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Analysis of the Image of Immigration in Prime Time Television Fiction¹

Análisis de la imagen de la inmigración en la ficción televisiva de prime time

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the results of a research study into the image of immigration as presented in television fiction, taking Cultivation Theory as a reference. Content analysis was performed on a representative sample of prime-time fictional programming broadcast in 2010 on six television channels. Results show that immigrant characters are under-represented and their construction is based on negative stereotypes. These results are discussed in relation to the role of television fiction in reducing prejudice.

Keywords: Immigration, television fiction, cultivation theory, content analysis, stereotypes, parasocial contact.

RESUMEN: Se presentan los resultados de una investigación sobre la imagen de la inmigración en la ficción televisiva, tomando como referencia la Teoría del Cultivo. Se llevó a cabo un estudio de análisis de contenido sobre una muestra representativa de la programación de ficción emitida en 2010 en el horario de prime time en seis cadenas televisivas. Los resultados permiten concluir que existe una infra-representación de los personajes inmigrantes y una construcción de los mismos basada en estereotipos negativos. Se discuten los resultados en relación con el papel de la ficción televisiva en la reducción del prejuicio.

Palabras clave: inmigración, ficción televisiva, teoría del cultivo, análisis de contenido, estereotipos, contacto parasocial.

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Spain has undergone important demographic changes in the last few years, one of the most important being the arrival and settlement of immigrants, who now comprise 12.2% of the population (INE -Spanish National Statistics Institute- 2011). At the same time, xenophobic reactions and attitudes have begun to emerge in some segments of Spanish society (Cea D'Ancona, 2004; Cea D'Ancona & Valles, 2010). Until now, research has addressed the role of media coverage and informational treatment of immigration as one of the causal factors of this increase in xenophobia (Brader, Valentino & Suhay, 2008; Igartua & Cheng, 2009). However, the invisibility of immigration or the distorted (stereotypical) way it is viewed in television fiction may also be a relevant element in explaining the formation, reinforcement and internalization of prejudiced attitudes towards immigrants. Despite this, until now no rigorous systematic analysis has been carried out regarding how immigration is treated in fictional television programmes. Given this context, we researched the image of immigration in prime time television fiction in Spain, taking as a reference the empirical studies performed within the perspective of Cultivation Theory, developed by George Gerbner and colleagues, and studies concerning the representation of ethnic minorities and immigrants in the media. Our study is of interest for basic research (in particular, the study of stereotypes in fictional television programmes and the formation of attitudes of rejection of immigrants) and also has a clear applied dimension: the drawing up of codes or recommendations for the production of fictional television series in the Spanish context and the establishment of standards for training communicators in important social matters such as immigration.

1. Television fiction and the perception of social reality

Empirical research has found that the media have a significant effect on how people perceive the social world (Preiss, Gayle, Burrell, Allen & Bryant, 2007). The first attempt to systematize the empirical study of the representation of social reality in television fiction and to analyze its impact on audiences was the Cultural Indicators project led by Gerbner, which was to give rise to Cultivation Theory (Igartua & Gerbner, 2002). From this theoretical perspective, television is viewed as a cultural instrument that socializes behaviour and social roles and television models basic assumptions about social reality (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Morgan, Shanahan & Signorielli, 2009). Cultivation Theory is focused on determining the social consequences of the messages disseminated through television and investigates the effects of conventional television programming designed to 'entertain' audiences (especially in the case of fictional programmes with a narrative structure, such as series and films).

Over the last four decades, Gerbner and his colleagues have based their work on three types of data: institutional analysis of the media, analysis of the message system (content analysis) and analysis of cultivation (Signorielli & Morgan, 1996). Firstly, the *institutional analysis* of the media addresses how television messages are produced and distributed. Secondly, using *message system analysis*, Gerbner and his team record and analyze (content analysis) weekly samples of “dramatic” prime time television programmes and weekend children’s programming. Finally, *cultivation analysis* is addressed to determining empirically the influence of television contents on peoples’ perception of the world. Research studies carried out from the perspective of Cultivation Theory have mainly been based on surveys of representative samples of the population, analyzing the *relation* between television consumption and social beliefs about different issues, in order to determine whether television actually has an influential effect on television viewers’ conceptions (Morgan et al., 2009).

Studies carried out to verify the cultivation hypothesis have demonstrated that television consumption is associated with a high perception of risk and danger, and with having an exaggerated sense of mistrust, vulnerability and lack of safety (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002; Morgan et al., 2009). It also has an influence on the perception of gender roles, professions, environmental issues, gender violence, disability, science, attitudes towards interpersonal relationships and the social perception of ethnic minorities (Morgan, 2009; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Morgan et al., 2009; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). Nonetheless, it has also been observed (taking as a reference the common metrics of Pearson’s correlation coefficient and using statistical techniques for meta-analysis) that the mean size of the cultivation effect is low, with a value of .10 (Gerbner et al., 2002). Although the size of the effect estimated is small, it is upheld even when controls are carried out on multiple variables (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). For this reason, it has often been stressed that there is a need to analyze or monitor the degree of *diversity* present in the contents of television programming, given the impact it can have on audiences and public opinion (Avraham & First, 2010; Koeman, Peeters & D’Haenes, 2007).

