Social Class And Family On Screen: Do Prime-Time Television Series "Create" Images Of Family In Turkey?

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ABSTRACT

Many family issues and behaviors, such as dating, marriage, cohabitation, divorce, parenting, domestic violence, the division of household labor and other daily domestic activities are taken in account on television screens from different perspectives throughout diverse types and genres of media broadcastings. The presentation of these issues has changed in family lives across all social classes over the past few decades. This article aims to examine the role of prime time entertainment, particularly of television series in the representation of changing family structure, family norms and values according to different social classes on screen in Turkey. The methodology of this research is focus group study in which the participants are married young adults (According to UN age intervals, "young adults" are composed of individuals between the ages of 19-29) living in İstanbul. A total of 20 individuals were interviewed and the participants expressed their thoughts during the focus group study. This study intends to explore diverse family perceptions of the image of family and social class as well as television viewing habits.

Keywords: Family, social class, prime-time, television series

ÖZET

Medyada yer alan farklı türdeki programlar, aile yapısı ve yaşantısına dair, flört, evlilik, birlikte yaşama, boşanma, ebeveynlik, aile içi şiddet, aile içi işbölümü ve diğer günlük faaliyetleri, farklı perspektiflerle yayınlamaktadırlar. Geçtiğimiz onyıllarda, aile hayatına ilişkin bu konular, farklı sosyal sınıf ve katmanlardaki aile yapılarında değişim göstermeye başlamıştır. Bu makalenin amacı, Türkiye'de farklı toplumsal sınıflara göre değişen aile yapısı, değer ve normlarının, televizyon ekranlarında, özellikle prime-time dizilerinde nasıl temsil edildiğini incelemektir. Çalışmada, İstanbul'da yaşayan, evli, genç yetişkin (BM yaş aralığına gore, "genç yetişkinler" 19-29 yaş aralığında yer almaktadır) görüşmeciler ile gerçekleştirilen odak-grup yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışma ile ekranlardaki aile ve toplumsal sınıf temsilinin, yine aile üyelerince nasıl algılandığının yanı sıra, televizyon izleme alışkanlıklarına ilişkin özellikler ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aile, toplumsal sınıf, prime-time, televizyon dizileri

Introduction

As the television set has become the major source of information and entertainment, its massive presence has penetrated into our daily lives. Accordingly, the programs on television screen serve as a multi-faceted mirror which reflects images as familiar as friends or neighbors. Our relationship with television is like our relationship with daily newspapers, books or films. However, the television set is turned on casually and the audience is inevitably surrounded by divers programs and their explicit and implicit messages.

Likewise, our ideas about family as a social institution come mainly from what we have learned during our socialization process; from our own families, peer-groups, the main teachings at schools and people around us. However, we redefine this social institution over our life-course according to what we perceive in books, newspapers, magazines, films and television. That is why, how family is defined in media has important social consequences. Many of the criticism and concerns about television and family values have become more important as the way families are presented in media varies in several different ways. Therefore, this article aims to reveal the representation of family on television screens, especially on prime-time television series, as it is the unifying period of day where all members of family meet after daily works. The representation of family and its implications concerning daily life structure in accordance with social class is the main concern of this study. Similarly, the perception of this representation by the audience has to be taken in account thoroughly. In order to explore these dimensions, focus group study is preferred as the methodology of this research as it gives participants the opportunity to interact and express their thoughts and feelings about prime-time broadcasting, particularly television series. The participants were chosen among married young adults living in Istanbul as they are the demographic segmentation most presented in television series. Before shedding light to the images of family in Turkish media, it is essential to define the concept of family sociologically in order to comprehend its the social symbolism.

This study was motivated by a public concern regarding the influence of diverse types of family issues in television series during the prime-time entertainment in 2010.

