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Evolution of family representations in Spanish fiction television

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Abstract

Introduction. This article analyses the evolution of family representations in Spanish fiction television, with a special focus on the roles assigned to female characters. **Methods.** The study is based on the analysis of 709 characters, with varying degrees of protagonism in the fictional programming premiered in 2013 and 2014 in national and regional Spanish TV channels. **Conclusions and discussion.** The study has shown that the representation of families in Spanish fiction television still privileges the traditional family model, although more innovative family models and roles are being increasingly incorporated.

Keywords

Family; fiction; women; television; roles; stereotypes.

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1. Introduction

Fictional representations of the family reflect the repertoire of roles and characteristics that have been attributed to this social institution throughout history, including attitudes, norms, values, beliefs, and suitable behaviours (Greenberg & Neuendorf, 1980). These fictional representations of the family have gradually built “an analogue model of the vital universe, which allows, as all other models, to learn about the structure and internal processes of reality and to manipulate people cognitively” (Peñamarín, 2001: 4). Fiction TV promotes family union as the former is a cultural product designed for domestic consumption, and the latter finds in the medium of television the ideal medium to keep up with the continuous and many changes that take place around the family institution: divorced families, single-parent families, people in casual relationships, etc. There is a mosaic of new ways of communal living, intermingled with blood ties, which reflects the educational and constructive power of the representations of the family by fiction TV, which is able to establish better and more effective communicative relationships with audiences (García de Castro, 2008: 5).

Fictional representations of the family on TV have blurred the borders between fantasy and reality, becoming part of the social imaginary of real families, which seem to come straight out of TV, and television families, which seem to come straight out of the real world (Vera, 2010: 76). As Argentinean scholar Nora Mazzioti (2006) points out, television has reflected the transformations of the family institution, portraying more realistically the dramas currently faced by real families and revealing their reciprocal influence. However, the traditional role attributed to the figures of the mother and wife in the family units is still hegemonic, in contrast with a patriarchal man who responds to the family emblem. For this reason, some research studies on the representation of family structures in television (Chacón and Sánchez-Ruiz, 2011) have considered that, in addition to continue to represent the traditional family structure, television ignores the new realities that have emerged around the family unit: “In no case the representation of the family structure (...) reflects the emerging family realities, such as single-parent families, same-sex parent families, mixed-race families and adoptive-families (Chacón and Sánchez-Ruiz, 2011: 24). Finally, in this regard it is important to mention that: “fiction TV can serve to publicly expose issues that have been ignored, unclear or opposed by the public opinion (Medina *et al.*, 2010: 12) and, in this sense, the configuration of the family in Spanish fiction TV can either reflect the changes that have taken place in recent years or to ignore this reality.

This article examines the representation of the family in Spanish fiction TV, with the objective of identifying and analysing the roles played by women in the representation of the new family structures.

1.1. Family and fiction TV

The family institution has been one of the key themes of the fiction television since the medium emerged, and for many years it was widely accepted as the only narrative core around which a good part of the storylines were built (Fogel, 2012: 37). Initially, American TV series of the 1950s, which revolved around the daily life of the family realm, constituted an important impetus in the development of this audiovisual genre (Carrión, 2014). Afterwards, new forms of household organisation, combined with the social and cultural changes, generated a variety of narrative options

around the family unit in fiction TV. These changes have contributed to the representation of new family structures, which are generating an expansion of the very concept of family and are leading to a theoretical ambiguity which complicates its definition.

It is clear that the family is one of the basic organisational pillars of our society (Macionis and Plummer, 2011) and that its dynamics directly condition not only culture, but also politics and the economy. The media in general, and television in particular, are a reflection of the society in which they operate and which they influence through the construction of a social imaginary around a common culture (Hall, 1986). Currently, fiction TV not only demands smart viewers, but also creates them (García Martínez, 2012: 285), while simultaneously preserving, building and rebuilding a common census of everyday life (Vasallo de Lopes, 2007: 38).