2. The media, immigration and prejudice

Gordon Allport (1954) defined prejudice as “an antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalization” (p. 9). It is a negative attitude toward or a rejection of an individual for pertaining to a specific group (Molero, 2007a). Prejudice has become an essential factor in explaining acculturation processes of individuals coming from other countries (Navas, García, Rojas, Pumares &

Cuadrado, 2006). However, prejudice towards ethnic or cultural minorities is not simply a psycho-social phenomenon but is based on a wider institutional and cultural institutional framework (Lacalle, 2008). And in this context the media play a very important role (Cea D'Ancona, 2004; Igartua & Muñiz, 2007; Van Dijk, 1997).

A large number of research studies has been done on the information processing of immigration in the communication media and its socio-cognitive effects. These kinds of studies have shown that people tend to link immigration to delinquency, crime and other social problems, whereas information about immigrants' positive contribution to the host country is much less present in the media (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Igartua, Muñiz & Cheng, 2005; Igartua, Muñiz, Otero & De la Fuente, 2007; Kim, Carvalho, Davis & Mullins, 2011; Van Dijk, 1989; Van Gorp, 2005). This line of research is important in relation to the study we are presenting here, since it has been pointed out that screenwriters for television series use news from the press on immigration to create fictional contents (Galán, 2006). Furthermore, research into the socio-cognitive effects of news frames on immigration has concluded that the frames themselves influence the perception of immigration as a social problem and attitudes towards immigration (Brader et al., 2008; Domke, McCoy & Torres, 1999; Igartua & Cheng, 2009).

Another relevant line of research is the one related to the analysis of the representation of ethnic minorities (African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans and Native Americans, in the US) and immigrants in television fiction (Greenberg, Mastro & Brand, 2002; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Studies analysing the content of fictional television programmes, following in the tradition of Gerbner and colleagues, have found that: a) there is a low presence of characters pertaining to ethnic minorities in the fictional contents analysed, as they are usually underrepresented, and b) when characters pertaining to these minorities do appear, it is usually through a distorted and stereotyped lens (Mastro, 2009a, 2009b).

In relation to the first point, it has been found that in the United States, Latino characters comprise only 3.9% of the characters, whereas they are the largest minority in the country, at 12.5%. In contrast, white people appear on television in a larger proportion (80.4%) than their actual demographic weight in society (69.1%); and African-Americans are also slightly over-represented in television fiction (13.8%, their demographic weight being 12.3%) (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). Together with their low presence or underrepresentation, it has also been observed that ethnic minorities usually occupy relatively unimportant roles in the narrative structure of fictional programmes (Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Koeman et al. (2007), in their content analysis of Dutch television, found that white cha-

acters were overrepresented and immigrants were underrepresented despite the high social diversity of the country. These findings are important because the low presence of immigrant characters or ethnic minority characters, that is, the absence of diversity in television fiction, may be conditioning their *visibility* or *social vitality*, and therefore their perceived social status or strength (Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007).

Violence, crime and delinquency are aspects strongly associated with ethnic minorities, especially Latinos and African-Americana in the United States (Entman & Rojeck, 2000). In this context it has been observed that on US television, Latinos tend to focus their conversations on topics such as crime and violence to a greater extent than persons of Caucasian origin, who in turn devote more time to talking about professional topics and business (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). It has furthermore been found that police in television fiction are more likely to use excessive or extreme force with young people pertaining to ethnic minorities, suggesting a greater victimization of these individuals as opposed to Caucasians (Mastro & Robinson, 2000). Another of the stereotypes associated with ethnic minorities, especially Latinos, has to do with occupational status and capacitation. Latinos are represented in a negative light in television fiction, as lazy people with low status and low-skilled jobs, who are not very intelligent and have difficulty in expressing themselves or communicating effectively (Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005).

Media research into television fiction and ethnic minorities and immigrants has also studied the effects of television viewing on social attitudes and beliefs regarding minorities (Greenberg et al., 2002). In this context it is assumed that the image of ethnic minorities and immigrants in television fiction contributes to the building and/or upholding of stereotypes and prejudice (Mastro, 2009a). It has been observed that the television consumption of these contents is linked to a distorted perception of minorities: in relation to their real number or demographic weight, their presence in certain occupations, the assimilation of dominant stereotypes and rejection of the members of these minorities (Mastro, Behm-Morawitz & Kopacz, 2008; Mastro, Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2007; Ramasubramanian, 2010). However, it has also been found that viewing television series that present a positive image of minorities and identification with minority characters is associated with more positive attitudes towards them, constituting empirical proof of the hypothesis of the *vicarious parasocial contact*: the more the vicarious contact (through the media) with members of the out-group in a favourable context, the greater the knowledge of the out-group and feelings of trust and respect, and the less prejudice and the perception of threat (Müller, 2009; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007).