The Social Symbolism of Family

Family, as a major institution, is one of the most controversial phenomena in our contemporary society. As social norms and values have been changing, there has been a disaccord about what family has become and what it represents for the members of a given society. One of the most common official definitions of family in sociology comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, which distinguishes between household and family. According to this

definition, a household composes of all persons or groups of persons who occupy a dwelling such as a house, apartment, single room, or other space intended to be living quarters. On the other hand, family composes of two or more persons who are related by blood, marriage or adoption and who live together as one household (Newman & Grauerholz, 2002:7). Likewise, it is crucial to distinguish the two important aspects; the private and public aspects of the family. The contribution of family to personal satisfaction and to public welfare provides an overview of these aspects. Public family indicates one adult or two adults who are related by marriage, partnership, or shared parenthood, which is/are taking care of dependents, and the dependents themselves. Dependents are defined as children, the weak elderly and the chronically ill. Public families are mostly about caretaking and dependency. They are easily identifiable because society has an interest in how well families manage the regulations within the family in order to ask how adequately our society will raise the next generation. However, family is not only a public service institution. It also provides individuals, intimacy, love and emotional support. From this perspective, the term private family refers to two or more individuals who maintain an intimate relationship that they expect will last indefinitely or, in the case of a parent and child, until the child reaches adulthood and who live in the same household and share their income and household labor. An appropriate definition of the private family must, therefore, encompass intimate relationships whether or not they include dependents (Cherlin, 1999:20-24).

On the other hand, the discipline of anthropology, unlike sociology, has primarily focused on kinship systems in pre-industrial societies while studying on the concept of family. The kinship systems that define relations of production and ownership constitute the nexus of economic relations in kin-based societies and gained widespread recognition. Nevertheless, early ethnographic accounts were of a predominantly descriptive nature, leading to the assumption of universality of the nuclear family (Murdock, 1949). Additionally, structural-functionalist family sociologists assume that a universal evolutionary path in the transition from the extended to the nuclear family emerged with industrialization and urbanization.

However, there is and has been confusion about the very definition of the family. First of all, no matter what form it takes, marriage has been considered as a necessity for the construction of the family in most of the societies because it serves as the legally sanctioned setting for reproduction. As it is mentioned above, family is often perceived as a kinship group. But in practice, family is rarely limited to formally recognized kin relations. Structural changes in societies and changes in contemporary lifestyles compel many people to seek satisfactions from diverse groups other than kin. People other than legal or biological

relatives, who are called fictive kin, such as roommates, provide the emotional and other needs for its members. Likewise, a close elderly friend may be referred as aunt or uncle even though he or she is not a sibling of either parent. People today are likely to use the word family to describe a group of individuals who have achieved a significant degree of emotional closeness and sharing, even if they are not related by blood, marriage or adoption. As a result we may conclude that people are recognized as family not because they have biological boundaries but because they "help each other out" (Newman & Grauerholz, 2002:12). From these basic sociological perspectives concerning diverse definitions of what family is and might be, it is essential to evaluate the domestic uses and functions of television in order to bring out the representation of family on television screens.

Family and Media: Domestic Uses of Television

In our contemporary era, modern society has given the family leisure time at home. The home has become the place where all family members meet after work or after school. This reunion takes place especially in the evenings during dinnertime usually accompanied by a quite, yet solid member of the house; television. For several decades, the family's use of this time has been dominated by prime time entertainment. That is why television channels, companies, producers and directors aim to address this particular target and broadcastings are shaped and created regarding diverse familial concepts, events and issues.

Starting from the fifties, network television became a contested zone without anyone knowing what effect it actually had on family life and on the image of self and other. The only given was that everybody but the networks themselves had no doubt that the effects were there. Meanwhile, "many people pride themselves on a contemptuous ignorance of television entertainment, accompanied by a sneaking fascination with its raw cultural power and a horror of its effects on public sensibility" (Gitlin, 2005:10). However, since television has become a living-room habit and as the reunion around the dinner table is accompanied by television, this ignorance started to become quite impossible. A glance by family members at the screen is almost inevitable, especially during prime time where all family members are usually together at home.

