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# Gender roles and the Spanish media, a three-decade-long comparative study

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This article presents the partial results of an interdisciplinary research study that is part of a wider innovation project funded by the University of Salamanca. **Objectives.** The main objectives of the study are to identify the gender roles represented in the Spanish television programmes produced during the 1960s, 1980s and 2000s in order to detect the social changes that have occurred throughout these periods. **Method.** The study is based on a mixed method: a survey questionnaire administered to students and professors from different postgraduate degree programmes to detect the social paradigms represented on television during the aforementioned periods, as well as the values and stereotypes that underpin them. To analyse the social changes in the different periods we performed repeated measures ANOVAs and the post-hoc test (Bonferroni correction) to the quantitative response variables of the survey questionnaire and nonparametric tests (Cochran's Q test and McNemar's Test) to the dichotomous categorical response variables. **Conclusion.** There has been a paradigm shift in the representation of gender roles in Spain, but this evolution has been uneven. The mistreatment of women is represented in the audiovisual texts and these representations seem to be based on the loss of the traditional identity.

## Keywords

Gender roles; audiovisual texts; Spanish television; social evolution.

## Contents

1. Introduction. 2. Method. 3. Results and discussion of results 4. Conclusions. 5. Notes. 6. List of references.

Translation by CA Martínez Arcos, Ph.D. (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas)

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine the representation of roles in Spanish television. In this study, roles are understood as “a function or job performed by someone, or the set of behaviours and rules that people adopt according to their social status, according to the conducts that a group expects from a member in a particular situation or context”. The overall objective is to develop a specific understanding of what roles are, what they involve, and what they mean in the society that sustains them.

As pointed out by different researchers, like Jayme and Sau (1996), LaGarde (1997), Lipovetsky (1998), Barberá (1998), Burin and Meler (2000), Instituto de la Mujer (2000), Walter (2010), and Varela (2012), behaviours come hand in hand with the roles that form the backbone of society, and which are usually based on prejudices and stereotypes. As a consequence there is a permanent presence of situations and attitudes that violate the rights of humans and in particular of women (whom the traditional values and parameters have considered as an inferior human category that must be protected).

The specific objectives are to detect the incidence and impact of gender roles; to establish the different roles assigned to women and men in the current Spanish society, and to compare this situation with that of past periods; to analyse the importance of the different roles played by women and men in various samples of audiovisual media content; and to establish the prejudices and stereotypes that sustain them.

In short, one of the specific objectives is to establish the different incidence and impact of gender roles in Spain in the 1960s, the 1980s and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This issue, its importance and current situation, have been analysed by such authors as Lippman (1997), Bourdieu (2000), De Miguel *et al.* (2004), Acaso (2006), Hernández Alarcón (2007), Moreno Sarda *et al.* (2007), Rovetto (2010), Guerrero Solé, Pont-Sorribes and Palencia-Lefler (2013), Huerta Floriano and Pérez Morán, E. (2013). These authors have identified the underpinning narrative principles used by the media in the symbolic representation of roles, and their work serves as basis to characterise the different periods and their contexts.

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. Sometimes these roles also reinforce other areas of socialisation such as school and textbooks through the use of non-neutral languages, as mentioned by Cunningsworth (1984 and 1995), Subirats (1991), Lobato (2006), Méndez Guerrero (2012), or the controversy on sex-gender and its corresponding reproduction in the labour and private spheres, as mentioned by Murillo (1996), Blanco García (1996), Posada (2001) and Díaz Martínez *et al.* (2013), among others.

Advertisements, in-house programmes, news shows and documentaries produced during the three periods are the point of departure to examine the representation of gender roles in each period. Based on this analysis we designed a 15-item survey questionnaire administered to students from different postgraduate programmes.

The survey results were analysed to produce a series of graphs to determine the degree of evolution of the audiovisual media in terms of gender representations, to determine whether gender roles have evolved in parallel with the social sphere, and to identify the most obvious results of the potential shift in paradigm.

The legal frameworks of the three periods under study are very different: in the 1960s, the form of Government was a dictatorship and as such it seriously restricted the rights and freedoms of women, by conceiving them, legally, socially and materially, as inferior to their male counterparts and incapable of doing anything by themselves, like contracting services, applying for a job or opening a bank account. Education was aimed to turn women into “good housewives and better mothers” without considering the fact that women could have aspirations beyond childcare and domestic chores.

