Andrea Nyéki

The world of work in Hungarian television: The portrayal of occupations in Hungarian fiction series

[andinyeki@gmail.com] (Corvinus University)

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Abstract

The main role of the media is to be an information source – such as a window on the world – which forms people's knowledge, values and attitudes. Several studies have shown that the impact of television during socialisation is unquestionable, and it continues to shape people's perceptions later on too. If the portrayal of the labour force on television is distorted, it can not only distort in the audience's image of the world but also alter their perceptions of their own lives and make them dissatisfied with their own social status. A great amount of foreign research has been conducted on this topic, but no such research has yet been done in Hungary. The current study examines how Hungarian fiction series portray the world of work by quantitative content analysis of all series of which the premiere was broadcast between 2015 and 2019 in the prime-time slot and gave sufficient opportunity for discovering portrayals of occupational roles. The results show that the world presented on television is more masculine and glamorous, with certain occupations significantly overrepresented, while some other occupations are neglected compared to the real world. The portrayal of characters also shows a distorted picture of society in the television world.

Keywords: media portrayal; world of work; cultivation theory; quantitative content analysis

1 Introduction

Television serves as a primary socializing force, the impact of which continues throughout an individual's life (Greenberg, 1982; Signorielli, 1993; Wright et al., 1995; Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Hoffner et al., 2008; Gehrau, Brüggemann, Handrup, 2016). Viewers gain knowledge from television about unfamiliar concepts and construct a broader social reality than what they can access directly. Consequently, through the representation of working characters and their occupations, media has an inevitable role in shaping public conceptions of the professional world.

Work plays a central role in human life, particularly in Western cultures where an active life, framed by paid employment, is the standard. It affects life in many ways, from

transforming the environment to shaping personal identity (Watson, 2008). An individual's occupation often determines their social standing. For instance, when meeting for the first time, people frequently ask, "What do you do?" to help situate each other in a social context. Participation in certain occupations is culturally bound and socially valued (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009; Unruh, 2004), and occupational titles function as social categories, thus forming a part of one's social identity.

Due to their significant social, cultural and psychological functions, television series are a major media genre, often serving as modern-day tales for adults. This format allows audiences to develop strong bonds with and also identify with the characters. When this engagement becomes sufficiently strong, viewers may begin to perceive these narratives not just as entertainment, but as stories that reflect their own lives (NMHH, 2016).

In 2010, a total of 216 series premiered in the US, while in 2019, the number of produced series was 532.[1] Starting from 1997 (the year the two commercial TV stations, RTL Klub and TV2, entered the market) until the end of 2019, 41 Hungarian series were produced.[2] After 2010, there was a notable increase in the production of locally made series. According to data from Nielsen Audience Measurement, fiction series have become the most popular genre, yielding high ratings for broadcasting channels. In fact, the audience share for series reached the highest level among all programme types, standing at 20.4 percent RSH[3] for the total population aged four and above in the first quarter of 2019 across Total TV. (Figure 8 in Appx.)

In 2015, eight new series premiered in Hungary. Over the five-year period from 2015 to 2019, a total of 24 Hungarian prime-time fiction series were introduced. The main themes of these series are broadly international and generally lack distinct Hungarian characteristics. The focus on a specific profession, workplace, or the nature of work itself is not a uniquely Hungarian trend. For instance, there are series centred on teachers and school life (*A tanár/The Teacher*) or set in a private hospital (*Jóban rosszban* [*In Good Times and Bad*]). Similar thematic choices are common in foreign series as well. When television portrays a distorted labour force, it risks misleading viewers, creating false beliefs, and fostering dissatisfaction with their own social standing.

Numerous international studies have demonstrated the media's impact on the occupational aspirations of children and adolescents (e.g. Atkin, 1991; Vande Berg & Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993, 2004, 2009; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Signorielli &Kahlenberg, 2001; Jacobs et al., 2015; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2018). This body of research has focused on the depiction of occupations in television programmes and their influence on viewers' perceptions of the world of work. The findings consistently show that television provides a biased account of occupations, underrepresenting traditional professions while promoting distorted and false ideas about the characteristics of various jobs.

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[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/444870/scripted-primetime-tv-series-number-usa/ [Accessed 07 09 2021]

[2] Data are from own collection (from 1998 onwards, the first full year after the launch of the two major commercial channels (RTL and TV2). The database includes all fiction series produced in Hungary between 1998 and 2019.

[3] RSH stands for "Rating Share," which is a measure used in television ratings to indicate the percentage of television viewers watching a particular programme compared to the total number of viewers watching television at that time. It helps to assess the popularity of a programme relative to its competitors.

Consequently, the aim of this research is to explore how entertainment television shows – particularly locally produced, scripted series – portray the world of work, in a realistic, idealised, or distorted way. The objective of this research is to provide a general overview of how work is represented in Hungarian scripted prime-time series. To achieve this, we will examine the demographic distribution of characters on television and their work-related characteristics, comparing these findings with actual social conditions.

Therefore, the research questions are the following:

- What are the demographic characteristics of Hungarian Fiction series and how do they compare to the actual Hungarian population?
- How do the characters' employment statuses and the portrayed professions compare to the real-world labour force?

As this research follows the methodology of previous studies, its outcomes are comparable with the results of earlier analyses. A large body of content analysis on the portrayal of work has been conducted in the U.S. (e.g. Atkin, 1991; Signorielli, 2009; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2018), whereas far less research exists in Europe (e.g. Emons et al., 2010; Jacobs et al., 2015). Although the results have not shown remarkable differences in how television portrays the world of work, this highlights the problem that such research is largely missing in other regions and cultures.

In Hungary, media research has covered all medium types, with numerous studies on the portrayal of phenomena like violence or minorities. For this study, television-related projects are the most relevant. Previous research has focused on specific series genres, narrative analyses of shows like Szomszédok or Barátok közt (e.g. Hermann, 2010; Kupi, 2011), historical analyses (e.g. Gayer, 2000), or the depiction of specific issues like abusive relationships or Roma characters (e.g. Bernáth & Messing 2001; Császár & Gregor, 2016).

The current research connects to these previous studies and complements them. However, no content analysis of this kind on the portrayal of the world of work has been conducted in Hungary, making this study a necessary supplement to the field. Without mapping the media's messages on occupational issues, it is impossible to ascertain the social context generated by television content.

2 Background

The evolution of media effects theory has occurred in tandem with the development of the media environment itself (McQuail, 2010). The theoretical framework of this research is underpinned by two seminal paradigms: George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory and Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. Both are among the most influential and frequently cited theories in communication studies (Morgan, Shanahan, 2010; Morgan et al., 2015), serving as the conceptual basis for extensive research into media messages and their influence (e.g. Signorielli, 2004, 2009, 2017; Hoffner et al., 2008; Esch, 2011; Gehrau et al., 2016). These theories converge on a central premise: that mass communication constructs a symbolic environment whose influence is pervasive, even in the absence of direct exposure, as effects can be transmitted through socially mediated channels. However, they diverge in

their analytical focus. Cultivation Theory examines media's long-term, cumulative effects through a sociological lens, whereas Social Cognitive Theory explores the psychological mechanisms of learning and cognition.

Cultivation theory has faced significant criticism regarding its applicability in the modern, fragmented media environment. A primary critique is that the proliferation of platforms has segmented the audience, weakening the uniform influence that television once had. However, Morgan and Shanahan (2010) argued that these developments often lead to more intense and focused media consumption, which actually reinforces the theory's relevance.

Given that the number of U.S.-produced series more than doubled between 2010 and 2019, and considering the global popularity of series, we are clearly in a new era of storytelling. Even people who cancel cable subscriptions still access popular media content through streaming services or downloads. Therefore, it can be argued that the platform is secondary to the narrative itself, as these stories circulate widely within and across societies. This widespread circulation of stories reinforces the continued relevance of Cultivation Theory.

