender portraits and fiction is a relevant and necessary area of research (Marcos-Ramos and González-de-Garay, 2021; Lauzen, 2017), both because of its specific field of research and because of the transversal dimension to other areas.

The knowledge gained from the case studies of the portrayal of the characters of serial fiction is essential when determining the socialization patterns proposed by the broadcasters (Buckingham, 1993; González-de-Garay *et al.*, 2019; Lacalle, 2013; Núñez-Puente, 2005). The fiction programmes most viewed by both local and global audiences enjoy added value and the roles represented in these series have a greater impact on the circulation of values and models referenced due to the audience ratings reached. This fact is highlighted by the significant amount of earlier research studies focusing on prime-time television, a peak-viewing time slot where broadcasters schedule their main titles (Glascock, 2001; Elasmir *et al.* 1999; Lauzen *et al.*, 2008; Signorielli, 2009, Van de Berg and Streckfuss, 1992).

“The media roles, as the representation of the social realm, play a double role: the role of mirror (occasionally a distorting one) and the role of ethical precept, with the objective of teaching and educating the audience about what is expected from them” (Gutiérrez San Miguel *et al.*, 2014). It is necessary to investigate the evolution of gender representations in fiction, based on the content analysis of the case studies that we have in the scientific literature on gender and fiction (Marcos-Ramos y González-de-Garay, 2021; Padilla y Sosa, 2018; Lacalle y Gómez, 2016; Cascajosa, 2017; Tous-Rovirosa y Aran-Ramspott, 2017; García-Muñoz, Fedele y Gómez-Díaz, 2012; Donstrup, 2019). As well as the relevance of studies focused on how women perceive the roles represented in fiction (Chicharro, 2011; Grandío-Pérez *et al.*, 2020).

Representation of gender and occupation is also a factor that influences the construction of identities (Morgan, 1982, Hoffner and Buchanan, 2005, Schaeffer, 1999). In this sense, the importance of research focusing on the role of series as role models for young people needs to be highlighted. Hall *et al.* (2012) indicated that people have expectations about the real world from learning situations while consuming media. While in Western Europe women have been part of the labour force for decades, inequalities in between genders are still present. Studying how the workplace is represented in serialized popular fiction is important to understand the social imaginaries influencing viewers' behaviors and awareness. With a comparative approach, this study describes the current representation of work roles by gender in the highest rated serial fictions broadcast by general-interest channels in the United Kingdom and Spain from January 2016 until December 2019. These roles are analyzed taking into account three factors: the occupational field, the prestige of the occupations and the leadership of the characters in the workplace portrayed by the recurring characters.

2. Occupational roles on Television

Research focusing on labour roles in television fiction have been carried out over the last 50 years (Ceulemans and Facuconnier, 1980; Downing, 1974; Gerbner and Signorielli, 1979; Greenberg, 1980; Morgan, 1982; Turrow, 1974). The contributions of these studies emphasize various topics related to the workplace including the balance between work and the domestic life of the characters, the assigned occupations, and the status of the position, additionally considering other indicators such as age or race. As McIntosh (2014) indicated “roles for female characters in early sitcoms were domestic ones, such as housekeeper and child care-taker as in *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957), *The Brady Bunch* (1969–1974), and *Leave It to Beaver* (1957–1963)” (McIntosh, 2014, 197).

While some factors aligning with the social changes of the last decades have been improved, there are still differences in the fictional representation of men and women that preserve stereotypes and hinder gender equality. One of the first studies analyzing the portrayal of work in TV fiction (De Fleur, 1964) found that men were significantly more likely to be described primarily by their work (83.9%) when compared to women (16.1%). With similar results, Van de Berg and Streckfuss (1992) investigated in which they compared the representation patterns of 116 episodes of prime-time television programs broadcast by CBS, NBC, and ABC with the real-life occupational activity. In addition, a significant volume of research has found a greater number of traditional roles between the genders, not only during the first decades of the studies (Busby, 1975; Geraghty, 1991; Kalisch and Kalisch, 1984; Van de Berg and Streckfuss, 1992) but also in the ones focusing in the 2010s (Emons *et al.*, 2010).

Nevertheless, other researchers have also provided results suggesting changes in these roles. One example is the study by Atkin (1991), which found an increase in the number of single women in professional and

management jobs in the programming broadcast during the period 1966-1990. At the end of the 1990s, Elasmár *et al.* (1999) also researched the portrayal of women in U.S. prime time television, indicating that “44.4% had clearly defined employment outside the home” and “only 3.1% of females were represented as housewives as their occupation” (Elasmár *et al.*, 1999, p. 28).