The legal system of this time considered women as inherently inferior to men and incapable of performing activities without the authorisation of a man (as it will be exemplified below). However, while unmarried or widowed women were equated to men, married women had to be subjected to the demands of the direction unit of marriage, which resides in the husband, who is charge of giving or not marital license to the wife to act in the labour and professional spheres.

In Spain, the inequality between men and women in all spheres of public and private life, throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been strongly reflected in the legal system, particularly in the criminal and civil code [1], which has legitimised the subordination of women to the husband, and has largely strengthened the social prejudices that indirectly encourage violence against women.

The Spanish Civil Code of 1889, which was in force until the II Republic and was reinstalled during the Francoist Regime through the Law of 12 March, 1938, includes articles that clearly exemplify the sexism of the Spanish legal system: article 57: the husband must protect the woman and the latter must obey the husband; article 58: women are obliged to follow their husband wherever he decides to reside; article 59: the husband is the administrator of the assets of the conjugal partnership; article 60: the husband is the representative of his wife and the latter cannot appear at trial without his license; article 61: without marital license, the woman cannot purchase goods for good and valuable consideration, transfer property, or contract obligations, except in the cases and limitations established by law; article 62: without the consent of her husband, women can only buy products destined for the family’s ordinary consumption. The purchase of jewellery, furniture and precious objects has to be validated by the husband; article 154: parental authority can only be exercised by the father or alternatively by the mother.

This degree of subordination of the wife to her husband reduced to the minimum any capacity of resistance to the husband’s whims and hostility, and encouraged the dominance and overrating of men, which guaranteed and legitimised the family rights that existed at the time.

Other regulations also reinforced this situation, like the normative of 23 August, 1938, which repealed the Republican law of 1931, which prohibited the sale of contraceptives; and the normative of 24 January, 1941, which criminalised abortion under any circumstances; and the Law of 19 July, 1944, which ordered the reform of the Republican Criminal Code to criminalise adultery and common-law unions, without admitting extenuating circumstances for female infidelity, but showing condescendence towards unfaithful men or crimes of passion motivated by the jealousy of the deceived husband.

Women's inability to "restart" their love life outside marriage, its indissolubility and the situation of dependence of women on her husband, was extended throughout the dictatorship, although with some minor changes that resulted from a modest reform to the Civil Code in 1958.

On 29 April, 1975, this Civil Code [2] experienced the most substantial reform, which included ceasing the husband from being the only "head" of family, and allowed married women to have assets, to accept inheritances, to appear in trial, to contract banking services and obtain a passport without "marital license".

The situation changed radically in the 1980s basically because democracy was instituted and with it the Spanish Constitution, which was passed in 1978 and promoted equality as a fundamental right to avoid discrimination on the grounds of gender. In addition, various reforms to the Civil Code gave legal equality to married men and women so that wives could decide their fate as individual human beings equal to their male counterparts. Moreover, other changes that undoubtedly contributed to the liberation of women were the new possibility to use the contraceptive pill in 1978, and the introduction of the Divorce Law in 1981. The laws contributed gradually to the achievement of formal but not real gender equality.

With the democratic system already instituted, in 1978 adultery and common-law marriage were decriminalised, as well as the advertising and sale of contraceptives. That same year, article 14 of the Spanish Constitution declared the "non-discrimination on grounds of sex" [3] as a fundamental principle, and incorporated this precept to the Statute of Workers' Rights and then produced a series of measures to promote the independence of women.

Indeed, the development of the aforementioned constitutional principle led to the creation in 1983 of the Women's Institute as autonomous agency, whose primary purpose is "the promotion of the necessary conditions to achieve real equality between men and women and the participation of women in the political, cultural, economic and social life" [4].

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the legislation sought to bring the formal constitutional equality closer to the material equality through the creation of rules to prevent the discrimination that existed despite the legal developments achieved on the matter since Franco's Regime: the glass ceiling that prevented women from reaching certain positions of power or taking certain positions –particularly in the private sector- and the gender wage gap.

