

## Portrayal of Perception of Women in Domestic Series and its Comparison with the Real-Life Woman's Figure, From Woman's Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

**Aim and Importance of the Study:** TV series play a key role in shaping the society. In this study, the aim is to identify the authenticity of the woman's roles portrayed in the series with the real life and make comparison of with the real-life woman's figure as well as to review the image of woman from woman's perspective, which is represented to the public and determine to what extent this image can be perceived as role model. This study intends to raise awareness in resetting and redesigning women's roles in TV series.

**The Research Method:** In this study, out of Qualitative Research Methods, the method of interviewing was applied. Stewart and Cash (1985) described interviewing as "a process of dyadic, relational communication with a predetermined and serious purpose designed to interchange behavior and involving the asking and answering of questions". From woman's perspective, 10 women professionals got involved in the research conducted on the portrayal of perception of women and its comparison with the real-life woman's figure and their responses were analyzed using the qualitative research methods. The relevant resources in literature were also reviewed and the woman's figure in TV series was examined.

**The Study's Aim and Research Questions:** In today's broadcasting, TV series have great importance. This study aims to assess the perception of woman in TV series followed by a great majority of public from woman's perspective and examine the presented perception through comparison with the real-life woman's figure, and these research questions were asked such below:

- 1) How do you think are women portrayed in domestic TV series?
- 2) What extent is that model of woman authentic with the real life?
- 3) What would you say when asked to characterize the women that you have viewed in the series?
- 4) Do the economic statuses of the women portrayed in TV series correspond to those in the real life?
- 5) How should the woman's figure be in those series when considering its potential implications in the society?

**Findings and Conclusion:** As a result of this study, it was observed that there are limited similarities between the serial female characters and the real life figures. It is observed that they are portrayed as powerless, weak, whiny and under male dominance, or class- and power-focused, wealthy, ambitious, dominant and intriguing and with beautiful physicalities.

**Keywords:** Perception of women, domestic series, television

### INTRODUCTION

Women have a very powerful, important and determinant role in society. To identify social attitudes and behaviors, education given within the family or in the education system undoubtedly has great importance. Education might be very determinant of the social structural analysis, particularly family education. Another concept of these determinants is media, one of the key figures in social engineering.

In any individual's whole life or only specific part of it, women have always played a vital role. They shaped a big part of the physical, psychological and educational development of each of us, regardless of gender. The women, as mother, sister, and/or partner, are moulders of the set of human behaviors that these social determinants are often learnt unconsciously and transformed into characteristic structures.

The female role is very critical that they are one of the key determinants in family or society because every individual is grown up with a female model. However, we need to mention another dynamics that are moulded

by women within the community. Undoubtedly that is media which is one of the main factors shaping the society whether deliberately or unintentionally.

Since 1950's, media has emerged as the principal actor in the formation of social dynamics including the investigation of the ideological structure and behavioral pattern of the public and the role model structures of the individuals. Out of various media instruments, television is major one with its influencing power. In this sense, the fact that TV programs are shaping our society has for long been taken as given.

In TV broadcasting, the series and the behaviors referred to the female characters in these, and the extent to which their characteristics correspond to the real life woman's image can be designed as a research topic. It has been mostly recognized that TV has the dominant role in the opinion leadership for society or the thought determinant, however one of the key contributing factors is rating and audience measurements.

TV series are one of the elements capturing the highest ratings in broadcasting, which provide key economic inputs. It may not be admittedly very realistic in terms of both ratings and attention that the female characters in the series are supposed to jibe with the women's image in reality.

Notwithstanding all this, this study aims to recognize how a female character portrayed in TV series is viewed from the women's perspective in the real life and try to see what the perception of women is and should be in these series which are moulding and caring for the society in female's eyes.