Empirical studies on the treatment of immigration in television fiction are practically non-existent in Spain, in spite of its being a basic ingredient in prime time television programming (Ruiz-Collantes, Ferrés, Obradors, Pujadas & Pérez, 2006; Galán, 2006; Lacalle, 2008). Galán (2006) did a content analysis research study of the image of immigration in fiction, but only analysed two television series (*El Comisario* and *Hospital Central*). The study by Lacalle (2008) observed that in the contents analysed: a) the image of immigrants with low qualifications and in irregular situations predominates, b) there is a high presence of immigrants acting as criminals or as victims of crime or violence; and c) the presence of skilled or qualified immigrants or an immigrant as the main character of the narrative plot is infrequent in the series analyzed. For their part, Ruiz-Collantes et al. (2006) observed that immigrant characters tend not to appear in main roles, their representation is mainly negative, associated with problems and victimization, and they are shown to be ineffective in reaching the goals they set for themselves, therefore tending toward simulation, manipulation or deception.

Although the studies by Galán (2006), Ruiz-Collantes et al. (2006) and Lacalle (2008) focus exclusively on series produced in Spain, they are an essential starting point for analyzing the image of immigrants in television fiction. Nonetheless, in the present study we analyzed all the fictional programming broadcast in prime time, regardless of its national origin or genre (thus, both television series and feature-length films). Furthermore, the studies by Ruiz-Collantes et al. (2006) and Lacalle (2008) used a qualitative socio-semiotic approach, concentrating the analysis on immigrant and foreign characters, which impedes both an analysis of their presence (their hypothetical underrepresentation) and of how their characterization compares with that of native characters. Given this context, the research presented here has tried to overcome these problems by adopting content analysis as the research technique in order to make a socio-demographic analysis of the characters in television fiction broadcast by nation-wide channels in prime-time. Furthermore, by making comparisons between native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters, we shall be able to draw conclusions as to the nature of the representation of immigrant characters, a strategy that has been employed in the previous studies reviewed about ethnic minorities in television fiction (e.g., Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Taking as a reference research studies concerning the image or representation of immigrants and ethnic minorities (especially African-Americans and Latinos) in television fiction, as well as previous research into the analysis of news frames surrounding immigration, the following hypotheses were established:

- H1. The underrepresentation of immigrant characters is expected to be found in fictional prime time television programmes.

- H2. Characters that are immigrants or foreigners will occupy secondary or background roles to a greater extent than native characters, and appear to a lesser extent in main roles.
- H3. There will be a higher frequency of antagonists or villains, secondary protagonists, and non-protagonist secondary characters, and a lower frequency of protagonists among immigrant or foreign characters as compared to native characters.
- H4. Immigrant or foreign characters will have a lower level of education, a lower socio-economic level and less-skilled jobs than native characters.
- H5. Significant differences will be observed between immigrant-foreigner characters and native characters in the manifestation of violent behaviour, victimization, personality traits, health problems and conversational richness.

3. Method

3.1. Sample of contents

Two full weeks of prime-time programming were recorded from the six television channels broadcasting nationwide in Spain: TVE1, La 2, Antena 3, Cuatro, Tele 5 and La Sexta. According to the General Media Study, these six channels together add up to 67.9% of the audience share of television consumption in Spain based on a universe of 39,435,000 individuals aged 14 and over (AIMC, 2010). One full week in July (19-25 July 2010) and one full week in October (18-24 October 2010) were selected randomly. Recording was carried out on a computer equipment system (6 Energy System P3350 TDT, each with a hard disk capacity of 1.5TB) that permitted the simultaneous recording of the digital format television programming on each channel. The equipment was programmed to automatically record six hours a day from 8 pm to 2 am. Although six hours were recorded every day, only fictional programmes were analyzed, understanding by this term: a format destined for entertainment, with a clear narrative structure (presentation, conflict, resolution) and with a cast of characters that intervene in the action, it being possible to identify main, secondary and background characters. To select the programmes a “programme selection sheet” was devised with directions for the analysts whose task it was to decide which programmes should be selected: fictional programmes (series, serials, soap operas, sitcoms, feature length films and TV movies) that began between 8 pm and midnight. As a result, a total of 88 programmes were identified, 53 in the week of 19-25 July and 35 in the week of 18-24 October, 2010. The 88 programmes selected totalled 5,473 minutes (approximately 91

hours), the mean duration of each programme being 62.19 minutes ($DT = 32.52$). Thirty feature length films and 58 series (serials, miniseries, sitcoms) were identified, and 71.6% had been produced in the United States ($n = 63$), 19.3% in Spain ($n = 17$), 6.8% in another European country ($n = 6$), 1.1% ($n = 1$) in Latin America and 1.1% in another country ($n = 1$).