In general terms, women earned 20% less than men. The paradigmatic norms of this time were essentially two: first, the Organic Law 1/2004 (of 28 December 2004) on Comprehensive Protective Measures Against Gender Violence, which recognises in its general provisions that violence against women on the grounds of their gender is the most brutal form of inequality and, second, the Organic Law 3/2007 (of 22 March 2007) on effective gender equality, which in its explanatory memorandum states that:

"In effect, it is necessary to adopt a normative action aimed at fighting all the remaining manifestations of, direct or indirect, discrimination on the grounds of gender and to promote real equality between women and men, through the removal of the social obstacles and stereotypes that prevent it. This requirement derives from our constitutional system and constitutes a genuine right of women, but is also an element that enriches the Spanish society, and will contribute to the economic development and the increase in employment."

Despite the aforementioned regulations, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Spanish society there is still fear to recognise that there is no material equality between women and men and that, although there have been great developments in this matter, primarily on legislative terms, the scourge of discrimination on the grounds of sex unfortunately still persists. And it is necessary to recognise it.

This situation has worsened, undoubtedly, due to the economic crisis that affects women more than men. This is clearly reflected on the rate of female unemployment, which has doubled in the current context, and the social cuts in the areas of education, health care and dependants care, which have forced women to take care of the children, the elderly and the dependant family members and to abandon their professional career, which undoubtedly takes us back to past times.

The hypothesis and the justification of the article are directly related to the previous introduction; the social context underpins human behaviour to a certain extent and through certain behaviours. The roles or modes of operation are linked to that context.

This study aims to verify this hypothesis and to determine which roles have been promoted in Spain in the different periods under analysis, based on the audiovisual media representations of those times, and the extent to which these roles have evolved. The study also aims to establish the changes that the social roles have experienced and their potential consequences.

## 2. Method

The method used in this study was the “network structure”, to promote participation and establish training discussion forums based on the starting point of this project. The research study was developed with students of the postgraduate programmes listed in Figure 1. This research study was presented to students as a form of practical work about the study of gender roles in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The point of departure was to examine, in a specific society, the discrimination of the different gender models of behaviour, as pointed out by Grosman, Meterman and Adamo (1989:66), or gender roles, understood as “what men and women should be and do” according to a society’s political ideology, social imaginary, economic, religious, cultural, and legal models, and historical context.

Accordingly, we linked the general issues about the roles, understood as the “representation of a function or occupation that somebody performs or plays, or the set of rules or behaviours that people adopt according to their social status, or in response to a conduct that a group expects from a member in a particular situation”, and analysed the roles currently played by men and women so that each student would subsequently choose, based on their academic and personal interests, a specific topic to study, research and review in depth.

One of the specific objectives was to determine and compare the incidence and impact of gender roles in today’s society and during 1960s and 1980s and to establish the different characteristics and importance of gender roles in the past decades with respect to the reality of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To facilitate this analysis we designed a comprehensive survey capable of providing enough information to guide the search for audiovisual content.

For the validation of the sample and the analysis of results we used the SPSS predictive analytics software. Four different analyses were performed for each line. For the validation of results it was necessary to remake the initial questionnaire matrix to be able to carry out certain types of analyses and because the answers to some questions were textual, non-numerical, and were associated with certain tags.

To analyse the social change throughout the different periods based on the answers to the survey questionnaire we performed repeated measures ANOVAs and the post-hoc test (Bonferroni correction) for the quantitative variables, and nonparametric tests (Cochran’s Q test and McNemar’s test) for the dichotomous categorical response variables.

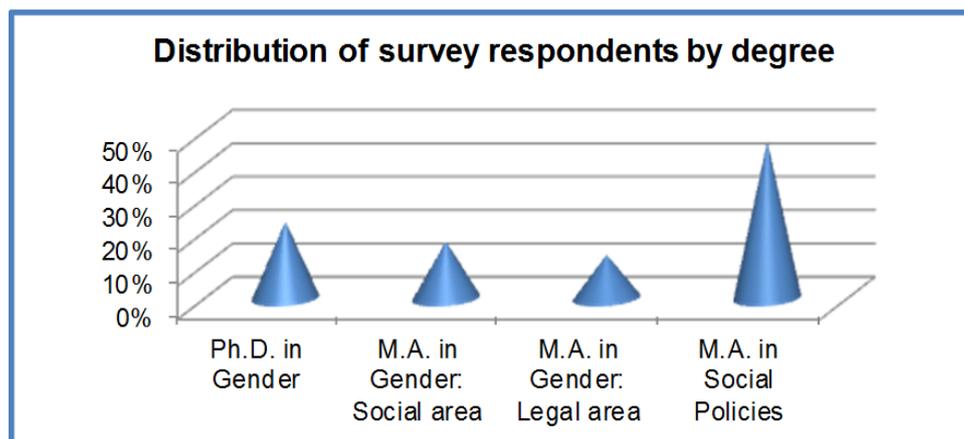
While the repeated measures ANOVAs and the Cochran’s Q test were used to detect general differences between the different periods, the Bonferroni correction and the McNemar’s tests were used to examine the differences between each specific period.