However, as mentioned before, a common element in the fictional female characters is the desire to show how women combine their professional career with family life. The research by Czarniawska *et al.* (2013) about soap operas produced in different countries shows that in Italian fiction “work and career are but of marginal significance in a woman’s life”; in the Swedish titles, women cannot combine a career with family and, lastly, “South African series suggests that women’s success in work and career is built on sexual manipulation” (Czarniawska *et al.*, 2013, p. 278).

Another important aspect when analyzing the portrayal of the workplace by gender in television fiction is the type of work carried out by men and women. Regarding the work environment and prestige of the characters represented in the series, during the 1990s a significant amount of research highlighted men in the labour sphere and with more qualified jobs (Elasmár *et al.*, 1999; Herrett-Skjellum and Allen, 1996). This tendency has also been found in more recent papers showcasing a slow evolution of gender role portrayal (González-de-Garay *et al.*, 2019; Lacalle and Gómez, 2016). Although, as mentioned before, it also revealed a greater number of women in work environments when compared to previous periods.

Regarding the productive sector associated with men and women in serialised fiction, the job profiles related to health and education are emphasized more with female characters (Lacalle & Gómez, 2016; Tous *et al.*, 2013; Van-de-Berg and Streckfuss, 1992). The results of the last mentioned study indicate that female characters have motivational functions while the male characters are “seen fulfilling informational, decision-making, political and operational functions in organizations” (Van-de-Berg and Streckfuss, 1992, 204). This fact coexists with the increased offering of “professional series”. Undoubtedly, the mapping of the labour representation in the series of fiction does not respond to sociological reality. Professions like doctors, lawyers and police have dominated television fiction for several decades with white and blue-collar professions continuing to be under-represented (Signorielli, 2009).

As Turnbull (2014) indicates, the arrival of professional series has advanced a different female role than the conventional one. In the British case, “Cagney and Lacey was significant because it reflected the increasing participation of women in law enforcement during the 1980s, as did several British crime drama series of the same era” (Turnbull, 2014, p. 230). Since the broadcast of the police series Cagney and Lacey (1982-1988), created by Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday, there has been an increase in women-authored series in the UK that have given female characters non-stereotypical representations (Johnson and Minor, 2019). This is evident in titles such as Fleabag (2016-2019, Phoebe Waller-Bridge), Happy Valley (2014-present, Sally Wainwright) or Stella (2012-2017, Ruth Jones and David Peet).

It is important to mention the relevance of studies focusing on historical fiction from a gender perspective and in relation to the workplace. In the Spanish context, the research by Coronado and Galán (2015) analyzes the portrayal of women and the labor advances represented in the Spanish series Cuéntame and La Chica de ayer. Serial fiction, undoubtedly, brings together imaginary products about the past, the present and the future. Lacalle and Gómez (2016) highlight the over-representation of working women in fiction compared to the percentage of women in the Spanish workplace, making retired and unemployed women less visible. Furthermore, series set in the past are showcasing gender inequalities and praising the advances of the feminist movement, with ideas more advanced than the era described (Chicharro-Merayo, 2018; Coronado and Galán, 2015). Despite this effort to view female characters from new and current perspectives, when regarding the workplace these are still constructed under stereotypical characteristics. Female Spanish TV workers are in lower-status positions and are more likely to have jobs related to taking care of others (González-de-Garay *et al.*, 2019; Lacalle and Gómez, 2016).

The main objective of this study is to reveal how fictional characters are represented at work by gender in the most watched series of two local European markets where, in real life, women are part of the workforce. In a context where audiences are becoming more transnational due to the multiplication of platforms of consumption, it is still important to analyze the most popular series in local markets since they continue to be the hegemonic players. In fact, the population of the United Kingdom watched linear television for an average of 191 minutes per day in the first half of 2019 (Ofcom, 2019) and in the Spanish case, the average minutes of the entire year amount to 222 (Barlovento Comunicación, 2020). In a context where feminism should be present in the public sphere, we consider it is important to show which imaginaries broadcasters are showcasing. Considering precedent studies, the following research questions relating to the series that have obtained the highest audience figures on DTT general-interest channels in the United Kingdom and Spain have been created:

RQ1. Are male and female characters in different professional areas repeating traditional stereotypes?

RQ2. Is the level of occupational prestige set by the gender of the character?

RQ3. Do male characters have a greater leadership position in the workplace than female characters?