While other media theories, such as Representation Theory or Cultural Studies, could provide relevant grounding for this research, a quantitative method was chosen to address feasibility issues associated with a large-scale, long-term examination. Given the number of foreign studies on this topic, ensuring comparability was a key consideration, allowing the results to be interpreted in a broader context. This approach also makes it possible to see if recurring themes and stereotypes are observable across different countries. Since the vast majority of this previous research is based on Cultivation Theory, continuing with this framework is a reasonable choice.

The original aim of Cultivation Theory was to develop a method for examining the "central cultural dynamics of the age of television" (Gerbner et al., 1986, p. 22). Gerbner developed the "Cultural Indicators" research project to study television as the key source of shared images and messages in society. According to the theory, the stable and repetitive messages on television have a strong influencing power, as nearly everyone is affected either directly or indirectly.

As the main focus of the current research is on the portrayal of the world of work in television, the primary approach is based on the guidelines of the 'Cultural Indicators' project, which provides empirical support for exploring the world of television. The research methodology aligns with Gerbner's 'Cultural Indicators' project framework and associated protocols. Spanning a period of five years, the current study employs a systematic quantitative content analysis for its message system assessment. Since earlier studies also employed the same framework, using this method was not only suitable for the subject but also ensures the results are comparable.

Several studies have explored the portrayal of the world of work in television programmes. One area of this research has focused on how television content portrays the world of work demographically (e.g. Atkin, 1991; Vande Berg & Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993, 2004, 2009, 2017; Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Elasmar et al., 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli &Kahlenberg, 2001; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004, 2005; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015; Behm-Morawitz et al. 2018).

Most of these studies examined television's demographic characteristics in terms of gender distribution, age, marital status, and ethnicity. The findings frequently highlighted gender disparity (Vande Berg, Streckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg, Collette, 1997; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Elasmar et al., 1999; Glascock, 2011; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Jacobs et al, 2015) and a low representation of teenagers and the elder generation on screen (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Signorielli, 2004; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Smith et al., 2012). With regard to ethnicity, a similar disproportional representation, which differs significantly from the distribution of the real population, has been reported (Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli 2004, 2009). The consistent findings across these studies highlight that the world portrayed on television is predominantly male dominated, sidelining older generations, families, and ethnic minorities, thus marginalizing certain groups and reinforcing stereotypes that perpetuate social inequalities.

Prior research has consistently found that the representation of everyday work roles on television is infrequent (Atkin, 1991; Vande Berg & Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993, 2004, 2009, 2017; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Elasmar et al., 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004, 2005; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2015; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2018). Beyond simply analysing the proportion of occupational roles, researchers have extended the analysis to examine the relationship between work and other demographic characteristics. Regarding gender differences, male characters are more often portrayed with higher status and in leading organizational positions, while their female counterparts are more likely to have stereotypical jobs or an unknown occupational status (Atkin, 1991; Signorielli, 1993, 2004, 2009; Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Elasmar et al., 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004, 2005; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015). Furthermore, older men were more likely to work outside the home than women (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen & Dozier, 2005). This pattern strengthens a sense of male superiority by portraying men in more prominent work roles with higher status, more success and power, thereby projecting the idea that the world of work is a privileged territory for men, where women are merely on the periphery.

Although – as it was mentioned earlier – significantly more research was conducted in the U.S. than in Europe in this field, the results showed that there are no remarkable differences: television portrays the world of work in an imbalanced, stereotyped way, in which men's situation is more favourable, compared to women in terms of occupational position, status, prestige and power. All these representational characteristics derive from the evolution of television series production.

When television became widespread and started to emerge as a mass medium, soap operas, which were some of the most popular and successful programmes on radio, were broadcast on the screen as well. Since serials have strong audience-attracting power, soap operas had become a primary tool for building up a loyal viewerbase. (Hagedorn, 1995) In the 1970s U.S. TV networks changed their prime-time programme offer in order to engage a wider audience: they started to broadcast more male-compatible versions of already well-known soap operas. The new series incorporated elements from crime genre, male characters and the upper-class were more dominant (e.g. *Dallas*, *Dynasty*). (Antalócy, 2001)

As years passed by, more and more new networks and cable channels were launched and the competition on the television content market had become stronger. In the early period of series, the main aim was to develop the commercial exploitation and stimulate the consumption of advertised products. Recently, the major goal of the broadcasters is to increase the media consumption – as higher ratings mean higher advertising revenue. In line with it, the soap opera format evolved to new levels and new genres were developed. (Bondebjerg, 2012) Although the format significantly changed, the popularity of series genre further increased. It seems that the characteristics of early serial production which guaranteed the high ratings and enormous popularity were retained, such as the dominance and more advantageous portrayal of male characters.

4 Method

To answer the research questions, a quantitative content analysis was conducted on Hungarian fiction series that premiered during a five-year period. The scope of this research is a systematic quantitative content analysis of all Hungarian scripted fiction series that premiered between 2015 and 2019 during prime-time broadcasting hours (19:00–23:00).

The period and time band selection were based on two solid considerations. Regarding the period, 2015 was the year of the rejuvenation of Hungarian series production: RTL Klub, one of the two market leader commercial television channels launched two locally produced Hungarian weekly fiction series and HBO launched its biggest Hungarian hit, the 1st season of *Aranyélet*. A five-year-long period is long enough to have a comprehensive amount of content for the analysis.

As for the prime-time selection, according to the KSH Time Use research and Nielsen Audience Measurement Data, the audience is the most concentrated in the evening hours. Some titles were excluded from the analysis due to genre issues or giving limited opportunity for discovering portrayals of occupations. Most of the produced series in Hungary are adaptations, but since the focus of the present research is an analysis on the patterns which the Hungarian audiences were exposed to in domestically produced fiction series, this aspect is not part of the analysis.

From a total of 24 series broadcast in the chosen period and time band, 19 were analysed (five were excluded for the reasons mentioned above). These were categorised as either daily or weekly series. The total broadcast time of the included daily series exceeded 1600 hours, which required a sampling strategy. To avoid overrepresenting the long-running soap operas, a disproportionate sampling method was used. The total sample size is 300 hours, allocated as follows: 100 hours for each of the two main soap operas, and a final 100-hour sample selected from the remaining telenovelas and series, drawn proportionally based on their total airing time.

Table 1 Sample of daily series

Daily series				
All titles			**Sample**	
Title	**No. of episodes**	**Total time**	**No. of episodes**	**Total time**
Barátok közt	2460	548:40:00	224	100:01:00
Jóban rosszban	1240	787:04:56	159	100:02:59
Terápia	35	15:40:17	11	4:55:47
Oltári csajok	101	73:55:15	33	24:19:20
200 első randi	118	87:58:44	39	29:12:01
Drága örökösök	142	106:43:59	46	34:54:13
MintaApák	30	23:52:46	10	7:57:36
Total		**1643:55:57**		**301:22:56**

As for the weekly series, except the excluded five titles, all of them were coded. The total broadcast hours of the weekly series pool were 200.5 hours.

Table 2 Sample of weekly series

Weekly series		
Title	**No. of episodes**	**Total time**
A mi kis falunk	38	27:17:10
A tanár	18	13:21:45
Alvilág	8	6:23:21
Aranyélet	24	22:13:08
Bogaras szülők	10	4:39:11
Csak színház és más semmi	26	22:32:53
Ízig vérig	10	7:25:58
Jófiúk	14	10:34:29
Korhatáros szerelem	23	16:50:02
Munkaügyek	60	25:53:39
Tóth János	104	45:09:10
Válótársak	30	22:46:04
Total		**225:06:50**

The codebook covers all socio-demographic characteristics of the relevant characters, who are the unit of the analysis: only those with speaking roles (more than three lines) and judged to be 15 years old or older. The following character traits were coded:

- Gender – the socially constructed aspect was recorded, due to the fact that the biological sex is undetectable in most cases
- Chronological (the character's precise or estimated age; social age) and social age (an estimation of the stage at which the character operates in his/her interactions with others)
- Marital status
- Having children and the number of children
- Socio-Economic Status: the evaluations were based on only the visible possessions (e.g. housing conditions, clothing, jewellery, etc.)
- Economic activity
- Occupation: recorded as a short description and was categorised in a later phase
- Own Business (yes or no)
- Hierarchical position / Status of employment
- Ethnic minority: Romani or not

Since the character traits are not constant, from time to time, some changes occurred in their marital state, status of employment, etc. These changes should have been tracked; to avoid chaos, the following recoding system was invented. Each time a new character appeared, who matched the requirements, their attributes were coded. Those changes which altered the traits of a character resulted in a subvariant character.[4] This coding system guarantees that all relevant character traits were tracked. Based on the number of the subvariants, a character weight was calculated (Wch=1/Ncharacter subvariant) and applied.