Table 1. Description of the analyzed sample

Channel	Nº of	Nº of characters analyzed
TVE1	11	175
La 2	29	373
Antena 3	11	213
Cuatro	11	183
Tele 5	8	131
La Sexta	18	270
Nº total	88	1.345

Once the fictional programmes on each of the channels were identified, characters from each programme were selected. To do so a “character selection sheet” was used, on which each analyst had to indicate the characters (in each programme) that were subsequently to be analyzed, taking into account the following definition of unit of analysis: the analysis of *characters* will focus on those who are human, leaving aside animals, extra-terrestrials and animated characters (cartoons); among the human characters, only take into account the ones that fulfil the following requirement: for a character to form part of the analysis he or she must appear throughout the programme (on more than one occasion) and enter into dialogue with another character (*talking individuals*) (Koeman et al., 2007). With this sheet the analyst numbered the characters in each programme and added basic descriptive information about each one (name, gender, approximate age, geographical origin or nationality). This process produced 1,345 characters. The mean number of characters per programme was 15.28 ($DT = 5.92$), with a minimum of 4 characters and a maximum of 42.

3.2. Coding scheme

For the analysis of the fictional programmes and their characters a coding scheme was used based on the studies by Harwood and Anderson (2002),

Igartua, del Río, Álvarez et al. (1998), Koeman et al. (2007), Mastro and Behm-Morawitz (2005), Mastro and Greenberg (2000), Neuendorf (2002) and Potter and Warren (1998). This coding scheme included variables grouped into nine large blocks or sections:

Basic identification data. The following aspects were evaluated: character number, programme number, coder number, date programme aired, day of the week it aired and the television channel it was on.

Programme information. This section included the following variables: a) production origin (0 = unidentified, 1 = domestic origin, Spain, 2 = United States, 3 = other European country, 4 = Latin America, 5 = other country); b) programme type (1 = feature-length film, 2 = series, serial, sitcom, miniseries, or procedural series, such as *CSI*, *House* o *Bones*); c) programme duration (in minutes, excluding advertising); and, d) place in which the main action takes place (1 = Spain, 2 = another European country, 3 = the United States, 4 = Latin America, 5 = other country).

Narrative aspects of the character. Two aspects were assessed. The *type of character* (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000) was evaluated using the following code: 1 = main (their presence is essential in the development of the narrative), 2 = secondary (they are involved in the plot, but are not essential to it), 3 = background (a non-essential, peripheral presence, or only episodic appearances).

The *narrative role of the character* in the programme was evaluated using the following code: 1 = protagonist (the one who performs the most important actions in the story; the dramatic structure revolves around this character and his or her actions); 2 = antagonist or villain (the most important character in opposition to the protagonist); 3 = secondary protagonist (those closely related to the protagonist or main character; their participation in the story is important and their actions move in the same direction as those of the protagonist); 4 = secondary non-protagonist (their participation in the story is not very important; their presence is not essential and is not closely related to either the protagonist or the antagonist).

Socio-demographic aspects of the character. The following variables regarding each character were assessed: a) gender (1 = male, 2 = female), b) age group (1 = child, between 0 and 12 years of age; 2 = adolescent, between 13 and 17; 3 = young adult, between 18 and 30; 4 = adult, between 31 and 64; 5 = elderly, over 65); c) educational level (0 = cannot be identified; 1 = illiterate, cannot read or write; 2 = no formal education; 3 = primary school, 4 = secondary and upper secondary school, vocational school; 5 = university); d) socio-economic level (0 = cannot be identified; 1 = low, working class or lower class, cannot satisfactorily meet their basic needs with their income; 2 = middle class, characters that work for a living, meet their needs and can afford a few luxuries; 3 = upper class, characters that do not need to work to maintain their standard

of living or have a job that allows them to enjoy many luxuries not available to the majority); e) occupation was coded according to a list established by Spain's Centre for Sociological Research (CIS, acronym in Spanish) for analysing occupations (18 different occupations are included, plus the category 0 = cannot be identified).

An important aspect of the study was assessment of each character's *nationality*. Since it was often difficult to discern the character's place of birth, identification of this criterion was based on a set of traits or attributes that had to be evaluated together or separately: a) character's place of birth (as long as specific mention was made of this aspect in the programme); b) place of birth of one of the parents of the character, since the possibility of being a "second-generation immigrant" was considered (when at least one of the parents had been born outside the country); c) biological characteristics or phenotypical traits (such as the shape of the eyes, skin colour and type of hairstyle); d) cultural characteristics (such as the character's way of dressing, name, or accent); and e) their reason for being in the country (work, study, vacation). Nationality was assessed by taking into account the country in which most of the action in the narrative time took place. Taking as a reference the criteria mentioned above, the following code was used to classify a character's nationality: 0 = not clearly identifiable; 1 = a citizen of the country in which the main narrative action takes place (a native, if living in his or her country of origin); 2 = a foreigner, i.e. a person who comes from another country but is in the foreign country for transitory reasons (study, vacation, business); 3 = immigrant, i.e., one who has abandoned his or her country of origin to settle in the country and has a specific work plan; a character could also be coded as a (second generation) "immigrant" if at least one of the parents had not been born in the country where the main action is taking place and had migrated for work reasons.