Moreover, fiction TV encourages family union as the former is a cultural product aimed at family consumption, whose foundation is laid by the social realism of neo-television (García de Castro, 2008: 5). As we will see below, the search for realism in the late 20th century generated a break with the traditional trend in the representation of the family, introducing in the small screen an endless range of new models that contrasted with the morally correct and traditionalist conventions that defined the fictional families of TV. Together with social and cultural changes, especially those relating to the incorporation of women to the world of work and their consequent independence, fiction TV began to abandon the figure of the more or less perfect family that was an integral part of most of the narratives and to integrate, as a form of protest, the dysfunctionality and destruction of the family model to which people were accustomed to. So there is a mosaic of new formulas of coexistence which, as mentioned, transform the traditional representational functions of fiction TV into constructive functions, aiming to establish better and more effective communicative relations with the audience (García de Castro, 2008: 5).

1.2. The beginnings in the USA

The fictional families of American TV of the 1950s and 1960s were initially characterised by their moral and educational character, which transmitted the *American way of life* through a set of representations built around the traditional family model: white, legally structured, Protestant and consumerist.

The pioneering sitcom *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-1957) reflected the patriotic and conservative feelings of a middle class family with material aspirations, which is understandable in a country that had just participate in WWII. After the wake of *I love Lucy* and other less successful comedies of the era, CBS premiered *The Brady Bunch* (1969-1974), which told the adventures and misadventures of a couple of widowers who get married and bring their three children to the new family. This TV series, which offered the first representation on television of the new step-family or blended family model, in an era in which traditionalism was hegemonic and continued to perpetuate the daily nature and characteristic pedagogical values of American society.

In the 1980s there was certain air of renewal around the representation of families in fictional TV series. The fictional programming of that period progressively introduced new family structures and turned everyday problems into key elements of the narrative. It was a period in which stories about

nuclear, structured, stereotypical, high-middle class and pedagogical families, (*The Cosby Show*, 1984-199, and *Growing Pains* 1985-1992), co-existed with narratives about the new dysfunctional families, such as, for example, *Married... with Children* (Fox, 1987-1997) and *Full House* [1] (ABC, 1987-1995).

The evolution of the representation of families in American fiction TV occurred in a gradual but steady manner. In the 1990s, the premiere of *Family Matters* (1989-1998) introduced a family model integrated by an extended nuclear family, composed of the mother, the father, three children, and the maternal grandmother. In addition, the family included the presence of an aunt, a single mother, and her small son, who move in with the Winslow family, as well as the conspicuous presence of her young neighbour, Steve Urkel, who in some ways was also part of the extended family. The dynamics of the extended-family model also became the central narrative elements of *The Fresh Prince of Bell-Air* (1990-1996), which combined the stability of a traditional, upper class, nuclear family and its conservative and educational messages with the incorporation into the family structure of a nephew, who destabilises the family's peace and challenges many of the family's classist and conservative principles.

There were other riskier family models presented in the 1990s, such as *The Nanny* (CBS, 1993-1999), which incorporated the presence of a nanny into a single-parent family composed of a father, his three children and the butler. At that time, there was also a change in the representation of the home as a family setting and there was an increase in the number of fictional series whose characters assume family roles but developed such roles outside the family unit and the family's home, such as *Cheers* (NBC, 1982-1993), *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-1998), *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004) and *Dawson Creek* (NBC, 1998-2003).

In the 21st century, the presence of family dysfunctionality in American fiction TV is indisputable, particularly in comedy (*Modern Family*, ABC 2009-; *Two and a Half Men*, CBS 2003-2015), drama (*The Sopranos*, HBO, 1999-2007; *The Wire*, HBO, 2002-2008; and *Breaking Bad*, AMC, 2008-2013) and even in the so called adult animated sitcom genre (*Family Guy*, FOX, 1999). Thus, during this time American fiction television starts to portray a postmodern or contemporary family. But this family does not have a precise meaning given that it is so diverse and uneven that it is not possible to define it with common standards (Furstenberg, 2003: 2) in the real world nor in the realm of fiction TV.