For testing the reliability of the coding schemes and process, 10 per cent of the whole sample was coded by two independent coders. Since the current research involved three coders and different level variables, KALPHA was applied for checking the Intercoder Reliability Indices (ICR). Regarding Krippendorff (2004) suggestions, KALPHA is always acceptable above 0.9, over 0.8 guarantees suitable reliability, and the results between 0.667 and 0.8 could support explanatory studies. In most cases (74 per cent of the variables), the result of the ICR test reached the acceptable level ($\alpha \geq 0.667$) or higher. In some cases, the results failed to reach the tolerable level, due to the low number of episodes coded by the sub-coders that provided limited opportunities for fair judgements.

[4] E.g. the character ID of the main character in the series Tóth János/János Tóth was TJ001 – this character was unemployed. As he started to work as an entrepreneur, the ID of the subvariant changed to TJ001_02. As soon as he started a new job, a new ID was generated and used; or if he just simply became unemployed again, the original ID was recorded again.

Table 3 Summary of the KALPHA results

		Type of data	KALPHA	LL95%CI	UL95%CI
Characters	Gender:	nominal	1.0	0.9	1.0
	Chronological Age:	ordinal	0.9	0.9	0.9
	Social Age:	ordinal	0.8	0.8	0.8
	Martial State:	nominal	0.7	0.6	0.7
	Having Children:	ordinal	0.9	0.9	1.0
	No of Children:	ratio	0.9	0.9	1.0
	Socio-Economic Status:	ordinal	*0.6**	0.5	0.7
	Economic Activity:	nominal	0.8	0.8	0.9
	Occupation:	nominal	0.8	0.8	0.8
	Own Business (yes or no):	nominal	0.8	0.8	0.9
	Hierarchical Position:	ordinal	*0.5**	0.5	0.6
	Ethnic minority:	nominal	0.8	0.7	0.9

* KALPHA is below the tolerable agreement level

A supplementary database gathers all the reference or so-called 'real-world' data. The official datasets of the Central Statistics Office were used for the comparative analysis, in order to measure the socio-demographical and occupational distributions on television against those of the Hungarian labour force and overall societal characteristics. The most up-to-date and relevant available[5] data were applied (from STADAT, the average of the 2015-2019 period).[6]

5 Results

In the following, all results are systematically presented altogether in different sections. First, it starts with a character overview, which presents all socio-demographic characteristics of the characters, then the next phase introduces all occupational characteristics, including the work-related main aspects of the world of work on television.

[5] Official data about ethnic minorities and number of children were provided by Microcensus 2016, all other socio-demographic data were available in the Summary Tables (STADAT)

[6] One methodological problem in relation to 'real-world' data should be noted: in the KSH data on Stratification by the character of work done, currently retired persons are included by their last occupation, thus increasing the size of the two-manual and agricultural groups. This classification cannot be reproduced in the present study due to different analytical purposes.

5.1 Character Overview

Altogether 1995 characters were recorded, who matched the criteria apart from the subvariants.

With respect to the gender distribution, on television the male characters significantly outnumber females by about 1.55 to 1 (Figure 1), while in the real world the ratio is reversed in favour of women.

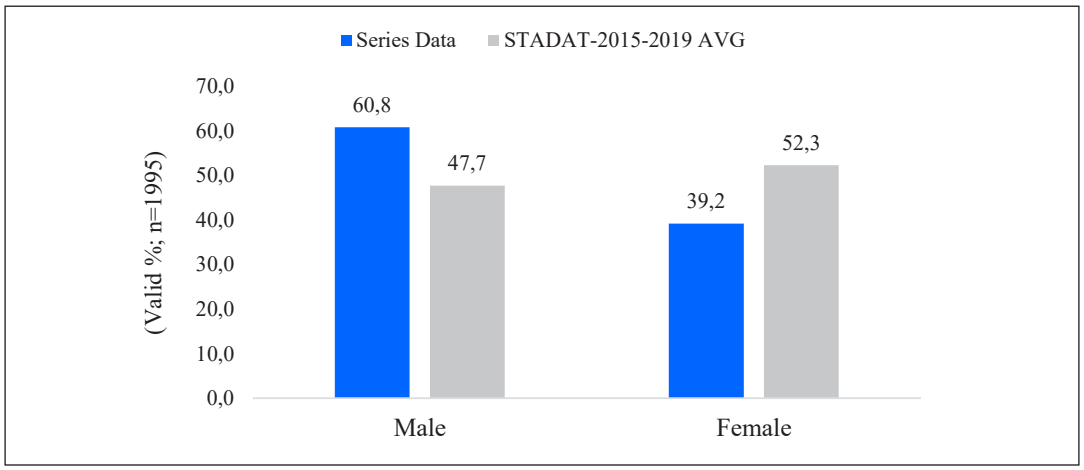

Figure 1 Gender distribution in television series vs. 'real-world'

Goodness of Fit Test: χ^2 = 137.919, df=1, Sig. < .001 (Table 4 in Appx.)

Source of 'real-world' data: KSH Summary tables; 22.1.1.3. – 2015-2019 avg.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0003.html [Accessed 19 05 2021]

Prior research reported the same imbalanced gender representation (Vande Berg, Streckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg, Collette, 1997; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Elasmar et al., 1999; Glascock, 2011; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Jacobs et al, 2015), which reinforces the concept that the overrepresentation of male characters in Hungarian TV series is not a recent or unique phenomenon, but rather a consistent pattern, which may strengthen existing social inequalities and preconceptions by stereotyping viewers' perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles and identities.

Regarding the age distribution (Figure 2), two variables were used during the coding phase in order to make the most accurate estimation of the characters' age (chronological and social age). Both variables show the same results; young adults (aged 20-34) and characters in their midlife (35-49 years old) are overrepresented in television, while adolescents and elderly people are very rarely shown on screen. The chronological age classification shows that characters in their 30s and 40s overdominate the other four age groups. These results are completely in line with previous research findings, which highlighted that teenagers and the elderly generation are neglected on screen and the difference between the television representation and the population is significantly distorted. (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Signorielli, 2004; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Smith et al., 2012)