RQ4. Does the age of the characters determine their leadership in the workplace in both male and female characters?

3. Methodology

A total of 40 series have been selected based on ratings in the period 2016-2019 in the United Kingdom and Spain in the broadcast on DTT and also on a variety of subscription Video on Demand platforms. The most watched episode during this period has been analyzed, selected by the ratings results in each market provided by BARB and Kantar media. The sample includes a total of 455 characters. Table 1 displays the series included in the sample and the audience ratings of the episode considered.

Table 1. Sample description

	Series	Channel	Major characters	Ratings
UK	<i>Bodyguard</i>	BBC One	14	17,060,000
	<i>Line of Duty</i>	BBC One	11	12,137,000
	<i>Broadchurch</i>	ITV1	22	11,610,000
	<i>Sherlock</i>	BBC One	6	11,330,000
	<i>Call the Midwife</i>	BBC One	10	10,890,000
	<i>Doctor Foster</i>	BBC One	9	10,490,000
	<i>Luther</i>	BBC One	5	10,360,000
	<i>Death in paradise</i>	BBC One	7	9,810,000
	<i>Happy Valley</i>	BBC One	6	9,800,000
	<i>Peter Kay's Car Share</i>	BBC One	3	9,430,000
	<i>Silent Witness</i>	BBC One	8	9,410,000
	<i>Vera</i>	ITV1	6	9,370,000
	<i>The Missing</i>	BBC One	9	9,200,000
	<i>Marcella</i>	ITV1	13	9,180,000
	<i>Cold Feet</i>	ITV1	11	9,130,000
	<i>Liar</i>	ITV1	8	8,860,000
	<i>Apple Tree Yard</i>	BBC One	7	8,800,000
	<i>The Good Karma Hospital</i>	ITV1	9	8,130,000
	<i>Eastenders</i>	BBC One	22	8,110,000
	<i>Coronation Street</i>	ITV1	18	7,926,000
SPAIN	<i>El príncipe</i>	Telecinco	11	5,213,000
	<i>La que se avecina</i>	Telecinco	12	4,996,000
	<i>Velvet</i>	Antena3	8	4,302,000
	<i>Cuerpo de élite</i>	Antena3	10	4,193,000
	<i>La casa de papel</i>	Antena3	12	4,090,000
	<i>La embajada</i>	Antena3	15	4,034,000
	<i>Allí abajo</i>	Antena3	14	3,939,000
	<i>La catedral del mar</i>	Antena3	6	3,859,000
	<i>Buscando el norte</i>	Antena3	14	3,765,000
	<i>Águila Roja</i>	La1	16	3,661,000
	<i>Cuéntame cómo pasó</i>	La1	9	3,657,000
	<i>Fariña</i>	Antena 3	8	3,399,000
	<i>El accidente</i>	Telecinco	13	3,243,000
	<i>Mar de plástico</i>	Antena3	11	3,232,000
	<i>Bajo sospecha</i>	Antena3	14	3,222,000
	<i>Se quién eres</i>	Telecinco	18	3,176,000
	<i>Vis a Vis</i>	Antena 3	11	2,848,000
	<i>El ministerio del tiempo</i>	La1	19	2,839,000
	<i>Perdóname, Señor</i>	Telecinco	14	2,832,000
	<i>Tiempos de guerra</i>	Antena3	16	2,739,000

All series were firstly aired on free-to-air general-interest channels. The series considered are local productions except for two co-productions aired initially in the UK, *Death in Paradise* and *The Missing*. In this market, most of the popular series (13) were aired on the main channel of the public corporation, the BBC. This shows the role of the British public channels as one of the main promoters of the local audiovisual industry (Navarro and Prado, 2019; Monclús *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, most of the popular series in Spain were aired by the commercial channels, 12 on Antena 3 and 5 on Telecinco. In recent years, Antena3 has focused on serialised fiction with the aim of creating a quality brand, winning an international Emmy for the series *La casa de papel* [*Money Heist*] in 2018.

All genres of serialized fiction have been included in the sample, employing the Euromonitor variables (Prado *et al.*, 2020): series, serials, sitcoms, miniseries and soap operas, with the latter only being present in the United Kingdom with the success of the long running titles *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*. Furthermore, we need to highlight the presence of series set in the past, a phenomenon that is very popular in the Spanish market with the titles *Velvet*, *La catedral del mar*, *Águila Roja*, *Cuéntame cómo pasó* and *Tiempos de Guerra*. The revision of the past through the current perspective makes these series highly pertinent when analysing the representation of the occupation of women (Chicharro-Merayo, 2018; Coronado and Galán, 2015). In the UK, the series *Call the Midwife* focusing on a group of midwives working in London is set in the late 1950s.