2. Methods

The study is part of a wider research project on the construction of feminine identities in Spanish fiction television. The initial body of analysis is integrated by 709 characters that were integrated in the fictional TV programming premiered throughout 2013 and 2014 in the national and regional Spanish TV channels (series, serials, miniseries, TV movies and miniseries, sketch comedy shows). These characters play different roles and have different degrees of narrative prominence.

The analysis of these programmes aimed to identify the female characters that were related to any family structure. From this group of characters we excluded those who had only participated in three episodes. In total, 498 female characters (70.2%) had been integrated, directly or indirectly, in

relation to a member of their ascending or descending family (mother, daughter, grandmother, sister, etc.).

The part of the research presented in this article consists of a historical and diachronic review of Spanish fiction television, in order to contextualise the analysis of the narrative construction of the family institution, which is presented in other sections of the article. Specifically, we discuss the transition from the family models presented in Spanish fiction TV of the 1990s to the new proposals that have emerged throughout the 21st century, with the objective of highlighting the similarities and differences between the more or less traditional families, heirs of the old Spanish moral and social codes, and the new family configurations: single mothers that coexist with their children after the divorce; step-families, which consists of two separate single-parent families that merge into one new unit with their respective children; and families integrated by people with no blood ties, etc.

3. The evolution of family representations in Spanish fiction TV

During the 1960s and 1970s, fiction became a key genre in Spanish television, through the adaptations of classical universal literature (*Curro Jiménez*, 1976-1978; *Cañas y barro*, 1978; *La Barraca*, 1979, and *Los pazos de Ulloa*, 1985), which are costumbrist stories (*El último café*, 1970-1972; *Suspiros de España*, 1974-1975 and *Verano azul*, 1981-1982). However, Spanish television gradually opened up spaces for other more innovative proposals, which reflected new social and family situations, such as the police series *Brigada Central* (1989-1992), set in the Madrilenian scene, and the legal drama *Anillos de oro* (1983), which introduces issues such as divorce, the incorporation of women to work, adultery and homosexuality.

In the 1990s, the new private TV channels adapted the format of the American sitcom and its production structure to the Spanish context. In this sense, it can be argued that *Farmacia de guardia* (1991-1995) represents the start of the construction of an industrial audiovisual complex that would evolve along with the television system. The family presented in this comedy produced by Antonio Mercero, marked by the divorce of the parents and set in a barrio pharmacy (hence the title), broke with the characteristic costumbrism of Spanish fiction and pulverised the traditional family, through a successful combination of nostalgia and the celebration of other types of families, with the help of comedy. Four years later, *Médico de familia* (Telecinco, 1995-1999) narrated the daily life of a widower who lived with his three children, his father and a libertine friend, but whose “alternative” family (a single-parent family, after the premature death of the wife) did not renounce to the representation of traditional values. The success of these fictional shows, which reflected an emerging social reality, resulted in unprecedented success that was replicated in the fictional programmes premiered in the following years, such as the popular *Los Serrano* (Telecinco, 2003-2008), which gave a new twist to the representation of family by television through the representation of a family model that had been exploited more than two decades before in the United States, in the series *The Brady Bunch* (1969-1974).

The early years of the 21st century brought many other stories that revolved around the family context, and configured a wide range of areas, from tradition to transgression, in an attempt to reflect the different social realities through new forms of family coexistence. This transformation in the fictional representation of the family occurred in parallel to the evolution of the family

representations in Latin American telenovelas and in USA TV series, whose romantic plots were diluted in much more versatile and everyday-life stories that were very inclined towards the narrative representation of conflicts faced by contemporary women (Chicharro, 2011:20). Thus, there were other formulas of family coexistence that generated more than a new realism: a moral hyperrealism (García de Castro, 2007: 73), in which the new family models coexisted with the reflection of the classic family institution, but with a more modern, innovative and, sometimes, even exotic character (García de Castro, 2007: 32).