Since, television has such a power over the course of domestic life, society's view of the family, what it is and what it should be makes family a moving target for the media. The traditional conceptualization of family has been challenged and revised in recent years. In addition, other media instruments such as books, magazines or radio have lost ground relative to television as a source of information about the must-be structure of family over the past few decades. In any culture it is the telling of stories that forms the symbolic environment,

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which gives order and meaning to human actions; growing up within a particular system of storytelling slowly but surely cultivates an individual's perceptions and judgments about society. Concerning this statement, George Gerbner (1980) argues that television provides a concentrated system of storytelling that rivals and in modern societies supersedes religion in its power to shape people's social perceptions (p.80).

Television viewing has become an area of sociological study as a symbolic as well as a material process. However, the study of viewing can be perceived from many different perspectives. First of all, it does not, in fact, usually measure the television viewing as such. According to David Morley (1992), it usually focuses on the reliable indicators of viewing and takes into account whether the set is on or if there is a presence in the room. It also assumes that switching the television on is an index of wanting to view the specific program turned to, rather than, for instance, a reflex action signifying getting home. On the other hand, viewing behavior seems to be the result of an individual decision-making process, whereas much viewing is, in fact, done in groups, where power is unequally distributed and choices must be negotiated. In other words, family members are putting up with what someone else in the viewing group wants to watch, rather than leaving the room. Even in multi-set households, there is usually a main set, which is the focus of competing demand. Finally, it assumes that viewing decisions can meaningfully be treated as context-free thus ignoring the different significance given to the same viewing choice by contextual factors such as variations in access to both material and symbolic resources enabling alternative leisure choices to be made (Morley, 1992:176). As a result, television affects the family as a social group; and also affects the ways they spend their time and the nature of their interactions.

It is important to note that television effects on the family go beyond program contents and extends to impacts of the medium itself on patterns of family life. The table below, the Report of Turkish Ministry General Director Office of Family and Social Research (2006), (T.C. Başbakanlık Aile ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Genel Müdürlüğü, Aile Yapısı Araştırması Raporu, 2006) indicates the main thoughts and concerns about audiences' television viewing habits (p.127).

Table 1 presents the indicators about the impact of the presence, the usage and the function of television as well as its communicative dimension on families in Turkey. For example, 68.9% of the audiences declare clearly that television viewing is a domestic and a familial activity. In addition, individuals seem to be aware of the fact that television viewing has a negative impact on the relationship between family members. As prime-time is generally the main period of the day that is spent together in front of the television, in order to

comprehend this impact, it is essential to evaluate the representations within the content of prime-time broadcasting.

Table 1: Statements concerning Domestic Use of Television

Statement	Number	Percentage
Television steals from the time you can spend with your family or on your own	6882	27.9
Children should feel free to watch whatever they want	4182	17.00
Television affects negatively the intra-familial relationships	14976	60.8
We watch television together as a family	16981	68.9
People who have complaints about emissions	6576	26.7
Total	24647	100.0

Family Representation Reconsidered: Decision-Making and Media Output

First of all, whatever content it may have, television may be evaluated as an industry. That is why the sociology of television's organization takes up topics such as contextual imperatives, the nature and the evolution of the work routines, and the conditions of production in terms of technology and schedule (Dahlgren, 1995:26). Like other giant marketing corporations, the worldwide networks rely on the data that is deducted from program testing, the performance of precedents, social research on popular moods, and above all, once a show gets on the air, its performance as measured by the ratings (Gitlin, 2005:22). The networks cannot take for granted that their total audience would go on growing; if any show in a given genre gets into an uncertain view, the market is obliged to search for the network's next choice. The media in Turkey have been following more or less the same pattern. Hence, it is not surprising to see television series in which traditional values of families are being represented and emphasized.

The dimension of representation directs our attention to media output, which is concerned with what media portray and how topics are presented. Representation has to do with both the informational and symbolic aspects of media output. The dimension of representation in the points to basic questions as *what* should be selected for portrayal and *how* should it be presented. From a critical perspective there is much to be said about media representation. As Scannell (1991) reminds us, television's representation consists to a great extent of talk. This talk is public talk, usually taking place in a studio. It consists of people talking among themselves, but its communicative intentionality is such that it is aimed at the television audience beyond the studio (Dahlgren, 1995:15-16). From this point of view, it is important to grasp manners, words used as well as images of family members during prime

time in television series and soap operas. However, these images may neither be realistic nor representative because of the intervention of decision-makers such as the corporate holdings, producers and television executives.