To analyze how occupations and the roles of leadership are portrayed in serialised fiction, a total of 455 major characters were coded. A character was considered as a major character if they had a significant impact on the development of the storyline of the series. Since no limit on the number of characters was established, in order to obtain results with no predominance from any one series, the results were weighted so that each series counted the same despite having a different number of major characters.

The variables include demographic features and the occupational characteristics of the characters. Within demographics, gender, divided between male and female; and age, with 5 different ranges: 0-20, 21-40, 41-60, 61-80 and 81+, were considered. Occupational characteristics were coded in different steps. First, characters were divided between those professionally active (with a paid job), and those not. For the first group, a description of their occupation was made which helped to later group each occupation by its sector, reflecting the general field of the occupations. The sectors considered were: service industry (bartenders, waiters, supermarket employees, shop assistant, etc.), police, education, political, social (journalists, clerical, etc.), health workers (doctors, nurses, midwives, porter), agriculture/stockbreeding, industrial (builder, operator, dispatcher, etc.), culture/arts (writers, painters, artist, musician, etc.), and judicial (judges, lawyers, paralegal, etc.). Occupations were also classified by their prestige following the categories established by Signorielli (2009) considering their income and status: prestigious, neutral, non-prestigious and unknown. Finally, the leadership position of each character in its workplace was coded.

Intercoder reliability, conducted on a sub-sample of two series from the UK and two from Spain (10% of the sample), was measured for each variable by Krippendorff's (2004) alpha. All variables reached the Krippendorff's standards of unconditionally reliable. The coefficients for gender, age, professionally active, occupational sector, prestige and leadership were 1, .86, .91, .89, .94, .81, respectively. To verify the statistical significance relationships in the contingency tables, chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were used, considering .05 as the mean value of the significance level.

4. Results

4.1. Occupational areas and prestige by gender

The distribution of the characters by gender and occupation has different portrayals in the two countries analyzed as can be seen in table 2. Weighing the results by the number of serialized fiction titles in each television market, in the UK the number of male and female characters in the most popular series is very even, with 103 women (50.5%) and 101 men (49.5%). In contrast, in Spain there is a clear difference with 141 male characters (56.2%) and only 110 female roles (43.8%). Comparing these proportions to the population, British fiction series represent the demographic characteristics of the country more closely while in Spain female characters are overall under-represented. Therefore, in this country the quantitative portrayal of women has not improved compared to earlier decades (Davis, 1990; Emons *et al.*, 2010).

Regarding the age of the characters, the focus on the workspace of most serialised fictions produces an over-representation of those roles in working ages, especially between the ranges of 21 to 40 (UK, 41.8%; SP, 49.8%) and between 41 to 60 (UK, 39.2%; SP, 32.7%). However, there are fewer older women than older men confirming that the tendency already highlighted in previous research has not altered by time and is consistent in different television contexts (Emons *et al.*, 2010; García-Muñoz, 2012; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999).

Starting the occupational analysis, the majority of the characters are professionally active in both markets (UK, 81.9%; SP, 71%). Nevertheless, it has to be highlighted that in Spain, the presence of two series which focus their storylines on criminal activities, *La casa de papel* [*Money Heist*] and *Vis a Vis* [*Locked Up*], ex-

plains the lower number of active characters, while these still being predominant. In addition, there are differences by gender between the countries in the proportion of characters with a paid job outside the house. In the UK, the percentage of males whose activities were related to a paid job (82.2%) was very similar to the female characters (81.6%). In contrast, in Spain, males (78.7%) are more likely to have a paid occupation than females (60.9%) ($p < .001$). Therefore, more males are portrayed through their jobs in the most popular Spanish series than females, which are more often only described by their social and family relationships.

The significant number of television serialised fiction titles focused on the workplace tend to over-represent certain professions due to their more dramatic development or because, traditionally, they have been more common in audiovisual media (Signorielli, 2009; Turnbull, 2014). Nevertheless, the occupational sector of each character is also conditioned by their gender. Considering only those characters with a paid job, results show that in both countries the occupational areas differ depending upon the gender of the characters making a statistically significant contribution to the value of chi-square ($p < .05$).