Characters' violent behaviour. Using a three-point scale (0 = no, never; 1 = yes, on one or two occasions during the programme; 2 = yes, on three or more occasions during the programme) we coded the degree of presence of different types of behaviour or modes of violence based on the classification done by Potter and Warren (1998): a) performing "major physical attacks"; b) performing "minor physical attacks"; c) performing acts that cause "property damage"; d) performing acts of "intimidation"; and, e) making "hostile comments". An index of violent behaviour was created ($\alpha = .82$) from the sum of these five variables.

Violent behaviour performed against the character. Using a three-point scale (0 = no, never; 1 = yes, on one or two occasions during the programme; 2 = yes, on three or more occasions during the programme), and the classification by Potter and Warren (1998), we coded whether the character being analysed

suffered from or was a victim of the following types or modes of violence: a) major physical attacks; b) minor physical attacks; c) acts causing property damage; d) acts of intimidation; and, e) hostile comments. An index of character victimization ($\alpha = .77$) was created from the sum of these variables.

Problematic health behaviour shown by the character. We coded (1 = yes, 0 = no) whether or not the character: a) consumed alcoholic beverages; b) smoked tobacco; c) took prescription drugs; d) consumed illegal drugs; and e) whether they showed a problematic eating disorder. An index of health problems was devised from the sum of these five variables.

Topics of conversation engaged in by the character. A dichotomous coding (0 = no, 1 = yes) of whether the character conversed with other characters at some time during the programme about the following topics: love, violence, friendship, sex, money, social differences, work, the environment, health, education, family, politics, sports, racism, and immigration. An index was made of character conversational richness based on the sum of these fifteen variables.

Character's personality traits. Taking as a reference the study by Igartua, del Río, Álvarez et al. (1998), we evaluated on a three-point scale (0 = not characteristic of the character; 1 = partially or moderately defines the character's personality; 2 = perfectly defines the character's personality) to what extent the following traits characterize the personality of the character in question: friendly, open (extroverted), good (good-hearted), disloyal, unfair, traitorous, aggressive, intelligent, hard-working, mistrustful, thankful, conflictive, racist and tolerant. A principle components factor analysis (with varimax rotation) was carried out. It extracted three dimensions that explained 57.38% of the variance: a) negative personality traits ($\alpha = .81$), grouping the seven negative attributes mentioned (disloyal, unfair, traitorous, aggressive, mistrustful, conflictive, racist); b) social disposition, grouping the personality variables "friendly", "open", "thankful" and "good" ($\alpha = .80$); and c) cognitive effectiveness, grouping the traits "hard-working", "intelligent" and "tolerant" ($\alpha = .65$).

3.3. Coding

Four analysts with training in the area of audio-visual communication and research methods participated in the coding of 1,345 characters. Before starting the coding, the analysts received precise instructions as to how to perform the analysis, and were given a detailed explanation of how to code each variable in the coding scheme. After coding, a new analysis was made of 15% of the programmes in the total sample ($n = 210$ characters), in order to calculate the reliability of the coding process (*intercoder reliability*). Intercoder reliability was calculated using the observed agreement coefficient (OA) and Scott's π

coefficient for the qualitative and quasi-qualitative variables, and Pearson's correlation coefficient r for the only quantitative variable measured in the study (the duration of the programme in minutes) (Igartua, 2006). Intercoder reliability of the variable "programme duration" yielded a value of $r = .99$ ($p < .001$). The mean of observed agreement in the index (regarding the 55 variables considered) was $OA = .86$, the lowest value found being $.60$ (for the personality variable "tolerant"). The mean of Scott's Pi coefficient was $\pi = .65$. The variable "nationality" yielded a highly acceptable value ($OA = .93$, $\pi = .77$) (Neuendorf, 2002).