The results presented below are linked therefore to both variables: the results of the quantitative answers are presented through tables and graphics, and the results of the qualitative, textual, non-numerical answers, included at the end of the questionnaire, were used to draw the final conclusions together with the analysis of the audiovisual texts.

### 3. Results and discussion of results

As we can see in the following figure 1, of the sample of participants, the majority, 47%, belonged to the Master’s programme in Social Policies, 23% to the Ph.D. degree programme in Gender, 17% to the Master’s programme in Gender in the Social area, and finally 13% to the Master’s programme in Gender in the Legal area

Figure 1

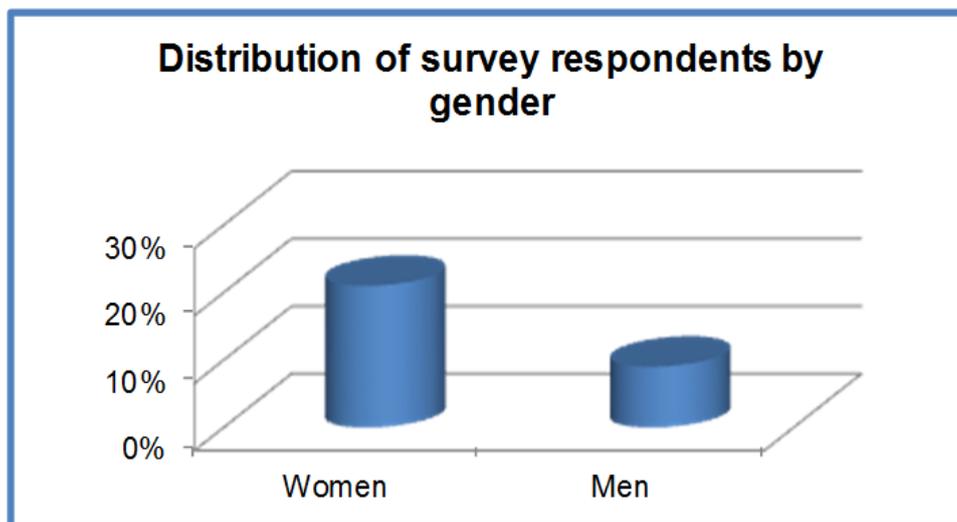


Source: Authors’ own creation

The survey questionnaire was designed after selecting the audiovisual texts necessary for the prior construction of the subject of study. The survey was administered to all the participants of the project

but was only answered by 55.55% of them, of which 21% were women and 9% were men, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2



Source: Authors' own creation

After having defined the sample and analysed the people who carried it out, we examined the results, discriminating the various issues that clearly exhibited two defining patterns.

On the one hand, there is a group of aspects that have shown statistically significant differences that have developed progressively throughout the 1960s, the 1980s and the 2000s.

In this regard, as time has passed, the representation of the family home as the productive sphere of women has decreased, the contribution of women to the family income and their participation in the decision-making at home has increased, the presence of egalitarian friendship relations between men and women has increased, the confinement of women to family life as the core of their life has decreased, the union between women's work and self-fulfilment has increased, the use of new technologies has increased, the representation of women as intelligent individuals has increased, the depiction of gender roles has become less traditional, the treatment of "women as objects" has decreased, and the use of women as synonym for weakness and of men as synonym for strength has decreased.

A second group of results highlights the differences between the 1960s, the 1980s and the 2000s and between the 1980s and the 1990s, but not between the 1960s and 1980s.