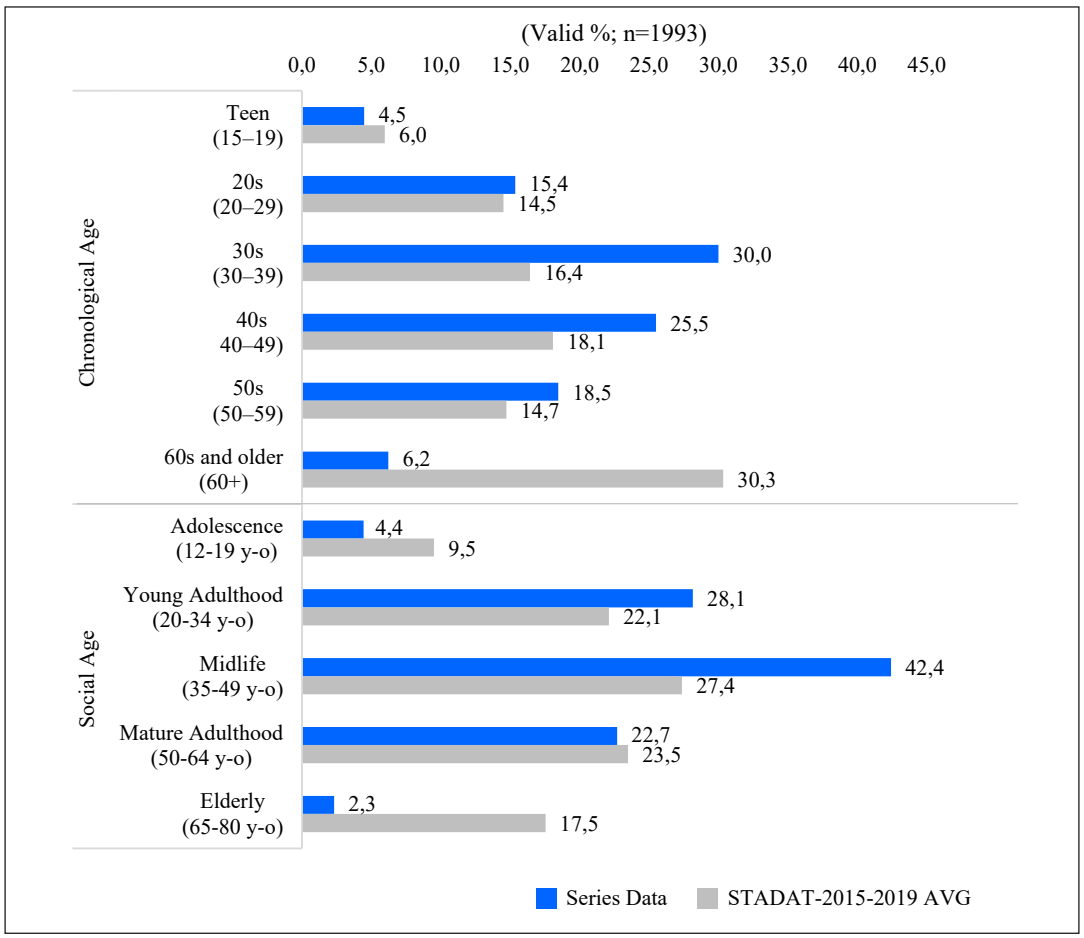

Figure 2 Age distribution in television series vs. 'real-world'

Goodness of Fit Test – Chronological Age: χ^2 = 694.08, df=5, Sig. < .001 (Table 5 in Appx.)

Goodness of Fit Test – Social Age: χ^2 = 514.623, df=4, Sig. < .001 (Table 6 in Appx.)

Source of 'real-world' data: KSH Summary tables; 22.1.1.3. – 2015-2019 avg.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0003.html [Accessed 19 05 2021]

As for the age distribution by gender (Figure 3), younger females are more likely to be portrayed, while middle-aged males make up a larger segment of the characters on the television screen. Males aged 30-50 are overrepresented; meanwhile, their counterparts over 60 are significantly underrepresented compared to the real-world age distribution. Females in their twenties are overrepresented, also in their 30s and 40s, while women in their 60s or older are dramatically underrepresented. This distorted representation of different age groups in favour of younger generations is particularly counterproductive in an ageing society, as it hinders intergenerational understanding and facilitates ageism, perpetuating stereotypes that marginalise older people in media narratives.

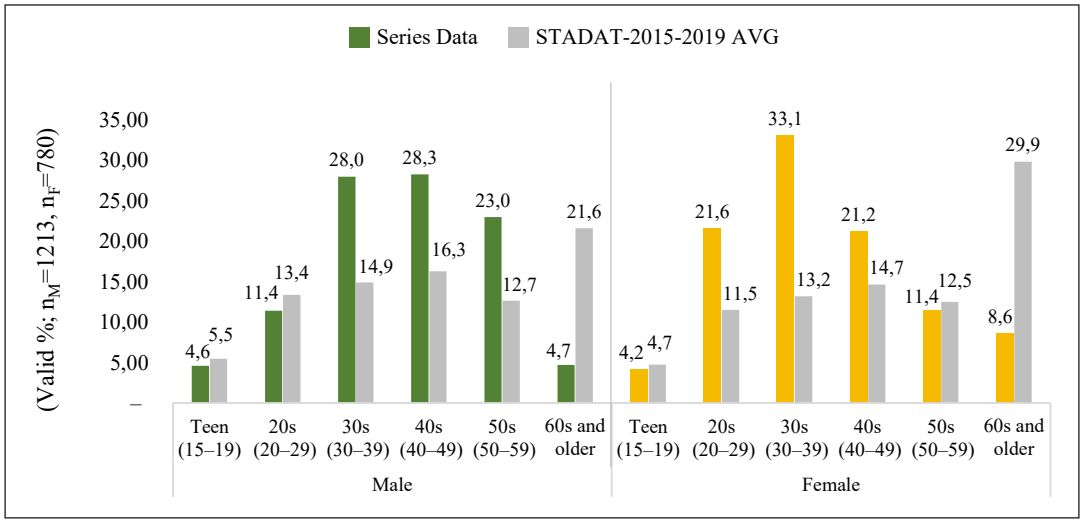

Figure 3 Age distribution by gender in television series vs. 'real-world'

Chronological age by gender: χ^2 =92.15, df=5, Sig. < .001

Source of 'real-world' data: KSH Summary tables; table 22.1.1.3. – 2015-2019 avg.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0003.html [Accessed 19 05 2021]

According to the results, legal marriage is significantly underrepresented on televison, and the same applies for divorcees and widows (Table 7 and 8 in Appx.). The official demographic statistic covers only the 'single' state at the legal category; however, during the coding, romantic and civil partnerships were also recorded. Legally, singles are highly overrepresented in television series (61.5 per cent (total percent: 20.7) vs. 34.9 per cent in the 'real-world'). The rate of 'real' single persons is the highest (34.3 per cent; total percentage: 11.5), and a quarter (26.6 per cent; total percentage: 9) of the characters are in a relationship (the number of civil partnerships is marginal). Among the male and female characters, there is no significant difference regarding their marital state. Similarly to the findings of Glascock (2001), males' marital status was significantly less likely to be known (70.9 per cent indeterminate) than their female counterparts' (59.3 per cent indeterminate). (This distinction is so meaningful that if the indeterminate category is included in the analysis, the difference between male and female characters is significant (Table 9 in Appx.)). The high proportion of single characters is also associated with the fact that the most frequent changes in the lives of the characters are related to their marital status. This phenomenon can be attributed to the central role of love in the narrative structure, while for already married characters, there are fewer potential complications in the storyline, as they have already established a stable relationship.

Determining if a character has a child or not was difficult in many cases (67.6 per cent) as well. Regarding the obvious cases, the majority had no child (57 per cent; total percentage: 18.5), meaning that parents are underrepresented in fiction series (population rate: 62.5 per cent; see Tables 10 and 11 in Appx.). Among females and males, there is no remarkable difference in having a child or not.

In the cases of those who have children (43 per cent; total percentage: 14), the average number of children is 1.45. Families with one child are more likely to be presented on the television screen (67.5 per cent; total percentage: 57.6 vs. population rate: 54.5 per cent), while families with more children are slightly underrepresented compared to the population average (Tables 12 and 13 in Appx.).

It proved challenging to define the characters' socio-economic status, with 80.4 per cent of the cases remaining indeterminate. However, the clear cases show that television's world overrepresents the upper- and upper middle class compared to the social reality[7]. Figure 4 illustrates that the representation of the middle class in the series is close to the real world, while the lower classes are underrepresented. As it was discussed earlier, such over-representation of the higher social classes has historical roots, as in the early days of series production, television content producers tried to attract a larger audience with stories about the glamorous lives of the wealthy characters. Nevertheless, such representations of social classes on television screens can negatively shape viewers' perceptions and attitudes towards class dynamics and social inequality. Over-emphasising the lifestyles of the higher classes strengthens class divisions, marginalises the lower classes, and creates barriers to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of different social classes.