Javier ya no vive solo (Telecinco, 2001-2003) was at the time an innovative example (influenced by the trend started by *Médico de Familia*), which chronicled the adventures of a bachelor who takes care of her two nieces. Although the series did not meet the expectations in terms of audience ratings, it represented a step towards a new era of representations of the family context. It opened a common premise for producers, focused on the search for new narrative models that, in some way:

“involved attractive benefits for advertisers and issues close to the public, mainly comedies and stories that had similar doses of drama and humour, projected a strong sense of community and were set mainly in the neighbourhood or family environment” (Galán and Herrero, 2011: 27-28).

The paradigm shift in the representation of the family in fiction TV led to the generation of many similar narratives, such as *Aída* (Telecinco, 2005-2014), the first Spanish TV sitcom that adopted the production patterns of the American model; *La que se avecina* (Telecinco, 2007-), set in a peculiar community of neighbours; *Con el culo al aire* (Antena3, 2012-2014), which explored the relations between a group of families who lost their house and are forced to live in a campsite; and *Familia: manual de supervivencia* (Telecinco, 2013), a story about the everyday life of a peculiar family, told from the perspective of the daughter. These series undermined the narrative constumbrism of the comedy shows produced in Spain as well as the representations of the nuclear family, and put in evidence a trend based on innovation, through the introduction of new characters in the family structure and new hyper-realistic symbols in storylines about dysfunctional and scattered families that took the relations between its members to an almost grotesque level (García de Castro, 2008; Lacalle, 2013). Importantly, this trend was also adopted in the drama genre.

3.1. New family issues

The evolution of the family occurred in parallel to the introduction of the wide range of new issues and social challenges faced by Spanish families: unintended pregnancies (in *El pacto*, Telecinco, 2010, and *Ventdeplà*, TV3); sexual promiscuity (in *Física o Química*, Antena 3, 2008-2011; and *La Riera*, TV3, 2010); partially incestuous relationships (in *Los Serrano*, Telecinco, 2003-2008; *Médico de familia*, Telecinco, 1995-1999), homosexuality (in *Aquí no hay quien viva*, Antena3, 2003-2006; *Física o Química*, Antena 3, 2008-2011), drugs (from *Cuéntame cómo pasó*, which perfectly reflects the increasing use of drugs in a district of Madrid to the occasional consumption of drugs in series such as *Sin Tetas no hay Paraíso*, Telecinco, 2006, which explored drug trafficking head on) and suicides (Viktor, in *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (“Loving in turbulent times”), La1, 2005-2012; Julián, in *Amar es para siempre* (“Love is forever”), Antena 3, 2013; and the suicide attempts of several characters in *Bienvenidos al Lolita*, Antena 3, 2014 and *Gominolas*, Antena 3, 2007).

Homosexuality, particularly in males, became another new theme to be explored in Spanish fiction TV after 2000, and this influenced the representation of the family context and became a recurring theme in the majority of TV genres, especially fiction, in its comedy and drama forms (Orozco and Vassallo, 2010). While fiction TV of the turn of the century provided isolated cases of homosexuality that interacted to a greater or lesser extent with the main storylines, including, for example: Diana, in *7vidas* (Tele5, 1999-2006); Mauri and Fernando, in *Aquí no hay quien viva* (Antena3, 2003-2006); Quique and the couple formed by Pepa and Silvia, in *Los hombres de Paco* (2005-2010); Maca and Esther, in *Hospital Central* (Tele5, 2000-2012); Fer and David, in *Física o Química* (Antena3, 2008-2011); and the most stereotypical character, Fidel, in the successful series *Aida* (Tele5, 2005-2014). The evolution of the stories that included homosexual relations progressively increased the influence of such relationships in the social construction of the family. *Aquí no hay quien viva*, for example, gave an important impetus to the representation of single-parent families through the representation of the marriage between Mauri and Fernando and their adoption of a kid, as well as through the insemination of Bea, who raises her baby with the help of her female partner. In *La que se avecina*, for example, the unilateral decision by Araceli, the mother, to marry Reyes, the woman she loves, causes the rupture of one of the most unified families