This decision-making system of media broadcasting brings out the materialist critique of culture and the concepts of ideology and hegemony. The cultural dominance of civil society over the individual even in the absence of the threat of overt force by the state is called as hegemony as employed by Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony is an element of the superstructure, as it is in the traditional Marxist concept of ideology. But an ideology, while it has a tendency to obscurer conceal itself, can be articulated in fairly conscious terms, while hegemony so interpenetrates all dimensions of social and cultural practice that its operation is largely unconscious, definitive of what it is at any given time taken to be natural, and consequently quite resistant to any intellectual critical analysis. However, according to Gramsci, the nature of modern society is such that hegemony can never be absolute. New groups continually emerge whose interests are opposed to those of the hegemonic culture. As a result, there will inevitably be counter hegemonic movements (Surber, 1998:86-87). Likewise, Louis Althusser makes a distinction between a Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) Media is one of those ideological state apparatus. According to Althusser, ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence and achieves its effects in promoting ideologies. Indeed, its allusion to the real world is what makes ideology so difficult to critique much like stereotypes (Surber, 1998:90). Overall, all items shown on television screen are coded by those who hold the power in decision-making. This means that the plot, the scenario, the storytelling and the setting of prime-time television series as well as the way Turkish families are represented are constructed by the decision-makers which depends in fact on a certain ideology reflecting a certain point of view.

Television Series, Soap-Operas and Usage of Family

There are distinctive set of principles that sets soap operas from other genres and storytelling forms. Its episodic and ongoing presentation in serial format on television has an open-ended nature of the narrative, which promises the audience that the story is to be continued in the following episode. Modleski (1979) draw attention to the principals of this affective televisual genre; an important indicator of a soap opera is the ability to make the audience "tune in tomorrow", not in order to find the answers, but to see what further complications will defer the resolutions and introduce new questions. Soap operas invest exquisite pleasure in the central condition of a woman's life including the familial situation

struggling against dissolution. So the narrative, by placing ever more complex obstacles between desire and its fulfillment, makes anticipation of an end in itself (Modleski, 1979:183).

This format is also valid for prime-time television series. At the beginning daytime soaps were principally about encouraging and satisfying especially the television consumer housewives demands. Over the years, broadcasters have focused on what was considered the ideal demographics; young housewives were the main target of advertising. Advertisers assume that women buy the packaged goods whereas adult men are usually a difficult demographic group to reach, but sports programming is the easiest way to reach male viewers. Children, on the other hand, are special targets because they are natural consumers (Walker & Ferguson, 1998:125). Accordingly, women seem to be the main target of any kind of television series who may be capable of designing the world shown on screen in the family. Concerning prime-time broadcasting, although the family has always been connected to media research because of its central role with children, the family was not a primary concern with regard to its presence in the media until 1970s (Skill, 1994:38).

Even though soap operas appeal the day-time audience, the television series of prime-time have more or less the same characteristics of the habitual soap operas except their weekly appearance on screen. Moreover, it is possible to observe the imperatives of a melodrama; such as the good must be rewarded and the wicked punished; and the latent message of the soaps, everyone cannot be happy at the same time, no matter how deserving they are. Dennis Porter, who is interested in narrative structures and ideology, condemns soap for their failure to resolve problems because unlike traditionally end-oriented fiction and drama, soap operas offers process without progression, not a climax and a resolution, but mini-climaxes and provisional denouements that must never be presented in such a way as to eclipse the suspense experienced for associated plot lines (Modleski, 1979:190). The importance and utility of soap opera, as a style of storytelling and televisual production to both those who adore the format and those who despise it is such that we can now predict that the concept of the soap opera will endure even if soap operas as we know them cease to exist (Ford et al., 2011:7). In addition, Kottak (1990) who studied Brazilian telenovelas and American soaps regarding their impact on attitudes, fears, values, images and consumerism as an anthropologist, states that those who said they liked telenovelas tended to be female, younger, less-educated and of lower social class (p.25). This constitutes in fact the main tendency of perception towards the target and the aim of television series during prime-time entertainment.