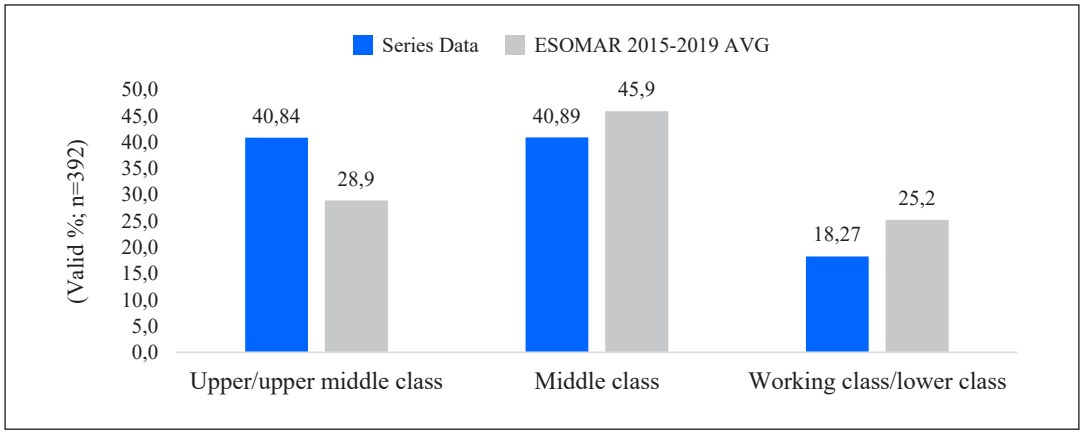

Figure 4 Socio-economic status in television series vs. 'real-world'

Goodness of Fit Test – Chronological Age: χ^2 = 29.135, df=2, Sig. < .001 (Table 14 in Appx.)

Source of 'real world' data: Nielsen, Establishment Survey, 2015 & 2019 avg.

[Obtained directly from the Audience Measurement Company; Accessed 08 06 2021]

[7] The 'real-world' data is based on the ESOMAR classification. The data is obtained from Nielsen's (Television Audience Measurement company) Establishment Survey (2015 and 2019).

The representation of the ethnic minorities is also inequitable (Table 15 and 16 in Appx.): 1.3 per cent of the characters were Romani, while their ratio in the population is 3.2 per cent. The same disproportionate portrayal of ethnicity was reported in prior research (e.g. Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, 2009). The underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the media content not only reflects existing social inequalities but also serves to reinforce them, along with the stereotypes that further marginalise minorities.

5.2 Occupational characteristics

The employment rate is highly overrepresented on television: the vast majority (89.5 per cent total percentage: 64.5) of the characters had a job, while in reality 60.4 per cent of the Hungarian population is employed (Figure 5). Inactive people are dramatically underrepresented in television series, which is also strongly associated with the representation of age groups: students and pensioners are underrepresented on screen. It should be highlighted that Hungarian television series show small proportions of effectively unemployed characters – if so, it is more likely to be temporary – and rather depict homemakers or other dependents. The neglect of unemployment and the rapid finding of work may foster the false idea that it is easy to get a job, thereby stigmatising the inactive who do not conform to societal norms of productivity.

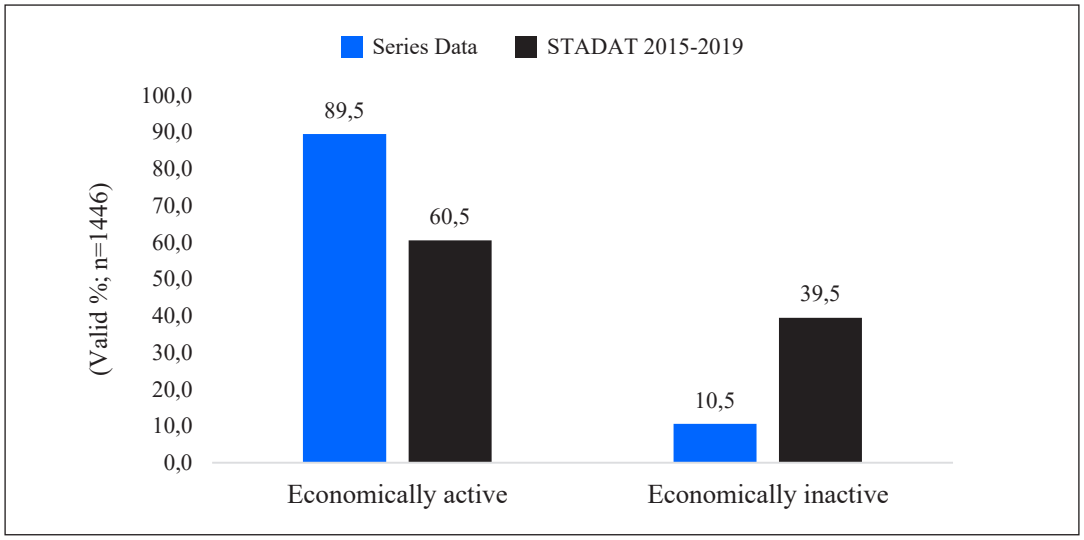

Figure 5 Economic activity in television series vs. 'real-world'

Goodness of Fit Test: χ^2 = 505.681, df=1, Sig. < .001 (Table 18in Appx.)

Source of 'real world' data: KSH Summary tables; 20.1.1.5. – 2015-2019 avg.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0002.html [Accessed 19 05 2021]

Regarding the gender differences, for women, it was more likely to be unclear whether they are economically active or not (33.7 per cent is indeterminate, while for men, the proportion of the unclear cases was 23.5 per cent). Jacobs et al. (2015) found the same connection between gender and unknown occupational status. Focusing on the relevant occurrences (Table 17 in Appx.), in television series more men are portrayed as economically active than in the population (66.4 per cent vs. 53 per cent), but for women a reverse trend was found (33.3 per cent in television world vs. 47 per cent in reality), which further strengthens the stereotype of men on television screens. Contrary to the findings of Signorielli and Kahlenberg (2001), in Hungarian television series, there is no connection between marital state and economic activity, meaning married women are equally likely to work as their male counterparts, thus avoiding the stereotype that a wife cannot have a career outside the home.

The ratio of business owners in series is twice as much (20.3 per cent; total percentage: 9) as in society (10.2 per cent; Table 19 and 20 in Appx.); consequently, employed workers are slightly underrepresented on television (79.7 per cent; total percentage: 35.5 vs. 89.4 per cent). Television tends to portray both men and women with a greater entrepreneurial spirit.

Determining the hierarchical position of a character seemed to be challenging in half of the cases (52.5 per cent) and was indeterminate. Regarding the unclear cases, twice as many men's employment status was undeterminable as women's (62.2 per cent vs. 37.8 per cent). As for the obvious instances, most of the characters were employees, one-fifth of them were in managerial positions, while very few unemployed or pensioners were visible.[8]

As Figure 6 shows, there are some obvious differences between men and women regarding their hierarchical positions. Males are significantly more likely to fill leading positions or be self-employed. On the other hand, pensioners on television are mainly female characters. This biased depiction of the working characters reinforces broader gender inequalities in the world of work on television screens, which implies a quite unfavourable position for women, as their recognition in positions of power and authority is limited. The 'other inactive' status encompasses housewives and students, resulting in a balanced distribution of genders in this category, which suggests a more equitable representation of gender roles in this sense.

Altogether 323 different occupations were depicted in the Hungarian prime time series. As Glascock (2001) and Signorielli and Kahlenberg (2001) noted, men were shown in a more diverse number of occupations than women, the same was found in the recent analysis: while male characters were cast in 268 different jobs, their female counterparts were portrayed in 163.