4. Results

4.1. Hypothesis 1

According to data from Spain's National Statistics Institute (INE, 2010), the number of foreigners registered in Spain on 1 January 2010 was 5,708,940, representing 12.2% of the total population (46,951,532). The results of our study indicate that 85.4% of the characters analysed were natives, 3.2% were foreigners, 10.9% were immigrants and in 0.5% of the cases no nationality could be determined. Since Spain's National Statistics Institute does not differentiate between foreigners and immigrants, we generated a new variable in which characters without nationality were eliminated (7 in all) and a single group was created of "foreigners, immigrants," (14.1%, representing 190 characters). According to these data, there would be a slight over-representation of foreigners-immigrants in the sample of characters analysed. However, if we take into account where each programme was produced, statistically significant differences emerge ($\chi^2 [3, N = 1338] = 21.71, p < .001, V = .12$). Thus, in the programmes produced in Spain, the percentage of foreigners-immigrants is substantially lower (7.8%, $n = 23$), their presence being greater in programmes from another European country (21.6%, $n = 19$) and the United States (16%, $n = 148$) (Table 2). It must also be taken into account that in the 17 programmes of the sample produced in Spain the narrative action took place in Spain. Thus, hypothesis 1 is partially confirmed, since the programmes produced in Spain (and whose narrative action takes place in Spain) tend to underrepresent foreigners-immigrants by a difference of 4.4 percentage points with respect to their real demographic weight.

Table 2. Relation between a character's nationality and the place where the programme was produced (% column)

Character's nationality	% total	Country where programme was produced			
		National origin	United	Other European country	Other country
Native	85.8	92.2+	84.0–	78.4–	100+
Foreigner	14.2	7.8–	16.0+	21.6+	0–
N	1338	295	923	88	32

– Value statistically lower than the total percentage (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).

+ Value statistically higher than the total percentage (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).

4.2. Hypothesis 2

According to hypothesis 2, we would expect a significant relation between the type of character (main, secondary or background) and the character's nationality. However, a significant relation was not observed between these two variables ($\chi^2 [2, N = 1338] = 0.25, p = .878$). Native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters were similarly distributed across main roles (22.4% versus 21.6%), secondary roles (38.1% versus 40%) and background roles (39.5% versus 38.4%). Hypothesis 2 was therefore not supported by the data.

4.3. Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 posited a relation between characters' narrative role and their nationality. However, once again no significant differences were observed between native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters in the narrative roles played in the programmes ($\chi^2 [3, N = 1338] = 2.41, p = .492$). The native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters were similarly distributed in roles of protagonist (21% versus 20%), antagonist (6.5% versus 5.8%), secondary protagonist (39.5% versus 45.3%) and secondary non-protagonist (33% versus 28.9%). Thus, hypothesis 3 was not confirmed by the data.

4.4. Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 posed the existence of significant differences between native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters in the variables educational

level, socio-economic level and occupation¹. With regard to educational level, statistically significant differences were observed ($\chi^2 [5, N = 1338] = 25.26, p < .001, V = 13$): for a very high percentage of foreigner-immigrant characters their educational level remained undefined (51.6%), something which did not occur to the same extent with native characters (41.8%). Moreover, the percentage of native characters with university-level studies (34%) is almost double that of foreigner-immigrant characters (18.4%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Relation between characters' nationality and their educational level (% column)

Educational level	% total	Character's nationality	
		Native	Foreigner-immigrant
Cannot be identified	43.2	41.8-	51.6+
Illiterate	2.2	2.4	1.1
No formal studies	3.4	3.0	5.3
Primary	6.1	6.3	4.7
Secondary	13.5	12.5-	18.9+
University	31.8	34.0+	18.4-
N	1338	1.148	190

- Value statistically lower than the total percentage (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).
 + Value statistically higher than the total percentage (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).

¹ Although it was not posited as a hypothesis, we also tested whether there were differences between native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters as a function of gender and age. Overall, 62.5% of the characters analysed were male (pointing to a clear underrepresentation of females) and 82.9% were adults (between 18 and 64 years of age). In this context no significant relation was observed between characters' nationality and their gender ($\chi^2 [1, N = 1338] = 1.85, p = .173$), or their age ($\chi^2 [4, N = 1338] = 5.56, p = .234$).

Table 4. Relation between characters' nationality and their occupation or main activity (% column)

Occupation or principal activity	% total	Character's nationality	
		Native	Foreigner-immigrant
Cannot be identified	10.5	10.6	10.0
No stable occupation	3.1	2.4-	7.4+
Management and professional	12.3	12.7	9.5
Technical	6.5	7.1+	3.2-
Small business owner	4.5	4.8	2.6
Clerical and services	4.6	5.0	2.1
Skilled labourer	1.6	1.7	0.5
Unskilled labourer	5.7	5.7	5.8
Religious	1.3	1.2	1.6
Police and/or military	15.4	15.9	12.6
Retired and/or pensioner	3.1	3.3	2.1
Unemployed	1.6	1.7	1.1
Student	10.2	10.1	10.5
Unpaid domestic work	2.8	3.0	1.1
Sports	0.2	0.2	0.5
Artist or show-business	4.1	4.0	4.7
Other	8.2	6.7-	17.4+
Crime-related activity	4.4	3.9-	7.4+
N	1338	1.148	190

- Value statistically lower than the total percentage (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).

+ Value statistically higher than the total percentage (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).