*"We should take into consideration that media not only shapes the views and attitudes of men and boys towards women and girls to some extent but also consolidates the women's negative thoughts about themselves."* (Özerkan, 2004; 21)

In Turkey, women's social contributions were considered when the role of their determinant and moulding elements was recognized, and some media roles were attributed in this way. The women's role have been re-established, which was seen as bringing up kids to be good family members and being an effective instiller of moral and humanistic values with abstract social rules. In social understanding, woman's figure very often takes place as guiding the family unity, catalyzing intrafamily mechanism, and acting as a natural unifier. Female in TV series is a visual icon of the society and however rather associated with the virtue-oriented behaviors moulding the family and being out of the basic needs of the public such as moral and humanistic values and abstract social rules. The media reflection and the public acceptance of such perception also could possibly be come across in these days (e.g. Ekmek Teknesi (*Bread and Butter*), Perihan Abla (*Sister Perihan*), Bizim Mahalle (*Our Neighbourhood*)).

*"In Turkey, the programs for women was first originated with "Ev Saati" (Home Time) on radio in 1939, which would continue under the name of "Ev İçi" (Intra-House) on the matters including child care, health, and family, in general. In broadcasting objectives for such programmes, women are described as one of the basic elements to realize the happy aspects of society. Although women are specified as good partners and mothers in family as well as humanbeing in the world and citizen in the society, they cannot get out of the identity of housewives restricted within the walls of home (Akbulut, 2004:159).*

Society is like a living organism which is living, transforming, developing, and improving itself. The behavioral ways of individuals in the community and their responses to phenomena and statuses can be regarded as the mechanism that is keeping the society alive and developing and changing it. The role of media has a very substantial role in shaping the public opinion. TV channels, radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, periodicals, and all publications are the most important part of this formation and perception, as well as digital media and social networks that are increasingly getting more important.

In this sense, TV broadcasts, the principal actor of media, have undertaken a serious role in the perception of women since they were launched in public. It can be acclaimed that TV's impact might have continued almost unabated from then on. Shaping and shifting the society, TV programmes gave a role to women especially in the earliest years. This consists of a whole of references characterizing women and crystallizing how the community should read the perception of women. The perception of women who are fond, lenient, altruistic, devoted, value family unity above all, bring up good boys and at the very core of their characteristics, include the notions of chastity and selflessness, was manifesting itself in almost all programmes (e.g. Kaynanalar (Mothers in law), Bizimkiler (Our Family), Yedi Numara (Number Seven)).

*“Once TV broadcasting commenced following radio, many programs have been made for women. In these, traditional roles of women, such as a self-sacrificing mother, a good wife, and a housewife, were highlighted. Most effective and common instrument of culturization in modern societies, television is major one of the mass media putting their stamp on our age. Women represented in series, films, ads, music clips, magazine programmes are mostly portrayed with their sexuality and become exploited by media. Females in TV shows have to be well-groomed and good-looking, that’s the most important one of the required qualifications is that they have beautiful physical appearance. It would not be exaggerated to say that females are currently transformed to visual objects on TV.” (Büyükbaykal, 2011)*

The perception of women portrayed in domestic series from mid 1990’s till the earliest 2000’s gave way to a modern, ambitious and aggressive model of women with a substantial change experienced in the early 2000’s. Female characters in the series of 1990 had the stories in which she was just stuck in the middle of a large family and sometimes the oppression of tribal culture and also had went through the trials and tribulations while she had difficulty in adaptation phase to those traditions and seldomly made uprising (e.g. Asmalı Konak (Vine Villa), Zerda (a female name), Beyaz Gelincik (White Weasel), Sıla (a female name)).

*Many stereotyped codes used for male and female characters in Yeşilçam (Turkish) melodramas now reappear in disguise with the modified screens of our domestic series (sometimes undisguised, exactly the same). The traditional patriarchal discourse is getting more powerful in time.” (Özsoy, 2018)*

Of the female image in these series, passivity as a common approach almost never changed. Women was not rulers but obedient, or not playmakers but always defenders or guards against intrigues. The study of TÜSİAD (an NGO in Turkey) on the perception of women over 12 series noted the standardized female model.