Other latent issue that affects the representation of the family in Spanish fiction TV, is the representation of gender-based violence, which despite the social attention paid to this issue in recent years is presented more as isolated episodes than a widespread social problem. This social phenomenon is barely addressed in *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (La1), through the representation of the harassment inflicted on Karina by her mother's partner, in an attempt to denounce the indifference of the society of that time towards the problem. This social problem is also explored in *Ventdeplà* and *No estarás sola, Sara*, a story that tells the problems of a young woman being abused by her boyfriend, as well as in the TV-movie *Violetes*.

Frequently, the representation of family dysfunction in fiction appears to be directly linked to the economic situation of the family. *Con el culo al aire*, for example, explores the economic reality of a group of families that have had to leave their homes and move to a campsite because they cannot pay their mortgages, thereby generating a macro "social" family consisting of several independent family units, each with its corresponding dysfunctions (single-parent families, split-families, step-families, etc.). *Stamos Okupa2* deals with a similar argument, through the occupation of an old block of flats for rent to prevent its demolition and the eviction of residents. This fact generated the birth of a new model of macro-family with no blood ties, in which each character assumes its own role in the family scheme.

3.2. New women, new families

Education, advances in birth control and the achievement of economic independence have resulted in a progressive change in the domestic environment and in the ideology of gender-based roles (Fogel, 2012:28). These changes have been reflected in the TV representation of the family. The continuous increase in the integration of women to the labour market has changed the family structure and dynamics. The reconciliation of work and family, the gender policy intrinsic to women's access to qualified and paid employment, was timidly represented in the fiction TV programming of the late

20th century but began to increase in the new century. Some studies indicate that the 1990s was the decade in which women in fiction started to become independent and to move into areas of power and professional work (Ruido, 2007).

The representations of fiction TV have been determining factors when it comes to extrapolate the public world, reserved to men, to a setting characterised by femininity (Meyrowitz, 1985: 10). Thus, the proliferation of series focused on professions, in the late 1990s (*El comisario*, *Central Hospital* and *Periodistas*, among others) reflected the use of two settings in the representation of women: mainly in their workplace, and relegated to domestic context (Galán, 2007), although this fact not does not exempt women from dealing with family and home matters in fiction. As Howard and Katz (2013: 10) point out, according to Meyrowitz, television's fictional representations of women have played an important role in the perception of women "as a distinct social group" (Howard and Katz, 2013: 10).

García De Castro has noted that fiction programming set in the workplace reflect the end of the domestic roles: "the home as an area of sex and solitude. (...) emerges for the first time the cult to work [by women] as new social value that we will see represented repeatedly in the series produced afterwards" (2008:6). However, a recent study by Lacalle and Gómez found that "fiction TV rarely bets on an original representation of women as dominant and independent subjects, but rather privileges the re-production of the characteristics associated with masculinity, such as aggressiveness, individualism, competitiveness and decision-making" (2016: online).

The representation of working family women in fiction TV tends to use the representative antithesis within the same story, combining domestic feminine roles with professional roles or roles released from the domestic social burden. However, fiction TV rarely deals with the problems of family conciliation (Lacalle and Gómez, 2016; Ortega and Simelio, 2012). The Spanish series *Gran Reserva*, for example, shows the professional activities of a female character, Lucia, who begins to manage the family winery (a traditionally male business), after the death of her father. However, the representation of a woman so independent and professional contrasts with the representation of the other family of competing winemakers, the Cortazar family, an authentic consolidated patriarchy. We see, therefore, that fiction TV can sometimes formulate a conception of domestic life that favours: "the identification of a female role with the domestic realm (Haralovich, 1988) but can also generate emotions that replacing the other actors that traditionally played this role (Rogge and Jensen, 1988)" (in Chicharro, 2009:153).