An Overview of Family Issues on Screen

There exist several studies concerning the family relationship and family interaction on prime-time television. As Skill (1994) presents in his article, Fisher (1974) found out via his study of content analysis of marital and familial role behaviors that parental and spousal relationships tended to be conflict-free, and that emphasis was on affectionate and altruistic concern for one's spouse or children (p.38). Likewise, Long and Simon (1974) as mentioned in Skill (1994) explored patterns of interaction between men and women in a sample of prime-time television programs and revealed that men are more likely to be dominant than women. This study also underlined that across family contents in situation comedies, patterns of interaction between men and women are the most equal with regard to dominant behavior traits. In another study of prime-time programs conducted by Manes and Melynk (1974), it was found that women who work at careers outside the home were less likely to have successful marriages than those who are full-time homemakers (as mentioned in Skill 1994).

In addition, Signorielli's findings (1982) revealed that themes of home, family, marriage and romance were seen as the domain of females and that television seems to cultivate the impression that marriage is rather neutral and safe state of existence; women were more often portrayed as married and located in a home or family setting. Married women, however, were presented at least able to succeed at blending both career and family, a problem almost never encountered by males (as mentioned in Skill, 1994: 38-40). Overall, in the presentation of family life, the husband and wife relationship in the family was highly stereotyped where the husband is in the instrumental role and the wife in the expressive role.

In a study that explored the relationship between social class and happiness across TV families, Thomas and Callahan (1982) examined primetime programs over a 3-year period beginning in 1978. Results indicate that "for the families portrayed on television, money clearly does not buy happiness and that, in fact, relative poverty does (Thomas & Callahan, 1982:186). They added that, family sympathy, a measure of unity, and agreement among family members involved in a problem reveled that 88% of the middle-class families were rated good-to-high, whereas only 22% of the upper-class families exhibited good-to-high levels of sympathy. Again, Skill (1994) presents in his article that, Glennon and Butch's study (1982) focused primarily on the social class elements of television's families, finding a dichotomy of portrayals. For example, if the family was working class, the father and husband was generally seen as dumb or inept, whereas if the family portrayed were middle class, then the viewer would find rather competent father and husband in an idealized picture of family life (Skill, 1994:44).

Media Effects: Investigating Family Portrayals

As television contributes to viewers' conception of reality, it is important to grasp the main issues represented both directly and symbolically on prime-time television series. In order to explore the influence of family representation in television series in terms of media effects, Gerbner's Cultivation theory (1980) designates cultivation analysis as the investigation of viewer conceptions of social reality associated with the most current features of the world of television, and thus constitutes an important grounding for our focus-group study.

Given the premise that television's images cultivate the dominant tendencies of our culture's beliefs, ideologies, and world views, Gerbner (1980) states that heavy viewers are expected to be more likely to give the television answers to a series of informational and opinion questions than lighter viewers. Many differences between groups of viewers can be explained in terms of systematic processes called *mainstreaming* and *resonance*. Mainstreaming can be thought as a relative commonality of outlooks that television tends to cultivate whereas resonance is associated to special cases of particular salience to specific issues (Gerbner 1980:83). That is why the participants for our focus group study were chosen among heavy viewers who claimed to watch habitually prime-time television series in accordance with mainstreaming. Television's cultivation of conceptions as a process occurs and results in different patterns. So, an insight into television series' family representation may be achieved by paying attention to the perception during "family viewing" time among the audience. Therefore, the findings from our two focus group studies in which the participants were married young adults provides compelling evidence for television series' particular family types, norms and values.

Results: Lack of Middle Class Families on Screen?

The evaluation of our focus group study revolves mainly around important representation topics such as representation of social class, gender-relations, and traditional and modern values within families.

As an important grounding, the participants think that the programming executives decide the content and the representation of changing Turkish family. They even complain about the fact that the media is reconstructing social norms and values. So, the more time people spend watching television, the more they perceive the real world as being similar to that of television.