In a relevant news, Özlem Gürses from Sözcü Newspaper reported: “TÜSİAD releases the study findings of ‘Perception of Women in TV series’. This suggests that ‘women are portrayed in 12 series most popular in Turkey much apart from reality and unfortunately in one single stereotype: like the creatures which are never businesslike, always whinny, flabby, and mopy.’ In this study conducted by TÜSİAD in partnership with a university, 12 out of the most popular series in Turkey was sampled and each one of them was analyzed frame by frame during the month of May. That news is going on like: “The results are sobering! We often use a language to feed these stereotypes and prejudices even regardlessly. Whereas the intelligents engaged particularly in the ad and series sectors are highly creative and exceptional, and even they have freshly recognized by means of our these studies. The same problem is also valid for males; as much as one man is persistently portrayed in series as aggressive, red-hot, violent, this bad image sticks on men. Above all, females are jammed with physical shapes, and while males are represented at every point of the spectrum, they are all imaged as under 39, skinny or fleshy and matronly. Here is the thing that is “rendering the diversity” in every respect. Women are romantic, it’s alright, but how about men? Or vice versa...”

The image of women who are always suffering, aggrieved and underdog due to her devotion to ethnic group or tribal order and sometimes obliged to be quiet, got changed across several series with female image, a “headstrong woman” who sets up the rules on her own and modifies traditions as a clan leader or under the matriarchal structure, or a powerful, cunning and intriguer woman in historical series (e.g. Hanımın Çiftliği (Lady’s Ranch), Kara Melek (Black Angel), Hürrem Sultan (a figure from Ottoman Dynasty)).

One model of the female characters in domestic series that TV broadcasters used includes the figures who are always oppressed, suffering, downtrodden and having few friends around (e.g. Fatmagül’ün Suçu Ne? (What fault could Fatmagül have?), Acı Hayat (Living Death), O Hayat Benim (This is My Life), Aliye (a female name)). From the early 2000’s, a new woman’s image reappeared that she was financially more independent, social, prestigious, having more active status and sometimes under the pressure of matriarchal structure.

*“Females are used as sexual object particularly in magazine programmes or foreign series, and domestic TV series have more conservative image of women. Represented in accordance with Turkish traditions and customs, they are featured by their role of good mother and wife. In domestic series which portray the conventional roles of women, their real statuses are reflected in some respect.” (Büyükbaykal, 2011)*

All these series have common point of non-concordant characters with normal course of real life, implausible, exceptional coincidences, non-fictionalizable unusual incidents, and unrealistic female characters. From the early 2010’s, gorgeous, attractive women with beautiful physical features are seen on the screen in the series. Female models who are care and make-up even when she has just got up, have luxurious autos, work for holdings and in plazas, and have no financial problems are embodied in series over the theme of love and affairs, and intrigue.

These non-productive women who are not featured by their professional qualifications take place with the image intrepid, unabstainer from telling lies and obsessive to reach their goals.

*“The characters (starred couples) in domestic TV series that permeate into our lives in the adventure of domestic series from past to present and deeply affect many parts of the society gain popularity with their lives of violence, loves and conflicts. Male characters of domestic series have got their women and envy them to die while female characters are always ready to sacrifice anything that they own any time. It means that they can immediately throw away their facilities and equipment that they have earned in life for the sake of their love. Self-sacrificing for their purity, family and children and fidelity are less than nothing for them.” (Özsoy, 2018).*

The images included in communication codes of media apparently serve the conventional ideology consolidating women’s dependency and secondary status. A number of TV series broadcasted on prime-time lay emphasis upon the priority of the women’s roles relating to their home and family (Kalan, 2010:81).

In their most of life the individuals must have had at least one woman. People’s physical and psychological developments are characterized by the presence of women. Female in the figure of mother, sister and wife is the moulder of the set of behaviors which specify the social dynamics, are often learnt unwittingly and transform into characteristic structures.

There are sexual identities accepted by every culture, and their social norms determine how either one man or one woman should appear, act and relate to each other (Yılmaz, 2007:144).