Despite finding significant differences as a function of educational level, we did not observe a positive relation between characters' nationality and their economic level ($\chi^2 [3, N = 1338] = 3.02, p = .387$); there was, however, a statistically significant association with occupation ($\chi^2 [17, N = 1338] = 56.86, p < .001, V = .20$). Thus, foreigner-immigrant characters were more likely not to have a stable job (7.4%, versus 2.4% of native characters), to devote themselves to crime-related activities (7.4%, versus 3.9% of the native characters) or to other occupations not considered in the list we used (17.4%, versus 6.7% of the native characters). Moreover, native characters were more

likely to be in technical or mid-level occupations, like managers of large firms (7.1%, versus 3.2% of the foreigner-immigrant characters) (Table 4). Based on these results, we can conclude that hypothesis 4 is partially confirmed (specifically for educational level and occupation).

4.5. Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 predicted the existence of statistically significant differences between native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters in the showing of violent behaviour, victimization, health problems, conversational richness and personality traits. To test this hypotheses we ran multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), the independent variable being the character's nationality (native versus foreigner-immigrant) and as dependent variables the indices made of violent behaviour, victimization, health problems conversational richness as well as the three personality factors (negative personality attributes, social disposition and cognitive effectiveness).

Table 5. Differences between native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters in violent behaviour, victimization, health problems, conversational richness and personality traits (multivariate analysis of variance, MANOVA)

Variables (indices)	Nationality		F	gl	p	np2
	Native	Foreigner				
Violence	1.32	1.80	7.75	1, 1336	.005	.006
Victimization	1.06	1.65	15.49	1, 1336	.000	.011
Health problems	0.30	0.35	1.21	1, 1336	.290	.001
Conversational richness	4.24	4.44	1.56	1, 1336	.212	.001
Negative personality traits	0.29	0.29	0.05	1, 1336	.811	.000
Social disposition	0.89	0.96	2.58	1, 1336	.108	.002
Cognitive effectiveness	0.81	0.72	4.25	1, 1336	.039	.003
N	1.148	190				

Note. The mean and standard deviation are indicated in parentheses for each variable.

It was observed that significant differences exist at the multivariate level (Wilks' Lambda = .97, $F_{\text{multivariate}} [7, 1330] = 4.26, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .022$). Analysis of the differences between native characters and foreigner-immigrant characters at the univariate level showed significant differences in the indices of violent behaviour ($F [1, 1336] = 7.65, p < .005, \eta_p^2 = .006$), victimization ($F [1, 1336] = 15.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .011$) and in the personality indicator "cognitive effectiveness" ($F [1, 1336] = 4.25, p < .039, \eta_p^2 = .003$) (Table 5). Thus the foreigner-immigrant characters scored higher in the index of violent behaviour and the index of victimization, whereas the native characters showed a higher score in cognitive effectiveness. No significant differences were found in the manifestation of health problems, conversational richness, negative personality traits or social disposition. Taken together, the results obtained confirm hypothesis 5.

5. *Conclusions and discussion*

The results of this content analysis research, a pioneering study for Spain, shed light on the biased or stereotyped construction of the foreigner-immigrant in prime-time television fiction broadcast by the principal nation-wide channels in Spain. Moreover, strong support was found for the hypotheses posited since three of the five proposed were confirmed. Thus an underrepresentation of foreigner-immigrant characters was observed in programmes produced in Spain (where 76.5% were series, sitcoms, or miniseries and 23.5% were feature-length films), since only 7.8% of the characters appearing in the programmes were foreigners-immigrants even though foreigners comprise 12.2% of Spanish society (INE, 2010). Furthermore, there were clear differences in the representation of foreigner-immigrant characters and native characters as regards demographic variables (such as educational level and occupation) and in their psycho-social configuration as well (violent behaviour, victimization and cognitive effectiveness). In this sense, compared to the native characters the foreigner-immigrant characters were represented as having a lower educational level, a more unstable job situation, and showing more violent behaviour and suffering more acts of violence (meaning that the action takes place in more conflictive environments); they are furthermore defined as being less effective from a cognitive point of view (i.e. less hard-working, intelligent and tolerant). These results converge with those of previous studies carried out in the United States in relation to the representation of ethnic minorities in television fiction (Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). On the other hand, no significant differences were observed in the level of protagonism of the foreigner-immigrant characters as compared

to the native ones. It is very likely that the difference between the two types of characters does not take place at the level of protagonism (type of character or narrative role) but rather in other aspects deriving from the *type of mission* that each character carries out in fictional programmes (see Ruiz-Collantes et al., 2006). Thus future studies should attempt to use more complex or elaborate criteria (only two variables were used in the present study) to measure the protagonism of a character in audiovisual fiction.