Given that title of family television, or whenever the word family comes up, there remains a strong tendency to think of the traditional, nuclear family of two adults and their dependent children living together with the father going out to work and the mother not working outside the home, but responsible for the home and the childcare (Morley, 1992:163). Despite the overall decline in this presumption, our participants admit the universality, stableness and the permanence of this model in mind when it comes to the family issues on screen.

These sociological concepts and the overview of family portrayal on screen are deepened during our focus group study and directed us to the representation of social class and family life on screen. However, family lives vary within different social strata. The worldwide middle-class ideal has been the two-parent family in which the husband works outside the home and the wife stays home and does the housework and childcare. According to a series of experiments conducted by Bales and Parsons (1955) concerning middle-class families, since the family was a small group in society, one may observe within a family an instrumental leadership and an expressive leadership. The claim was that the husband was the instrumental leader who provided the financial support for the family, and the stay-at-home wife was the expressive who provides emotional support to her husband and children. Their argumentation revolved around the breadwinner-homemaker family which was organized to fulfill the tasks that society assigned to it (Cherlin, 1999:32). This model is still visible on screen throughout the ways women and men interact, the attitudes toward childrearing, the collective habitual evening activities at home and in many other ways including upper-class families, working-class families/middle-class families and rural and urban structure of family life.

While discussing the family representation in prime-time television series, our participants stated that there is a huge gap between what is shown on these series and the real family lives in Turkey. There exist a stereotyping and generalization of families according to social classes. For example, a participant stated that "an upper-class family never drinks tea, peels oranges or eats seeds in front of television; such a scene is never shown on prime-time series". Such types of families may only be seen in series like "Geniş Aile" where all members have primarily economic and financial difficulties, get often into trouble but somehow are happy to live in a supportive family no matter what. Accordingly, the participants emphasized another "fairy-tale" series called "Gönülçelen" based essentially on class differences where the talented and rich musician falls in love with a gypsy girl. The audience also admitted that they are longing to see the happy ending.

All of our participants stated the lack of "middle-class lifestyle" in soap operas by drawing attention to the increasing number of television series where the family lives in a mansion, a villa, an expensive residence or in a *yalı* (mansion by the Bosphorus in İstanbul). They also feel that these types of series display directly the class struggle on screen. They expressed their discomfort about the increasing number of plots focusing on the tension between the servants -who work all day in the house, mostly living in the basement- and their employee who mostly consist of rich but inconsiderate family members. They also find the devotion of the elderly servant to the family exaggerated. "Aşk-ı Memnu" was one of the leading television series of this type, adopted from the novel with the same title by Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil dating back to 1899. In relation to "Aşk-ı Memnu", our participants state that the upper class lifestyle image represented with this series penetrated into real life deeply. They mention in particular how, the outfits and the accessories of the leading actress named Bihter were being sold out in shopping malls and bazaars targeting young and trendy women with signs making brand references to the television series.

The upper-class families and their lifestyles focusing on impossible love, hatred, betrayal and revenge seem quite irrelevant to the actual contemporary everyday life in Turkey. Among our participants, the audience of "Küçük Sırlar" emphasizes the attraction of glamorous mansions with servants, cars and outfits accompanied by unhappy and problematic family lives. In the same way, some of our participants who talk about another television series called "Aşk ve Ceza", draw attention to the leading characters who are members of a wealthy extended family and who respect their rural roots, kin relations and consanguinity. These characters care deeply about the rural structure of family and traditional values while living a tremendous urban life-style in luxury. So, the common thought is that these different examples constitute a deceptive, unreal and over-generalized representation of Turkish families from different social strata.

In addition, when "Yaprak Dökümü", one of the most influential and long-time running television series got on the air, it was taken very seriously with its potential to attract a wide range of audience because the scenario was again adopted from a well-known novel with the same name in Turkish Literature. This series was cited a dozen of times by our participants whose comments justify the interpretation of modern family perception among Turkish audience. They think that the story of this particular family, with a dominant father caring too much about traditional family values, a helpless and weak mother, and children in search of a life of high standards, capable of doing anything for it, reflects perfectly the lower-middle class portrait of a family in Turkey.