[8] The hierarchical position of the characters or their status of employment was recorded as well, but unfortunately there is no population data which is convenient for comparative purposes.
The stratification model (Stratification by the Character of Work Done – based on the HCSO-08/FEOR-08 classification) covers hierarchical aspects as well, and that also provides an opportunity for comparing the population and the television data, these are presented in detail later in this chapter.

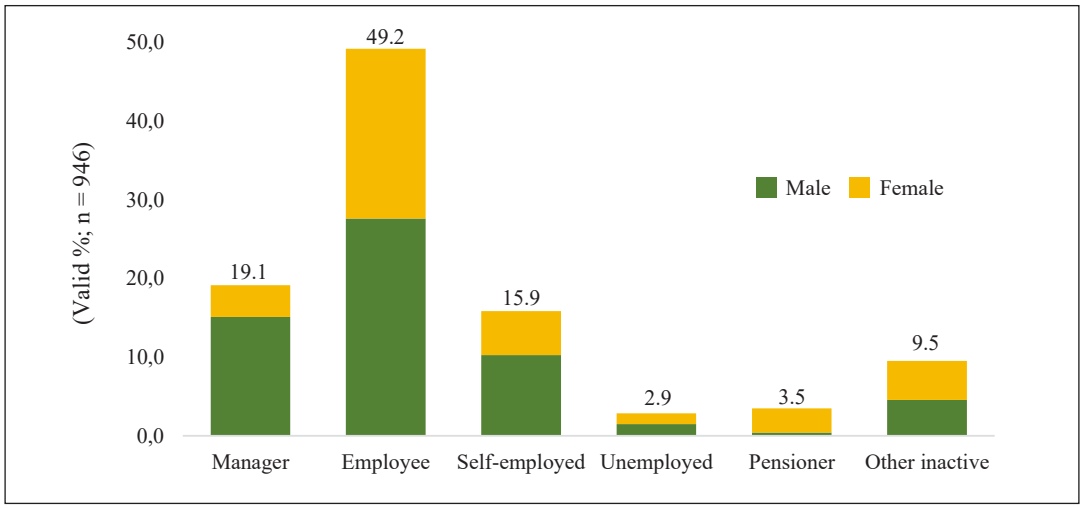

Figure 6 Hierarchical positions by gender in television series

Hierarchical position by gender: χ^2 =67.3, df=5, Sig. < .001

In general, the top 10 most prevalent occupations that were held by almost a third of the characters are the following: police officers, doctors, nurses, waiters/waitresses, salesclerks, lawyers, teachers, receptionists, managing directors, and actors/actresses. Previous studies reported very similar tendencies. Police officers, doctors and lawyers were the most represented occupations according to Signorielli (1993, 2004), Greenberg and Collette (1997), Elasmar et al. (1999), Glascock (2001), Lauzen and Dozier (2004) and Esch (2011). Although Signorielli (1993) reported that teachers, secretarial and sales workers are underrepresented, the current analysis has found that teachers, salesclerks, and receptionists are also among the most frequently portrayed jobs. Consequently, in respect of the branches of economic activities, a greater percentage of occupations belong to public administration and defence, human healthcare, and accommodation and food services. Also, a great percentage were in arts and entertainment-related occupations.

Between male and female characters, there are some remarkable differences in this aspect as well (Figure 7). The highest percentage of men were police officers and other professionals, such as doctors and lawyers. Greenberg, Collette (1997) and Glascock (2001) came to the same conclusions. In Hungarian fiction series, males are also likely to be portrayed as managing directors. The other most common occupations among men were typically non-intellectual jobs, such as courier, waiter, bartender, security guard, and repairman. It is rather an interesting fact that the list of the top ten most frequent occupations for men includes priests (1.6 per cent; valid percentage 1.1).

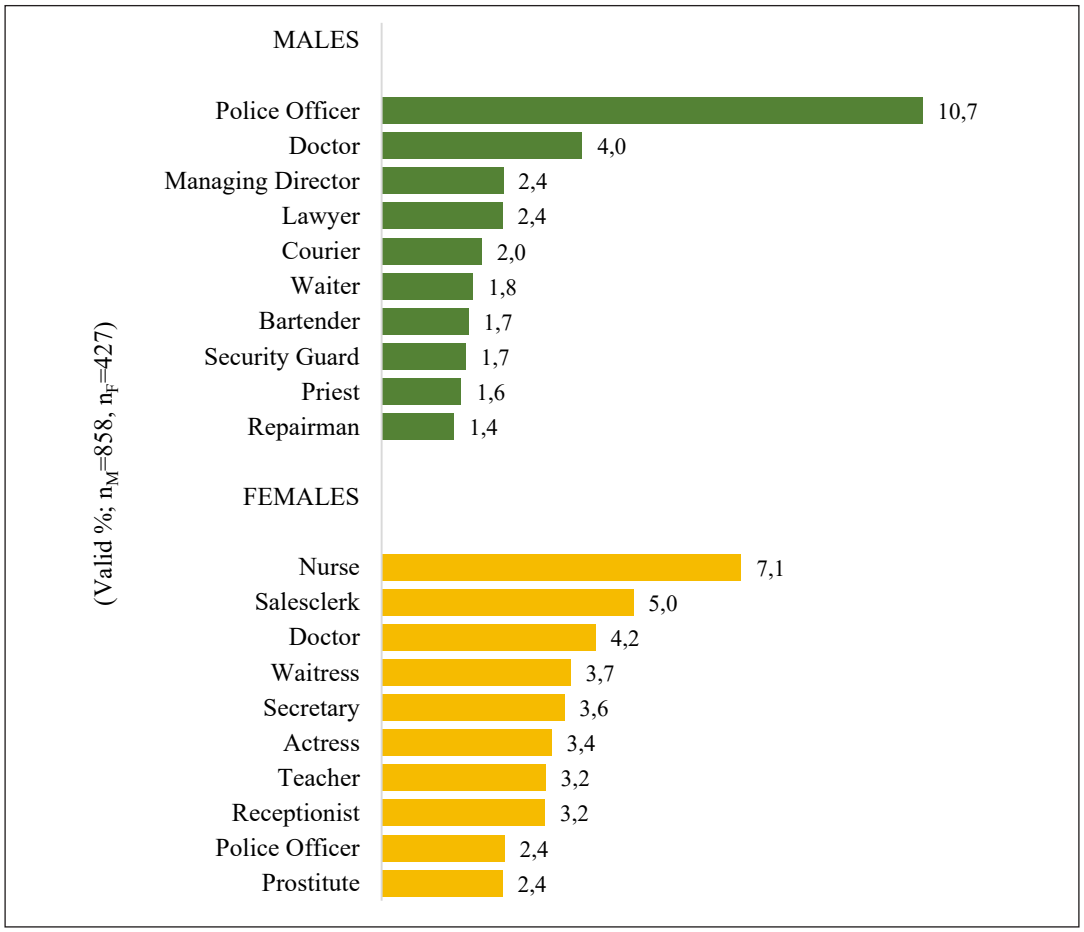

Figure 7 Most frequent occupations in television series by gender

Women are proportionately more likely to be seen in pink-collar occupations, which highlights even more the stereotypical gender portrayal. Six out of the ten most frequent professions belong to that category, such as nurse, salesclerk, waitress, teacher, receptionist, and secretary. Similar to men, a doctor is a common occupation for females as well, and women are also often depicted as police officers. Glascock (2001) also found that females on television screens are rather likely to be seen as police officers, nurses, secretaries, and waitresses. Elasmar et al. (1999) and Lauzen and Dozier (2004) reported that a high proportion of women are employed in the entertainment business. The present study found similar results, as an actress is the sixth most common profession among female characters.

6 Summary and conclusions

Television is a significant mass medium with a dual function: it can be watched for leisure time activities and also for obtaining information about news, politics, and the world in general. Among the numerous types of television programmes, television series are the most important ones and their popularity continues to grow.