Table 2. Area of occupation of characters with a paid job divided by country and gender

	SP		UK	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Police	28.9	19.4	44.6	25
Service Industry	18	20.9	26.3	33.3
Education	1.8	3	2.4	2.4
Political	9	14.9	4.8	2.4
Social	4.5	1.5	7.2	
Sanitarian	13.5	22.4	4.1	26.2
Agriculture/stockbreeding	7.2		0.6	
Industrial	7.2	6	6	2.4
Culture/arts	1.8	4.5	0.6	
Judicial	4.5	6	2.4	3.6
Other	3.6	1.4	1	4.7

Source: Project PGC2018-094863-B-100 (MCIU-Feder).

The most popular series in the period analyzed portray more men than women working in the police in both countries, especially in the UK, representing half of the characters. Despite there being some female characters in series in both countries with leadership inside the police, such as *Vera*, *Happy Valley* or *La casa de papel*, law enforcement is still associated with male roles. Other sectors with a higher proportion of males are industrial, referring to those jobs related to the creation and manufacturing of goods, and social, all jobs in the sample related to journalism, and agriculture/stockbreeding.

In contrast, female characters are more prominent than males in the health sector with major quantitative differences. However, they are portrayed particularly as nurses and midwives at 76.7% in the UK and 67.2% in Spain of the total female characters working in the healthcare sector. For example, the British series *Call the Midwife* and the Spanish *Allí Abajo* and *Bajo Sospecha* are focused on the health sector where nurses and midwives are mainly female.

Another sector with a significant difference between genders in both television markets is judicial. This sector is more feminized in both countries with more female lawyers as well as a judge also portrayed by a woman, who is the main character of the Spanish series *Sé quién eres*.

The educational field should also be highlighted. Traditionally, this productive sector has been associated stereotypically with women's work. While it is not a prominent sector in serialized fiction, the results of the most popular series show that in Spain the female characters who work in education are at double the level of males. Nevertheless, in the United Kingdom there are the same number of roles for both genders.

Finally, jobs from the service industry are particularly portrayed in the storylines of British series. Specifically, the analysis of *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*, the only two soap operas in the sample focused on the daily life of ordinary people, adds different representations for both female and male characters from the professional series. Numerous investigations have focused on the influence and peculiarities of soap operas with the intention of finding out the preferences of audiences about this genre (Ang, 1982; Anger, 1999; Blumenthal, 1997; Hobson, 2003). Some of them highlight that these preferences are produced by the audience's possible predictions about the plot resolutions (Geraghty, 1991; Eco, 1999).

Independently of the sector of the occupation, our results also reveal that gender conditions the prestige level of the character's job ($p < .05$). In both countries, a higher proportion of male characters occupy a prestigious job (UK, 47%; SP, 48.3%) than females (UK, 36.9%; SP, 41.8%). In contrast, females have more neutral (UK, 45.2%; SP, 38.8%) or non-prestigious jobs (UK, 17.8%; SP, 19.4%). Therefore, within the same sectors, male characters are more likely to be doctors, bar managers and police chiefs while female characters tend to be nurses, midwives, waitresses and police officers, respectively, professions that hold a lower social status.

4.2. Leadership's portrayal

According to the results shown in table 3, around half of the fictional roles portrayed have some type of leadership in the workplace. In the UK, only 46,1% of the characters have leadership positions whereas this proportion is slightly higher in Spain at 53,9%. However, there are more male characters in both countries with a management position than females. In the Spanish series, this difference is not significant (males, 55.9%; females, 50.7%) but there is a statistically significant variation in the UK (males, 50.6%; females, 41.7%; $p < .05$). Therefore, British male characters are more likely to hold a leadership position over other characters in the workspace workplace than female characters.

Table 3. Percentage of leadership of characters with a paid job by country and gender

		21-40		41-60		61-80	
		Leadership	No leadership	Leadership	No leadership	Leadership	No leadership
Spain	Male	43.1	56.9	63.3	36.7	88.2	11.8
	Female	46.8	53.2	60	40	60.5	39.5
UK	Male	22.2	77.8	71.1	28.9	77.8	22.2
	Female	28.2	71.8	51.4	48.6	75	25

Source: Project PGC2018-094863-B-100 (MCIU-Feder).

At the same time, age is an important factor in the representation of labor leadership in television series. In general terms, leadership increases as the characters get older but there are a few differences by gender in each country. It is important to observe the situation of female Spanish roles. While the proportion grows by 13.2% between the ages of 21-40 to 41-60, this is effectively frozen in the following age range, creating a ceiling on the growth of representation of female leadership. British female characters reach a similar percentage of leadership in the age group 61-80 to males. However, in the age range 41-60, usually the peak of the professional career, the leadership of women is 20 points lower than men.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In the changing media landscape of the 21st century, fiction has been reframed as an integral part of popular culture. The rise of serial fiction products and individual consumption anywhere and on any device places this genre at the center of audiovisual entertainment.