The sitcom genre, on the other hand, tends to remove the professional, hardworking and independent women from the domestic space, by linking her with spinsterhood, disastrous romantic relationships and solitude, to the point that the few qualified women in the sitcom *La que se avecina* (Judith Becker is a psychologist, Raquel is a marketing director destined to become unemployed due to the crisis), tend to reflect the professional failure of women in contrast to male triumph and the position of power of some men (politicians, businessmen, etc.). *Aída* is probably the comedy that has stigmatised the most the position of women in the family environment, both from the employment point of view and from the representation of a dysfunctional family at all levels, in which the woman, a matriarchal in this case, assumes the role of "superwoman" to try to meet the needs of her peculiar home (Ortega and Simelio, 2012: 1013). This is a representation of female roles based on a

submissive and short-sighted perspective, although it should be noted that male protagonists are neither represented as successful professionals.

In general, we cannot ignore the fact that Spanish fiction TV represents, after all, the traditional culture, and that the slow transformation of fiction has contributed to the perpetuation of the affective role focused on femininity in contrast to the professional role focused on men (Pearsons, Tuner and Todd-Mancillas, 1993). Anyway, while there are more and more examples of working “super-women”, who can reconcile family and work and be successful women, their family role is still framed within a domestic and traditional idiosyncrasy, which can be seen in a multitude of fictional programmes that continue transmitting traditional values. *Los protegidos*, for example, presents a family environment in which women are still chained to the roles of housewife and caregivers, in contrast to the professional status of their husbands. *Fenómenos*, despite blurring the nuclear family model and being a professional, cosmopolitan and innovative fiction series, gives women secondary or little successful professional roles, frequently ridiculing their professionalism, while men assume the role of successful and adventurous subjects. In this type of representations even the recognition of leadership/empowerment of female entrepreneurs and in chief positions involves the attribution of traditionally masculine traits (Lacalle and Gómez, 2016).

3.3. The importance of setting in fiction television

As expected, TV representations of the family acquire a much more retrospective and evocative tone in the fictional programmes set in the past, because the representation of the family institution from a historical perspective allows viewers to connect with different points of their own personal life story (Chicharro and Rueda, 2008:155). However, it should be noted that the boom of the stories set in the past complicates the quantitative empirical study of the representation of the family in fiction and, specifically the representation of women, given that the new hyper-realistic trends have no place in such periods of time. In any case, it is necessary to take into account that the construction of the representation of the past is carried out in the present, so we cannot speak of historical neutrality (Ortega and Simelo, 2012:1013), as there is certain bias in the narrative representation as well as in the roles assigned to the different family members (Lacalle and Gómez, 2016). Thus, fiction TV shows such as the successful *Águila roja* and others like *Hispania*, *Imperium*, *Toledo cruce de destinos*, *Tierra de lobos*, *El secreto de Puente Viejo*, *Bandolera* and *Gran Hotel*, evoke family configurations that are different from the family representations offered in fiction programmes set in the present time, except in the case of *Isabel* whose female protagonist, the Catholic Queen, has power in the family and social realms, derived from her aristocratic position, although assuming domestic roles in her domestic privacy.

Amar en tiempos revueltos is another example of timeless success in which the representation of the family is characterised by the use of the hegemonic social conventions of the time in which the series is set: the time of the Spanish civil war and the early years of the Franco regime. The series portrays a family environment in which women do not have any power in society, although it briefly explores certain professions performed by women, through the integration of a female teacher and other professions exercised by women in the domestic realm (cooking, cleaning, caretaking of children, dressmaking, etc.). However, the most emblematic example of the evolution of family representations in the Spanish fiction TV is perhaps *Cuéntame Cómo pasó*, whose story takes place