Story line and distributed characteristic structures can be regarded as usual when considering the overwhelming portion of men in the group of senarists of serial films. However, the scenarios typed from men’s perspective sometimes may not represent as true the roles in life, the viewpoints to happenings, the situational assessments, and then character formation. This can also be one of the reasons why female image portrayed in the series is questioned.

The narrations that made by male story-tellers are the stories of man and mannishness that provides men with symbolic power. Modern communication instruments have an explicit role and been employed in functioning the gender-based process of representation and interpretation (Kotaman et al., 2011:78).

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

At between the years of 20 and 50, 10 females attended this study on “portrayal of the perception of women in domestic series and its comparison with the real-life women’s figure from women’s perspective”. The participants who are professionals and regularly watching TV (at least one hour a day) were demanded to answer the questions asked related to the perception of women in TV series. A proper environment was provided so that they can explicitly express their feelings and thoughts under no influence in response to the general, understandable and clear questions directed. The respondents’ answers were coded in the way of S:1 (for Speaker 1), S:2 (for Speaker 2), etc., and the given responses were examined with the method of content analysis and released below.

First a question was asked to the attendants such as: **“How is do you think the women’s model in domestic series represented?”** The respondents’ answers are such below:

(S:1) *“In TV series, there are female characters who are passive, directed and easily guided, and naive or lead any of their surroundings, try to figure all humans and events towards their request, desire to get their way and are quite malicious. That’s, a portrayal of character was made by power distribution; powerless women are portrayed as naive and directed, and powerful ones as ruling and villainous.*

(S:2) *“They are intrigue-oriented or meek/weak-oriented. The message in the intrigue-oriented group is the motto of “everything in love is fair” while those in the meek/weak-oriented need a man shakening and awakening her for meaningful life, actual renaissance, and controlled life. Apart from this main tendency, other side characters have its various levels in general. Triumphant women to gain a footing have traumas with accompanying and degrading somebodies and need a man safeguarding her to leave her troubles behind and become happy.”*

(S:3) *“The impression that I have got is that the theme in the series is usually, you know, that women who are downtrodden and uninfluential characters if it is Anatolian/chieftain/clan thematic one. In urban series, the*

*profile of city women is such that seducers and coquette addicted to men or much intriguing and cunning females.*

(K:10) *“There are women’s models who we do not come across in real life. Too intriguer or too altruistic women”*

The respondents who assess the way of representation of female characters in domestic series made notable observations. Women are portrayed in series as passive, underdog, weak, battered, and tormented or intriguer, gossip, and lustful for power over others. Or they can be perceived as meek, weak with a character whose course of life suddenly shifts when she falls in love with a well-off and powerful man and who must require a masculine body to safeguard themselves so as to make achievements in life and recover from her troubles. Out of current series with high ratings, the one named “Ufak Tefek Cinayetler” (Little Murders) has four starred female characters. The series narrates the life story full of intrigues and lies belonging to these women living a prosperous and luxurious life, and the character with the name of Oya the doctor, whose college and personal life is turned into a living hell after she is slandered by her friends, despite being an idealist doctor, is portrayed as meek, weak, and non-self-advocate. Expected to have a key status in social life as a doctor, the character of Oya is taken under his wigs and looks to him as a safe harbor not until she is in love with a married man, which is the result of the mentality to portray women as passive.

It is also not different for the series of “Sen Anlat Karadeniz” with high ratings. This is about the incidents happened to the character of Nefes who is sold for money to a man by his own father and tormented, and then took shelter in Karadeniz (Black Sea) and had much trouble. This series which is attention-grabbing with too many scenes of violence has been criticized by audiences for the reason of “normalization of violence against women”. The starred female character, Nefes, is portrayed as battled, weeping, tormented and exposed to many other misdoings.