Moreover, with the exception of this last period, as time passes there has been: an increase in the representation of men's work as outside and inside the home, a greater involvement of men in domestic and educational tasks and a reduction of the exclusive assignation of these tasks to women and, finally, a greater depiction of men's beauty. The detailed results are shown in the following table.

Table 1. Significant differences in the variables of interest between the 1960s, the 1980s, and 1990-00s.

Variables	Answer categories	1960s		1980s		1990s-00s		F	Cochran's Q Test	Differences among periods
		M (DT)	f (%)	M (DT)	f (%)	M (DT)	f (%)			
Women's work	1. At home		26 (100)	7 (26.92)		1 (3.85)		40.88***	60s>80s*** 60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s*	
	2. Outside		0 (0)	2 (7.69)		2 (7.69)		2.00		
	3. Both		0 (0)	17 (65.38)		23 (88.46)		34.16***	60s<80s*** 60s<90-00s***	
Men's work	1. At home		0 (0)	0 (0)		1 (3.85)		2.00		
	2. Outside		26 (100)	25 (96.15)		12 (46.15)		26.14***	60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s***	
	3. Both		0 (0)	0 (0)		13 (50)		26.00***	60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***	
Domestic chores	1. Women		26 (100)	26 (100)		11 (42.31)		30.00***	60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s***	
	2. Men		0 (0)	0 (0)		2 (7.69)		4.00		
	3. Both		0 (0)	0 (0)		13 (50)		26.00***	60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***	
Women's contribution to family income	1 (nothing) 5 (high)	1.31 (0.47)		2.04 (0.60)		3.58 (0.90)		135.24***	60s<80s*** 60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***	
Decision making	1 (always men) 5 (always women)	1.08 (0.27)		1.85 (0.37)		2.73 (0.53)		139.46***	60s<80s*** 60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***	

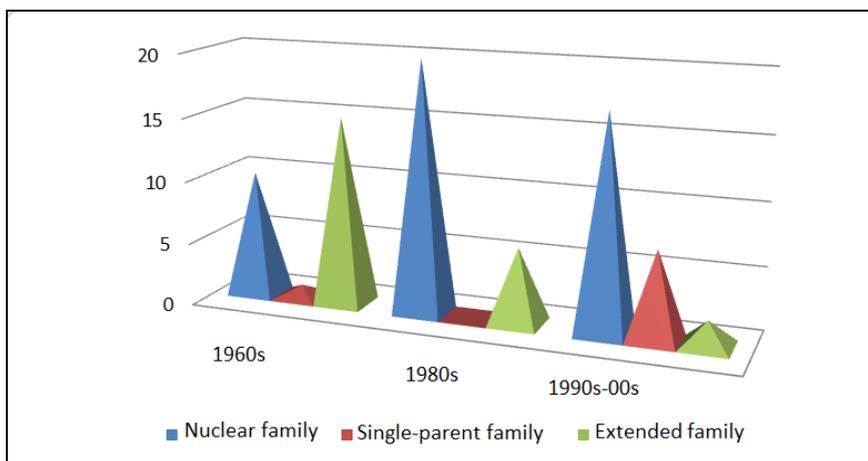
Children's education	1. Women	26 (100)	25 (96.15)	5 (19.23)	40.10***	60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s***
	2. Men	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (3.85)	2.00	
	3. Both	0 (0)	1 (3.85)	20 (76.92)	38.10***	60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s***
Egalitarian relations	1 (nothing)	1.08	1.88	2.81	172.06	60s<80s***
	2 (a lot)	(0.27)	(0.43)	(0.49)	***	60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***
Relations with friends	1 (nothing)	1.46	2.46	3.35	118.31	60s<80s***
	2 (a lot)	(0.58)	(0.81)	(0.94)	***	60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***
Tied fully to family life	1 (nothing)	4.92	3.96	3.12		60s>80s***
	2 (a lot)	(0.27)	(0.34)	(0.65)		60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s***
Women working for self-fulfilment	1 (nothing)	1.15	2.19	3.65	154.09	60s<80s***
	2 (a lot)	(0.46)	(0.69)	(0.80)	***	60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***
Housework as gratifying as other jobs	1 (nothing)	3.15	2.73	2.35	3.82*	60s>80s*
	2 (a lot)	(1.87)	(1.37)	(1.02)		
Media representing daily life	1 (nothing)	2.54	3.04	3.27	4.18*	60s<80s*
	2 (a lot)	(1.50)	(1.28)	(1.31)		
New technologies in daily life	1 (nothing)	1.50	2.58	4.15	144.52	60s<80s***
	2 (a lot)	(0.99)	(.90)	(0.67)	***	60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***
Depiction of women's beauty	1 (nothing)	3.96	4.31	4.50	3.29	
	2 (a lot)	(1.34)	(0.84)	(0.65)		
Depiction of men's intelligence	1 (nothing)	1.19	1.77	2.88	71.20	60s<80s***
	2 (a lot)	(0.49)	(0.65)	(0.77)	***	60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***
Depiction of men's intelligence	1 (nothing)	4.04	3.96	3.77	1.60	
	2 (a lot)	(1.04)	(0.92)	(0.99)		
Women as objects	1 (nothing)	4.58	4.35	4.04	3.28	
	2 (a lot)	(0.99)	(0.74)	(0.92)		
Women as subjects	1 (nothing)	1.77	2.38	3.12	20.80	60s<80s**
	2 (a lot)	(1.31)	(0.85)	(0.82)	***	60s<90-00s*** 80s<90-00s***
Women playing traditional roles	1 (nothing)	4.65	3.88	2.96	58.33	60s>80s***
	2 (a lot)	(0.74)	(0.86)	(1.00)	***	60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s***
Men are strong	1 (nothing)	4.54	4.15	3.54	23.45	60s>80s**
	2 (a lot)	(0.81)	(0.73)	(0.90)	***	60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s***
Women are weak	1 (nothing)	4.62	3.88	2.92	59.01	60s>80s**
	2 (a lot)	(0.80)	(0.71)	(0.84)	***	60s>90-00s*** 80s>90-00s***
Family model	1. Nuclear	10 (38.46)	20 (76.92)	17 (65.38)	8.78*	60s<80s**
	2. single-parent	1 (3.85)	0 (0)	7 (26.92)	10.75**	80s<90-00s***
	3. extended	15 (57.69)	6 (23.08)	2 (7.69)	15.65***	60s>80s*** 60s>90-00s***