As the results of the research demonstrate, the portrayal of male and female characters is not balanced, and the depiction of age groups is also inadequate; thus, the potential bias or stereotypes are strengthened towards gender roles and ageism. The same neglect is true for legally married couples, divorcees and widows who are apparently sacrificed for a better storyline. Families with more kids are also underrepresented, just as members of the lower social class. Minorites, more precisely the Romani ethnicity, are also inequitably represented compared to the population average, which also perpetuates stereotypes and marginalisation, and reinforces societal prejudices.

The occupational characteristics in television series are also distorted in most ways. The employment rate is overrepresented, suggesting that active working life is the standard, which can maintain social preconceptions about productivity and performance, ignoring the contribution and experience of inactive individuals. The majority of men were active, while their female counterparts were overrepresented among those who are economically inactive, and their economic activity status is unclear in more cases. The actual occupation was indeterminate more often for females; moreover, men tend to be portrayed in more diverse kinds of occupations than women. All these findings further deepen the differences and stereotypes between men and women, portraying males in a more favourable light.

At certain points, there are many similarities with the findings of prior studies concerning the inadequate portrayal of various groups, including, but not limited to, genders, older generations and certain occupations. Furthermore, it can be stated that, overall, the workforce in Hungarian television series is more masculine and glamorous, consistent with prior foreign studies.

These similarities can be interpreted as a confirmation of the mainstreaming pattern of television. Through these systematic repetitions and patterns, despite the wide range of possible options (e.g. different formats, genres, broadcasting platforms), the audience is still subjected to relatively restricted choices. One potential explanation is that it is an unrecognised and unconscious heritage or habit, i.e. building on the success of previous series, the next ones adopt the established patterns.

This exploratory research is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it addresses a gap in the Hungarian research landscape. Secondly, its findings contribute to international scientific knowledge: the results demonstrate that biased media representation is a universal phenomenon, with similar distortions occurring in different parts of the world. Thus it further reinforces the thesis of cultivation theory that the media functions as a melting pot by homogenising the divergences and converging the different views (Gerber et al., 1986), which spans not only different media platforms but also national boundaries. Furthermore, as the characteristics of depiction appear to adhere to the 'original' recipe of a successful television series, which entails an over-glamourised world with male

dominance. It can be stated that these phenomena not only extend across spatial and geographical boundaries but also over decades of series production, thereby preserving the imbalanced and biased portrayal of different societal members and groups.

The current study has limitations. Due to the sampling in the case of the long-running daily series, some character traits remained unclear. This issue can also be addressed by choosing a smaller period as the unit of analysis or larger contiguous units. Given that the current research spanned five years, this was indeed feasible. The methodology-related issue pertains to the reliability test. Although in most cases the IC-indices reached the accepted level, most of the discrepancy was a result of the low number of episodes on which the cross-coders worked. This issue can be handled by raising the number of cross-coders or delegating more episodes from fewer series to them.

Regarding future research directions, this analysis can be extended by new seasons of ongoing series, or by the newest Hungarian productions. Since 2019, fifteen brand new series have premiered, of which ten are originals. Involving these in the already existing database, new research questions can be answered that focus on the differences between the original series and adaptations. On the other hand, on a narrowed sample, certain series can be analysed in a more detailed manner, applying qualitative methods, other dimensions of the portrayal could be explored, such as how characters are presented in certain positions (e.g. appearance, personality traits, etc.), and also involving even more productional elements which further nuance the depictions of characters and occupations.

Hungarian research production is in its heyday and further blooming. The current research has proven that there is a wealth of available content to conduct an extensive and comprehensive analysis on any topic.

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Appendix

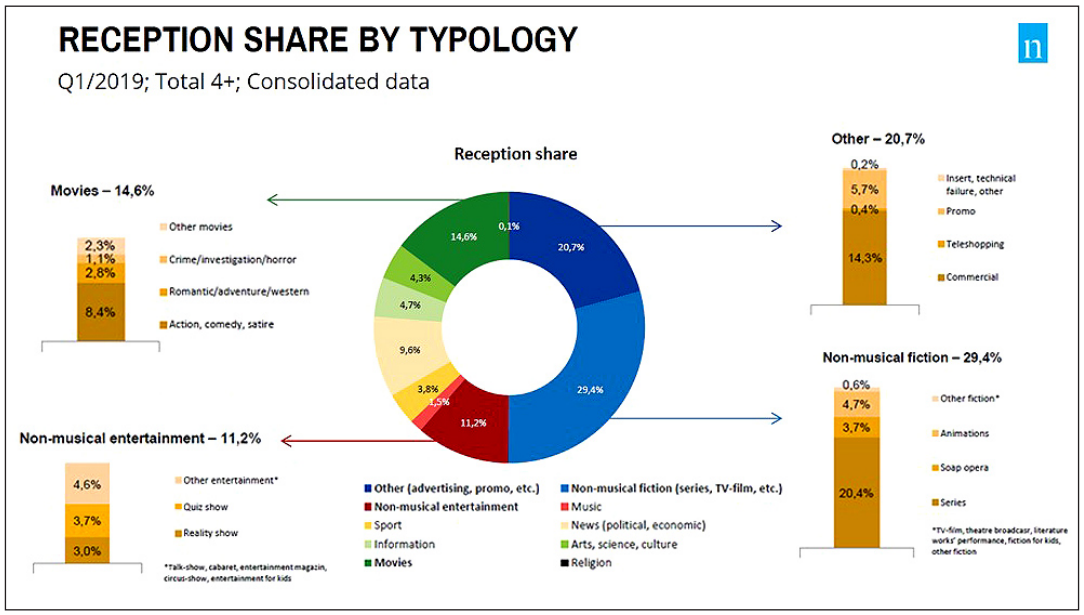

Figure 8 Reception share by programme typology in Hungary (Q1 2019)

Source: Nielsen, TV Market Snapshot 2019 Q1

Table 4 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) – Gender in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Male	1214	952
Female	781	1043
n = 1995		
χ^2 = 137.919, df=1, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

The Goodness of Fit Test was calculated by the online calculator of Statistic Kingdom webpage: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 5 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) – Chronological age in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Teen (15–19)	89	119
20s (20–29)	306	289
30s (30–39)	598	327
40s (40–49)	508	360
50s (50–59)	368	294
60s and older	124	604
n = 1993		
χ^2 = 694.08, df=5, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 6 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) - Social age in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Adolescence (12-19)	88	189
Young Adulthood (20-34)	561	441
Midlife (35-49)	845	545
Mature Adulthood (50-64)	452	468
Elderly (65-80)	47	350
n = 1993		
χ^2 = 514.623, df=4, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 7 Marital state in television series vs. 'real-world'

	SERIES DATA			POPULATION DATA
	Freq.	**%**	**Valid %**	**STADAT 2015-2019 avg. (%)**
Single	230	11.5	**34.3**	**34.9***
In relationship	183	9.2	**27.2**	
Married	183	9.2	**27.2**	**42.1**
Divorced	53	2.7	**7.9**	**12.1**
Widow	23	1.2	**3.4**	**10.9**
Indeterminate	1323	66.3	–	–
Total	1995	100.0	100.0	100.0

* Legally single (unmarried)

Source of 'real-world' data: KSH Summary tables; table 22.1.1.5. - 2015-2019 avg.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0005.html [Accessed 19 05 2021]

Table 8 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) - Marital state in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Legally single	413	234
Married	183	283
Divorced	53	82
Widow	23	73
n = 672		
χ^2 = 216.766, d.f.=df=3, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 9 Marital state by gender incl. Indeterminate

	Marital state (Valid %)					
n=1995	**Single**	**In relationship**	**Married**	**Divorced**	**Widow**	**Indeterminate**
Male	6.57	4.56	4.86	1.30	0.40	43.06
Female	4.96	4.61	4.26	1.35	0.80	23.26
χ^2 = 39.580, df=6, Sig. < .001						

Table 10 Parenthood in television series vs. 'real-world'