These findings are important because the low presence of foreigner-immigrant characters (particularly in programmes produced in Spain), that is, the absence of diversity in television fiction, may be conditioning the *visibility* or *social vitality* of these groups of people and therefore their perceived social strength or status; it also makes it more difficult for the native population to establish *vicarious parasocial contact* with characters of other national origins who have an outstanding presence in Spanish society (Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Furthermore, the stereotyped and negative image offered of foreigner-immigrants in the programmes analyzed may even strengthen or foment prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants, an aspect that should be addressed in future studies.

Although the media have often been part of the problem when it comes to the origin and maintaining of prejudice, they can also be part of the solution by contributing to a change in individual and group attitudes and beliefs, by stimulating reflection and by modelling innovative social norms. In this context, there are several studies which have examined the impact of audiovisual productions that have a content that fosters *intercultural contact* (Graves, 1999; Igartua, 2010; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Park, 2012; Paluck, 2009), that are based on the *Theory of the Extended Contact* (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe & Ropp, 1997; Molero, 2007b), the *Theory of Parasocial Contact* (Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes, 2005) and the *Theory of Imagined Intergroup Contact* (Crisp & Turner, 2009; Turner & Crisp, 2010).

The theory of (direct) contact formulated by Allport (1954) posits that one of the best strategies for reducing prejudice is to allow situations of interaction between the in-group and the out-group to be established (between foreigners-immigrants and natives, for example). That said, it has also been observed that for the contact to be effective a series of conditions must be fulfilled: there must be institutional support, the contact has to be frequent, lasting, and close (e.g., friendships should be fostered); the members of the in-group and the out-group that interact must have similar social-standing and interact while involved in tasks that require cooperation (Molero, 2007b). Of course this kind of interaction is not always easy to establish, especially when prejudice is very high, there is intense social segregation, or it is combined with a strong perception of rejection and threat that renders a first contact impos-

sible. However, it has been suggested that the positive effects of contact can also take place when the contact is indirect, vicarious or merely *symbolic*, and it is here where the role of audiovisual fiction can be determinant. According to the Theory of the Extended Contact (Wright et al., 1997), the mere fact of *knowing* or *observing* that a member of the in-group has a close relationship with a member of the out-group can contribute to improving intergroup attitudes. Thus, the Theory of Parasocial Contact upholds that being exposed through the media (e.g. television or film) to examples of positive and successful intercultural relations between in-group characters and out-group characters constitutes an opportunity for *parasocial* contact that reinforces attitudes of acceptance towards members of the out-group. For its part, the Theory of Imagined Intergroup Contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009) proposes that the mere fact of *imagining* a positive encounter (thus activating a behavioural script) with a person pertaining to the out-group (in this case, an immigrant) leads to a reduction not only in explicit prejudice but also in implicit prejudice (which is more automatic and uncontrolled by social desirability).

The practical implications to be deduced from these theories are evident: “publicizing” (e.g., through fictional narratives like a film or television series) positive interactions between members of the in-group (in our case, natives) and members of a stigmatized out-group (such as immigrants) will contribute to reducing the perception of intergroup threat and improve attitudes towards immigration. These narratives could show how immigrants and natives interact in a positive way, develop intimate relationships (as friends or as a couple) or solve interpersonal conflicts that arise precisely because of prejudice or stereotypes. There is also empirical evidence that is favourable to the hypotheses of extended contact and imagined contact when applied to the field of media communication. In one experimental study carried out in the Netherlands on the impact of a television series with a favourable message about intercultural contact it was observed that exposure to a multicultural dramatic series (in comparison with a series that acted as a control variable) reduced the perception of intercultural threat and stimulated identification with the out-group characters (Müller, 2009). Paluck (2009) found that exposure to a radio serial designed from the perspective of entertainment-education with the idea of fostering positive inter-ethnic relations in Rwanda helped to change social norms and increase behaviours of empathy and cooperation with the out-group. In an experimental study with the participation of 93 students from the University of Salamanca, it was found that exposure to the film *A Day without Mexicans* (showing a positive message about immigration) reinforced a favourable attitude towards immigration and beliefs in the positive contribution of immigrants to the economies of the host countries (Igartua, 2010). Finally, Ortiz and Harwood (2007) found that viewing series with a positive

image of minorities and identification with minority characters was associated with more positive attitudes towards minorities, providing empirical proof of the *hypothesis of vicarious parasocial contact*: the greater the vicarious or mediated contact with members of the out-group, in a favourable context, the greater the knowledge of the out-group and the greater the feelings of trust and respect.

In conclusion, studies such as the one presented here allow us to construct a *baseline* of indicators for knowing the degree of prejudice towards immigrants that is present in television fiction. The next step should be to devise codes or recommendations for the production of fictional series (at least in the Spanish or European context) and establish standards for training communicators in topics of social importance such as immigration and racism, since it has been verified that vicarious contact (extended or imagined), through audiovisual consumption, can have positive repercussions on the reduction of prejudice and in turn favour more harmonious relations among citizens of different ethnic and national origins.

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