Notes: \*p<.05. \*\*p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001.

Source: Authors' own creation

It is relevant to highlight the different family models found in the three periods. As shown in Figure 3, the nuclear family model appears in the three periods, although to a greater extent in the 1960s than in the 1980s. In the same direction, the extended family model appears to a greater extent in the 1960s than in later periods, while the single-parent family model is more frequent in the 1990-00s.

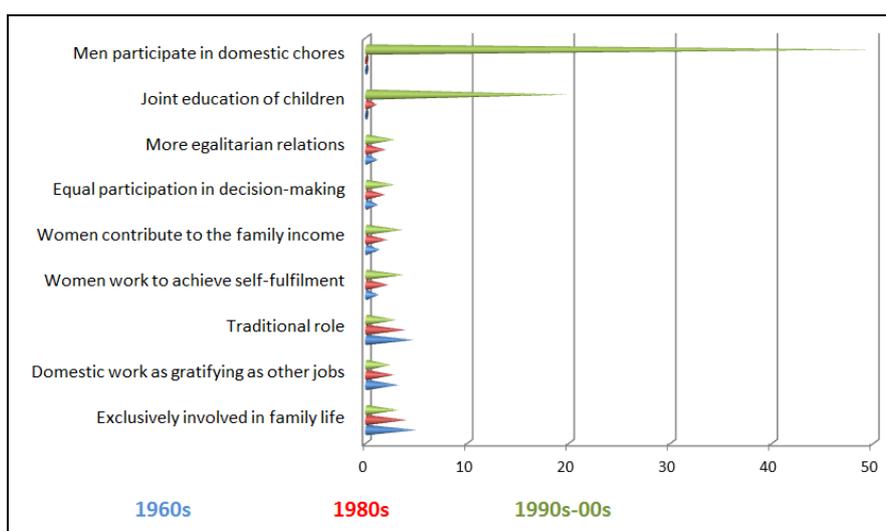
Figure 3. Different family models in advertising, across the decades under study



Source: Authors' own creation

At the beginning of the 1960s women were represented playing the traditional roles of housewife, mother or exemplary wife as their unique dedication and as a source of satisfaction equal or superior to other works. This situation changed from the 1980s onwards, and especially from the 1990-00s onwards, in which women were represented as involved in the sphere of paid work as a form to achieve personal fulfilment and contribute, increasingly, to the family economy.