The respondents have negative thoughts about **“the consistency of the model represented in TV series with the real life”**. One stated that extreme troubles and emotions are normalized and economic class is highlighted that the reality concept in the public have been changed and reshaped by senarists: *“I think many cases in TV series are excessive in quantity and exaggerated. Again they, I think, are trying to create sense of familiarity and normalize such extreme negativities as they make the public view all these hyperbolic violence and excessive negative emotions, thoughts and actions persistently. The stories always make arguments on the subject of social class that the problems and conditions of humanbeings are differentiated according to socio-economic classes as much as I see, that’s the emphasis is too much on the class issue. By keeping similar stories told, people’s sense of reality in the society is rebuilt or reengineered by senarists and producers every day ...as well as male and female character models.”* (S:1)

Another respondent pronounced that the life represented in the series has no association with the real life: *“These series lead to adopt the reality in different and nonconstructive way. It is seen as though the achievements are subject to that sort of actions. And also, they emphasize the discrimination in social gender roles and created an effect like single woman is somehow defect. On the side of men, a new identity of classical men that has appeared within the modern version of traditional masculine model help people internalize the role of dominance and determination.”* (S:2)

One of the respondents pointed out the gap between the female model portrayed in the series and the real-life women’s model: *“In my opinion, it’s irrelevant. We can even see this when we look at houses and settings that these serial films are shot. The culture of extravagant consumption is overwhelming in the series. All environments are luxurious places. The houses are not normal, they are like the residents of palaces or residences. Hidden ads are embedded into the series cause a bad impression.”* (S:8) and another replied *“Although the characters in the scenarios can be sometimes simulated to the women in the lives of ours or our friends’, the series include exaggerations: the characters may live on the edge.”* (S:4)

*The respondents replied to the question of “How would you describe the characteristics of the females that you have watched in series?”*

(S:1) *“They are characterized by a social class and power-focused structure. Exceptionally, there are some characters including the women wealthy but more naive as well as the others deprived but highly passionate and thus desperately struggling to attain money and power.”*

(S:2) *“Having to pay off being powerful, weak, dependent on a man to deal with drawbacks in her life, usually downtrodden if not an intriguing character, oriented towards being like extension to a man rather than being individualistic.”*

(S:5) *“The women sex-oriented, male-dominant, oppressed, male-dependent, femme fatale, secret plots in closer kinship, yenta, and low brow. In short, the females who got there using their intelligence are unlikeable and in supporting roles. Yet, it depends on the series. For example, I mostly like two series... I am watching them because they are preponderantly psychological: Tehlikeli Karım (My Dangerous Wife) and Fİ. The female characters in those series draw my attention.”*

(K:10) *Beautiful, well-groomed, intriguer, self-sacrificing, lover, sneaky, brave, smart, gossip, hypocritical, two-faced*

The respondents make physical and behavioral assessment for the female roles in domestic series and highlight that women are intriguing, eagerly attached to a man, sneaky, self-sacrificing, highly courageous, downtrodden, dependent on husband, class- and power-focused, non-individualistic, weak, slim, beautiful, made-up, well-kept and manivured even if tormented. The warm-hearted characters are also represented as the secondary characters who are shy, diffident, and taking a backseat.

The responses to the question of **“What is the authenticity of the economic conditions of the women portrayed in the series?”** are such below:

(S:1) *“The female characters’ economic attributes are characterized by the patterns of social and economic class. They are portrayed as being in the economic status, very high or very low. Apart from its trueness, persons in middle, middle-low and middle-high income groups have far less chances to be viewed on the screen, I think.”*

(S:2) *“By the fashion of poor girl to rich guy, which is considerably going on, a female character is featured, who sets for life by means of mad love of a wealthy man or makes a marriage of convenience with a rich person and gets out of her financial troubles. When she is possibly a woman who can stand on her own feet, she is in the position of paying a heavy price for it, being downtrodden, oppressed or isolated. Namely, there is like an inclination as if the woman had to receive a nasty blow from her sufguarding attached man in order to realize that goal.”*