The study of the occupational roles portrayed in the television series with the highest audience in two European local audiovisual markets, the United Kingdom and Spain, allows us to understand crucial elements in the construction of the social imaginary of audiences (Czarniawska *et al.*, 2013; Traube, 1992). The series with the highest ratings aired by the broadcasters constitute a key element in advancing the knowledge of the models and stereotypes that are being transmitted. The results derived from this knowledge should also be reviewed by broadcasters to determine their role in helping to change gender inequalities.

From a strictly quantitative perspective, the importance of the consumption of certain products of serial fiction, as is the case of *Call the Midwife* by the BBC, for example, with more than 10 million audience on linear television or *El Príncipe* broadcast to more than 5 million viewers on Telecinco, must lead to the study of certain strategic formats of European DTT. Furthermore, some of these popular series are later available on SVOD services internationally such as *Bodyguard* or *La casa de papel* on Netflix, further intensifying their impact on societies.

The results of the study show certain occupational characteristics in the representation of the male and female characters in the most-watched series. The findings refer to the professional sectors portrayed, the level of prestige of their occupations and the age and number of men and women who hold a position of leadership in the workplace. The results indicate the persistence of certain traditional stereotypes, the discovery of less

conventional ones and the singularities of the portrayal of these occupational roles in the case of British fiction versus Spanish.

The first characteristic of the protagonists of the most viewed series reveals that the characters that are professionally active are mostly between the ages of 21 and 40. However, there is a greater number of older men than women in the workplace. As authors such as Glascock (2001) or Signorielli have already found when investigating aging in television in previous decades, “women are almost always depicted as younger than their male counterparts who, in turn, are portrayed as older and wiser” (Signorielli, 2004, p. 282).

An additional significant aspect is the homogeneity of the most represented productive sectors through both the male and female characters of these series, such as the police, health, and service providers. In the case of the two first sectors mentioned, it must be said that it follows the trend of professional series in the television programs (Turnbull, 2014). However, there are still substantive differences between the gender of the personnel. Female characters are still over-represented in relation to male characters when it comes to the sanitary professions while male roles are predominant in law enforcement related jobs in the series most seen by British and Spanish audiences on linear television. Similarly, male over-representation when compared to women in industry jobs has been depicted since the beginning of the 1990s as noted by Van de Berg & Streckfuss (1992).

The prestige and the leadership of the occupations portrayed also add significant value when it comes to discovering the gender constructions of the series. Women continue to be placed in lower-status positions in most of the areas of occupation, especially in the health and police sectors (González-de-Garay, 2019). The Judicial area seems to be the exception with female lawyers and judges, but this is a sector closely associated with female stereotypes (Lacalle & Gómez, 2016). In the case of leadership, while it seems that male and female roles are almost equal in terms of positions of management, our results confirm that the age of the female characters strongly influence their job position. Thus, while men tend to have more leadership as they grow older, women characters in the UK and Spain do not obtain the same positions throughout their careers.

The analysis of the images portrayed in mass media products such as the most successful series is important when associated with social imaginaries and, in this context, the work position of the fiction characters is fundamental. While more women with successful careers are becoming the main protagonists of series, the general picture of the most watched series in the United Kingdom and Spain still show substantial differences in the representation of male and female roles, especially in the case of older characters. Thus, television still needs to give women the same recognition as men in the workplace. In this sense, it may be of interest for future research to analyze the occupational roles of the characters of female-authored series to see if they showcase more non-stereotypical women with the same type of jobs as their male counterparts.

Gender inequality is a global problem. The portraits of women in audiovisual content is the responsibility of the audiovisual industry. But also, the regulation policies of public and commercial media and the strategies to encourage good practices on representation and gender are essential. It is important that studies on work and women show results on three fundamental aspects: the presence or absence of women in the professional sectors, the role played in labor relationships and the relationship between work and private context of the family and social sphere. The results on these issues are essential contributions not only in the scientific field, but also in the transfer to the legislation of the territories regarding local fiction producers and the actions of media programmers. Future research from the field of production and audiences' reception in relation to the most watched series in the various cultural communities are necessary to understand the possible changes that fiction should face to promote gender equality through the images represented.

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