from the last years of the Franco regime to the period after the transition. This series embodies an era of social and cultural changes that directly affected the structure of the family institution. The storylines that revolve around the Alcantara family portray the new generations of young professional, in which there are no substantial gender inequalities, while the generations of adult women continue performing household chores and caring for children (Ortega and Simelo, 2012:1013). In fact, Merche, who is the paradigm of the woman in constant evolution, struggles to make her way in a man's world and keeps on performing the domestic role that the gender conventions of her generation imposed on her.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The review of the family representations in Spanish fiction TV confirms certain evolution and the incorporation of new patterns concerning the family structure. Coinciding with others authors focused on American fiction TV (Furstenberg, 2003:6), we can affirm that at present there is not a single predominant media model that represents the prototypical family, contrary to what happened in the comedies of the 1960s and 1970s.

The coexistence of realistic and stereotypical representations of the family in contemporary Spanish fiction TV is evident in the juxtaposition of female characters that play traditional roles, sexual objects, victims, housewives as exclusive occupation and highly qualified professionals or entrepreneurs (Lacalle and Gómez, 2016). However, the representation of families in fiction TV is still constructed based on the conception of the traditional family model (Ortega and Simelo, 2012: 1009). For this reason, although the moral hyperrealism that characterises the Spanish fiction TV is impregnated with modernity, some critics dare to talk about a somewhat superficial hyperrealism:

“There has been no change in the sense of cohesion, in the caring of children, in the concern for the weakest, in the desire of making children happy... Perhaps what has changed is the conception of happiness that is often unlimited, in people's decision to give into their whims, the most extreme consumerism, and the importance given to material things... And, probably, in the role of the parental authority, which is very blurred or has vanished. Instead of it is the dominant figure of the mother who is the one that makes the decisions on almost all issues. What the “supermom” has failed to do is to distribute domestic work equitably. The irrelevant father is neither willing to perform domestic activities at home. And this is the reality of things, there is resistance to equality and equity campaigns. The kitchen, the iron, and the grease remover... are still in female hands” (Fernández, 2013:1)

The representation of changes in the family responsibilities of women in fiction TV influences the values and behaviours of viewers, who start to see the new lifestyles as normal. This fact, which has been reproduced a lot in Brazilian and Latin American telenovelas in general, which offer hyper-realistic representations that encourage dialogue between audience and encourage their acceptance of controversial topics (Tufte, 2007).

It is important to note that family dysfunctionality is becoming the most common way of representing the family in fiction TV. In the comedy genre, such dysfunctionality contributes to the achievement of the desired humorous effects, while in the realm of drama it provides the tension

between scenes and characters that is necessary to build the *crescendo* of the story. Hence, dysfunction becomes an interesting demand when talking about the social construction of women, if we take into account the changes that have influenced the de-structuring of the traditional nuclear family are the same socio-cultural changes that have determined the evolution of the role of women in society.

As noted in other works related to women and fiction, television culture is increasingly more demanding and advocates for the representation of characters, plots and situations that have not been represented in the past (Menéndez, 2008: 33). In this sense, we can affirm that fiction TV offers us a wide range of family environments in which women move away from the roles traditionally assigned to them within the family structure to explore new realities that acquire meaning in the narrative stories.

Ultimately, the study of the representations of the family structure in Spanish fiction TV outlines a model in which women are still closely linked to traditional family structures, in spite of also assuming some more innovative roles. This is why, despite the high number of independent and assertive female characters in Spanish fiction, contemporary fiction programmes set in the past and, above all, in the present still do not feature post-feminist female heroines in the leading roles.

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5. Notes

1. In 1997, *Married... with children* challenged some issues associated with the figure of the family on television and inaugurated a trend in the representation of dysfunctional families through the Bundy family, composed of losers and selfish members, living constantly at the limit of existential chaos. *Full House*, which premiered the same year and remained on air until 1995, featured a new family model that stood out for its absence of the mother figure and the inclusion of a peculiar family in which the problems of childhood and adolescence were treated with certain naiveté and whose success was due in large part to the pedagogical and traditional warmth narratives built around a solid family structure.

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