The early comparative study on family patterns in developing countries tended to attribute the increasing predominance of the nuclear family to the transition from a rural society to a modernizing-urban industrial one (Goode, 1963). In post-industrial societies where the family has lost its central role in production and where there are clearer lines of demarcation between paid labor for the market and unpaid domestic labor, the family is virtually the only institution. Concerning this subject, a study by Özbay (1985) underscores some important points; the first is that the attribute of being a housewife, being responsible for housework and the care of children and not in whether women work for wages outside home or not. In that sense women may be defined as working or non-working housewives so long as they remain primarily responsible for housework. In industrialized societies where larger numbers of women have joined the work-force, the tension between their continuing involvement in housework and child care and the requirements of a job have called for new forms of organization of these caring roles and for changes in the sexual division of labor within the family (Özbay, 1985: 43-77).

It is important to note that, in spite of the problems and this changing intra-familial portrayal, the changing family roles concerning gender-based division of labor occurring worldwide, the increasing divorce rates and problems with children who grow up in divorced families or cohabitation are never or very rarely the center of attention in prime-time television series. Unequal distribution of income is an important indicator of inequalities especially in middle-class families, which again is never the main concern of television series. Additionally, our participants state that despite the growing popularity of cohabitation especially among young couples, prime television series seem to support the social recognition of marriage. Then again, the requirement of marital status for parents seems to be an inevitable necessity. However, they claimed that in rare cases the traditional form of thoughts concerning unmarried couples, single-parent families are being abandoned as in the case of the leading actress in "Aşk ve Ceza", a single mother who tries a lot to raise her child, keep her love inside and be a strong woman at the same time. As a result, these perspectives occur as indicators of a changing society.

Conclusion

The media, prime-time entertainment, and television series in particular, do provide a diverse range of family images on television screen to an extent. These images prevail during "family viewing time", displaying and imposing certain structures, norms and values. For a long time, family has been considered as a sacred label that should be applied only to the most traditional type of family: married parents and their children. Nonetheless, our study suggests

that the concept of family is becoming significantly a more elastic term nowadays. It seems to be increasingly a matter of choice throughout all social classes. This redefinition of the concept varies in accordance with social class and is represented in prime-time television series accordingly.

Taken as a whole, the family is presented on television as a diverse and complex entity. Our data suggest that there has been and is an overgeneralization and a stereotyping of upper class, middle class, rural and urban families in prime-time television series. There is a negative correlation between wealth and happiness. The representation of upper-class families is associated with a lack of tranquility, peace and joy in the middle of a wealthy life style. On the other hand, middle-class and lower-middle class families cling on to each other and somehow overcome all obstacles in life together. As a result, it seems that on screen family happiness and family unity is higher among middle-class families and lower in upper-class families. In addition, the increasing number of families living in mansion with servants points overtly to the class struggle and is perceived as a deceptive representation of family types and lifestyles in television series.

One of the most interesting findings of this study is that the participants, even when they are aware of this exaggerated narration, seem to be content of these stereotyped representations, signaling a willingness or preference to see what rarely and really happens in everyday life. Divorced parents, single-parent families and having children out of wedlock as well as unequal distribution of household income and gender-role behaviors are consecutively the family issues that are considered to be most problematic, yet also the most neglected topics in television series.

Television, as the central and one of the most omnipresent mass medium in Turkey, plays a distinctive role dominating the symbolic environment of everyday life. This reminds us one more time the immense manipulative effect of the media, in reshaping the collective conscience of a society in a given period. What is represented in television series concerning family portrayal is being watched, evaluated and in time accepted and internalized by the audience.

In conclusion, this study shows that affirmative family portrayals dominate the screen during prime time and will likely to continue this way in accordance with the decision-making process of media executive.

The aim of this article is not to provide an inventory but to highlight some fundamental themes concerning family on television screen, from examining the findings and insights of different viewing habits and perception of families as well as its link to different

social classes. It is this author's content that future studies both on audience perception and media content can offer insight on the symbolic function of the on screen family in contemporary Turkey. Given the substantial social transformations on family structure in the last decades, analysis of portrayals of the family on screen will continue to be a dynamic domain and should be analyzed periodically.

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