Figure 4. Women's roles in the family sphere in advertising in the 1960s, the 1980s and the 1990s-00s.



Source: Authors' own creation

Moreover, during these years friendship and emotional relations between men and women were represented more egalitarian with regards to the decision-making process, childcare and the assignment of housework, the latter especially in the 1990-00s (see Figure 4).

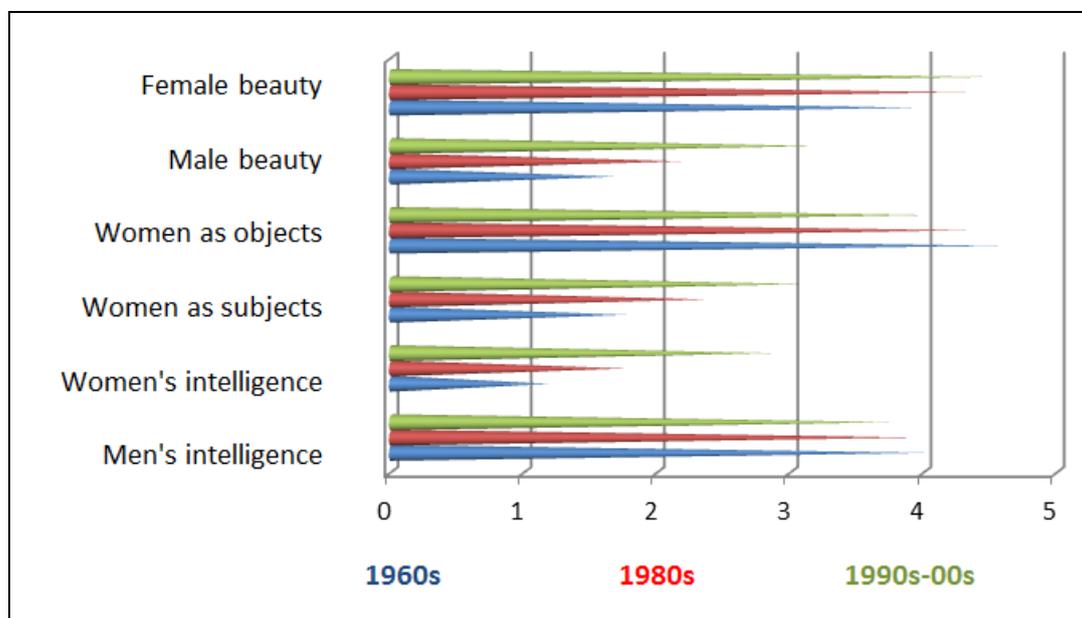
As table 1 shows, in the sample of audiovisual texts women combined “the household chores” with paid employment to a greater extent than their male counterparts, substantially in the programmes broadcast in the 1980s and the 1990-00s, with 65.38% and 88.46% of cases, respectively, and way above the participation of men in both spheres (with 50% of cases in the 1990-00s), all this without exploring the overload that this double presence meant for women.

Nonetheless, as mentioned, it should be recognised that as time passes the television texts offer a greater involvement of both sexes in domestic and educational tasks and thus reduce the exclusive assignment of these tasks to women.

Figure 5 shows that as time passes the intelligence of women is increasingly praised, while men’s intelligence is depicted but to a lower degree (0.77% and 0.99%, respectively, in the 1990-00s).

Gradually, although without completely banishing it, the media has presented a less traditional point of view of the different gender roles, including the use of the image of women as decorative “object” that serves to advertise “what really matters” which is, of course, the product that advertisers are trying to sell, or as a synonym for weakness, which contrasts with the image of men which are equated with physical strength.