(S:3) *It doesn’t mean that plaza women all are making good money. We may sometimes see them in high managerial positions in plazas but this won’t shift the real thing. Dreams and Realities. With the theme of sub-culture, some series may be a bit closer to reality.*

(S:7) *“Some are too rich or too poor.. There is no normal as family figure. Except for the series of Çocuklar Duymasın (Don’t Let the Kids Hear)”*

(S:4) *“The characters who generally mentioned in the series are financially easy and even sometimes got attention with their too much luxurious lives. They can be the exaggerated lives that do not correspond to the common social understanding.*

To such question as **“What would you like the female character in series to be when considering their social contributions?”**, one replied *“The female characters that I would like to view in the series are who come from any socio-ekonomik sub-structures in the society, are well-educated, coherent of their feelings, thoughts and actions, able to go through and cope up with their problems, suffering from their troubles without much dramatization, having positive personal characteristics, doing good things not only for themselves and their families but also for the community and the globe, working and earning their financial independence, self-aware and self-conscious as women, conscious of equal and democratic citizenship, and good role model to other girls and women in the society.”* (S:1) and another respondent stated *“There are such studies on as human relations, mate selections, individuality, self-identity formation, sexual roles, etc., but they are informed exclusively to a certain part. These can unfortunately not be addressed to general public and reached out low socio-economic levels through transformation into real life form. The series need to be designed with experts’ views from psychology, psychiatry and sociology, and the findings are embodied with the serial characters. The message made by the series can be that in order to stand on one’s own feet and be an individual, there is no need to pay a heavy price for it, for plots or submission to realize it, and provide insight with how is making choice, awareness*

*of gaining from freedom, and how one can be able to differentiate the useful alternative from the useless one.”*  
(S:2) Other respondents’ answers are such below:

*(S:7) “Firstly I would like the series to be genderles; that’s, without any discrimination of men or women, just a humanbeing. Women should have to stand on their own feet alone, intelligent, smart, and simultaneously funny. In other words, the female intelligence should be featured by the series.”*

*(S:10) “I would like to view females in the series who are workers, developers, good lovers, producers, readers and achievers while their sons and daughters must be happy mostly by such a women’s model. These perceptions should be focused in TV series.. affection and performance inside women won’t be oppressed but on the contrary will be uncovered. “*

*(S:5) “There should be female characters to be exemplar, away from twisting men around their fingers and exalted but not disparaged from men’s perspective.”*

Starting from all these observations, the perception of women in TV series have unequivocally great importance with its critical role in shaping the society. When considering the role of women in the development of individuals in the society, the responsibility that should be undertaken by TV serial broadcasters is overtly substantial. As a result of the present study, it has been observed that there are not significantly any similarities between the serial female characters and the real-life women’s figures. The female characters are portrayed as powerless, weak, whinny, under male dominance, or class- and power-focused, wealthy, ambitious, dominant, intriguing and with beautiful physicalities.

The respondents indicated that the female model portrayed in TV series are rarely consistent with the real-life women’s figure. It is observed that the incidents characterized by female characters contain exaggerated, extreme and negative emotions and these thoughts and actions have been gradually normalized. In the series, the reality is made to be adopted in a different and unconstructive way, and the presence of single woman is explicitly portrayed as defect in minds by emphasis of the discrimination on social sexual roles. Regardless their jobs, the females are represented as the characters who are safeguarded by men and finally, fall in love with him and so have a meaningful life. In the scenarios overwhelmed by consumption culture, female characters live in waterfront residences, villas in much luxury, or in shantytowns in destituteness rather than modest real-life models.

Those attending the study pronounced that the female image represented in the series is not authentic and re-engineered by producers. The female characteristics that they would like to view can be listed as: originated from any socio-economic sub-structures in the society, well educated, coherent in her actions, keeping in touch with reality, not dramatizing her troubles, having positive personality, working and financially independent, able to be a good role model for other girls and women in the society, not require paying a heavy price for being an individual, aware of not having to resort to any intrigue to deal with issues, producer, reader, intelligent.

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