	SERIES DATA			POPULATION DATA
	Freq.	**%**	**Valid %**	**Microcenzus 2016 (%)**
Have children	279	14.0	**43.0**	**62.5**
Does not have children	369	18.5	**57.0**	**37.5**
Indeterminate	1348	67.6	–	–
Total	1995	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of 'real world' data: KSH Microcensus, 2016; table 1.6.1.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/mikrocenzus2016/kotet_6_haztartasok_es_csaladok_adatai [Accessed 19 05 2021]

Table 11 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) – Parenthood in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Yes	279	405
No	368	242
n = 647		
χ^2 = 216.766, df=1, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 12 Number of children (of those who has children) in television series vs. 'real-world'

	SERIES DATA			POPULATION DATA
	Freq.	**%**	**Valid %**	**STADAT 2015-2019 avg. (%)**
1	133	57.6	**67.5**	**54.5**
2	46	19.8	**23.2**	**33.2**
3+	19	8.0	**9.3**	**12.3**
Indeterminate	34	14.6	–	–
Total	231	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of 'real world' data: KSH Microcensus, 2016; table 1.6.3.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/mikrocenzus2016/kotet_6_haztartasok_es_csaladok_adatai [Accessed 19 05 2021]

Table 13 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) – Number of children (of those who have children) in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
1	133	108
2	46	66
3+	19	24
n = 198		
χ^2 = 12.889, df=2, Sig. < .005		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 14 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) - Socio-economic status in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Upper/upper middle class	160	113
Middle class	160	180
Working class/lower class	72	99
n = 198		
χ^2 = 29.135, df=2, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 15 Ethnic minorities (Romani) in television series vs. 'real-world'

	SERIES DATA			POPULATION DATA
	Freq.	**%**	**Valid %**	**STADAT 2015-2019 avg. (%)**
Romani ethnicity	27	1.3	**1.3**	**3.2**
Not Romani ethnicity	1963	98.4	**98.7**	**96.8**
Indeterminate	5	0.3	–	–
Total	1995	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of 'real world' data: KSH Microcensus, 2016; table 1.1.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/mikrocenzus2016/kotet_12_nemzetisegi_adatok; table 2.1 [Accessed 21 05 2021]

Table 16 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) – Ethnic minorities (Romani) in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Romani ethnicity	27	63
Not Romani ethnicity	1963	1927
n = 1990		
χ^2 = 21.244, df=1, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 16 Economic activity in television series vs. 'real-world'

	SERIES DATA		POPULATION DATA	
	Valid %		**STADAT 2015-2019 AVG (%)**	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Economically active	66.4	33.6	53	47
Economically inactive	45.1	54.9	41.4	58.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Economic activity & Gender: χ^2 =26.87, df=1, Sig. < .001

Source of 'real world' data: KSH Summary tables; table 20.1.1.5. – 2015-2019 avg.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0002.html [Accessed 23 05 2021]

Table 18 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) – Economic activity in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Economically active	1293	875
Economically inactive	153	571
n = 1446		
χ^2 = 505.681, df=1, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

Table 19 Entrepreneurship in television series vs. 'real-world'

	SERIES DATA			**POPULATION DATA**
	Freq.	**%**	**Valid %**	**STADAT 2015-2019 avg. (%)**
Entrepreneur	180	9.0	**20.3**	**10.2**
Employee	708	35.5	**79.7**	**89.4**
Indeterminate	5	0.3	–	–
Total	1107	55.5	100.0	100.0

Source of 'real world' data: KSH Summary tables; table 20.1.1.11. - 2015-2019 avg.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0011.html [Accessed 22 05 2021]

Table 20 Goodness of Fit Test (χ^2) – Entrepreneurship in television series vs. 'real-world'

	Observed freq.	**Expected freq.**
Entrepreneur	180	90
Employee	708	798
n = 888		
χ^2 = 100.15, df=1, Sig. < .001		

Calculated by: https://www.statskingdom.com/310GoodnessChi.html

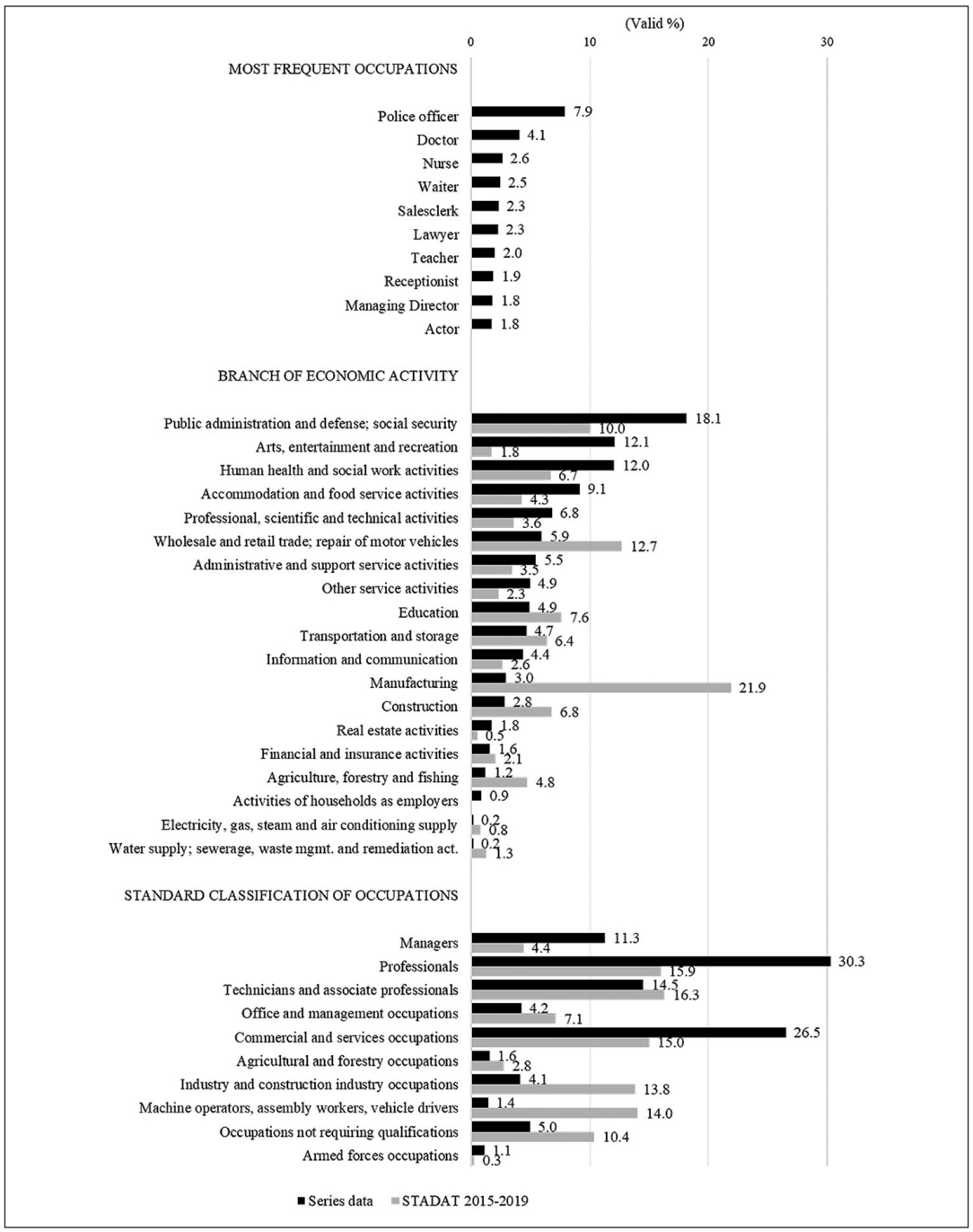

Figure 9 Most frequent occupations, branches of economic activity, and Hungarian standard classification of occupations in television series vs. 'real-world'

Source of 'real world' data: KSH Summary tables; table 20.1.1.10., 20.1.1.9. – 2015-2019 avg.

Available at: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0010.html; https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0009.html [Accessed 12 05 2021]