Figure 5



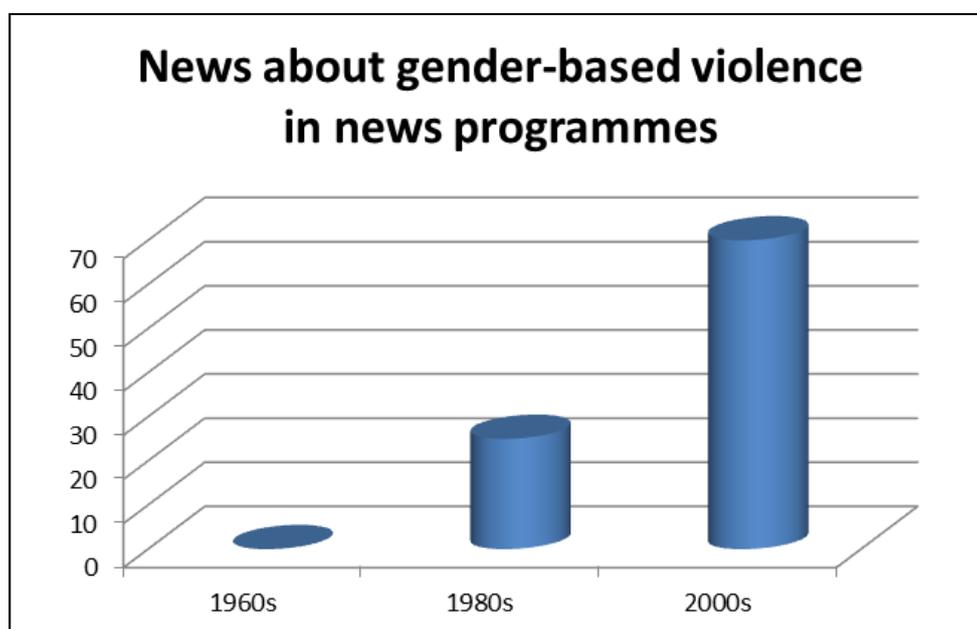
Source: Authors’ own creation

Intelligence is still predominantly male and although it can also be deduced that professional women, who are occasionally represented, are as smart as men performing the same profession. Here it is important to note that the professional women exhibit masculine attitudes and styles.

From the 1980s the audiovisual representations increasingly highlight men's beauty, which is linked, on many occasions, to the social climbing that it may mean for them.

Finally, we should highlight the importance of the qualitative results obtained from the surveys, which reflect a significant and worrying fact: the increasingly stronger appearance of gender-based violence. An increasingly high number of men end with the lives of women based on disagreements on such issues as the custody of children, divorce, and women's new life with another partner. These events are massively represented in the media. The result can be observed in the following final figure.

Figure 6



Source: Authors' own creation

#### 4. Conclusions

One of the most striking conclusions drawn from the survey was that gender roles have been effectively changing in parallel with the social context, in which women have begun to enter the labour market and maintaining the private and family life. Gender roles have been changing and moving away from the traditional society model in which women belonged to the family home and men belonged to the professional realm and were detached from the domestic sphere. Women were represented according to the status given to them in the legal system, with the obvious connection to child care, as mentioned before.

Men also had clearly defined their place and role.

As reflected in the qualitative results of the survey, as this contextual and representational change took place, news of violence against women and police reports about denigrating treatment against women began to appear increasingly more explicitly.

While there have been important changes in the conception of femininity and masculinity, today's social memory still retains very distinct symbols, actions and places for "men" and for "women", which prevents the existence of truly egalitarian societies.

The legislative advances have been of vital importance and have led to the creation in 1994 of the Observatory of Sexist Advertising, now the Observatory of Women's Image, to comply with the European and Spanish regulations aimed at the promotion of non-stereotyped images of women. However, there is still much to do in the cultural realm, in which awareness on gender issues is still needed to transform the micro realities and to procure a much more egalitarian next generation.

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## 5. Notes

1. And within this code, substantially, in the family law regulations
2. Currently, mistreatment is a valid cause for marital separation according to article 82.1, which condemns "injurious and denigrating conducts and any other serious or repeated violation of marital duties", and article 67, which enshrines "the mutual respect among spouses".
3. *Constitución Española*, Madrid, Tecnos, 1983, p. 39. The aforementioned article 14 of the current Spanish Constitution has been since the 1980s the main basis for the development of numerous reforms that promote equal opportunities between women and men in social, cultural, economic, political and legal terms.
4. Article 2 of the Law 16/1983.

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