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A TALE OF HEROES AND VILLAINS

**A Flemish Case Study of the Representation of
Journalism in Fiction**

MAXINE DE WULF HELSKENS
2020-2021

Supervisors: prof. dr. Martina Temmerman and prof. dr. Sarah Van Leuven
Faculty of Languages and Humanities
Field of Study Applied Linguistics

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Abstract

Depictions of journalists in fiction communicate what journalism is, should, and could be both for journalists and the public. In an era in which the credibility of journalists and trust in the media is diminishing worldwide and the journalistic profession is in transition these depictions become even more relevant. This research caters to gaps in research about the journalism genre, that is usually heavily oriented towards the United States of America, by uncovering how journalism is represented in fiction movies and series that Flemish journalists and the Flemish public consider important. A descriptive analysis of a database that was constructed based on a survey sent out to that audience, pointed out that both American fiction and foreign fiction play an important role in Flanders. But respondents perceived the representation of journalism in Flemish fiction to be less according to the free press myth than in foreign fiction. In addition, female and minority journalists less often appeared in more 'serious' journalism plots. The free press myth was also less often perceived in fiction with only female journalists. However, a difference occurred between respondents with different profiles as men, older respondents, and journalists more often perceived the free press myth in the titles they could recall in comparison to women, younger respondents, and non-journalists. As such, this research underlines both the similarities and differences between fiction from different countries and its impact on how journalism is perceived in Flanders.

Keywords

Film Studies, Journalism Genre, Popular Culture, Audience Research, Intersectionality

Filmstudie, Genre Journalistiek, Populaire Cultuur, Publieksonderzoek, Intersectionaliteit

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1. Introduction

"The founding fathers gave the free press the protection it must have to fulfil its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed, not the governors." Those were the words that resonated in the renowned movie *The Post* (2017). Such fictional portrayals of journalism illustrate how the democratic responsibility of journalists is stressed in popular culture (McNair, 2011a, 2014; Painter & Ferrucci, 2017, p. 8). Fiction movies and series about journalism constitute a genre or series of genres including musicals, thrillers, biopics, westerns, horror, sci-fi, and war films consisting of more than 4000 titles since the days of silent movies (Ness, 2020). Next to journalists, only professions such as policemen and detectives managed to amount to a comparable central place in the repertoire of filmmakers (Zynda, 1979; McNair, 2011a).

Depictions of journalists in fiction movies and series communicate what journalism is, should, and could be both for journalists and the public. First, they aid in discursively constructing journalistic roles that manifest themselves in assumptions and expectations about appropriate and legitimate ways of journalistic practice (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Second, these depictions do not only aid in constructing journalistic roles but also affect the public perception of journalism including the credibility and public trust of journalists (Saltzman, 2005; Painter, 2019). Last, fictional representations of journalism often reproduce gender and racial stereotypes in relation to journalism (Ehrlich, 1997; Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017). In an era in which the credibility of journalists and trust in the media is diminishing worldwide and the journalistic profession is under transition (Cook, Gronke, & Rattliff, 2000; Jones, 2004; McNair, 2011b; Müller, 2013; Nelson, 2019; Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020) these depictions seem to become even more relevant. Not only for journalism in the United States of America but also for other democratic countries with a strong journalistic tradition.

However, research on journalism in popular culture is heavily oriented towards the United States of America and does not take into account how the journalism genre is produced and received in other countries. Therefore, research into the depictions of journalists in other countries than the United States of America is needed (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). This

research paper proposes an analysis of how journalists are represented in fiction movies and series consumed in Flanders, Belgium due to its specific media and political system resulting in a unique journalistic culture (Raats, Evens, & Pauwels, 2015; Mertens & Standaert, 2017). In addition, because these depictions also reproduce gender and racial stereotypes, it adopts an intersectional perspective.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the fictional representations of journalists in movies and series that are considered important by Flemish journalists and the Flemish public. It wants to feed and inspire research aimed at understanding how these representations shape the perception of journalism in real-life. To answer the research question, a database was constructed to facilitate descriptive statistical analyses. To do so, a survey was sent out to Flemish journalists and the Flemish public to gather information about the fictional representations of journalism in movies and series that they consider important. By using this method, we were able to analyse cases that are relevant in Flanders and gather insight into how these movies, series, and their journalistic characters are constructed by the public.

This research wants to facilitate further qualitative exploration and reception research concerning the journalistic genre in non-American contexts. Before discussing the results of the statistical analyses, we situate our research vis-à-vis previous research into the journalistic genre in the literature review. The methodology section elaborates on how the survey was used to construct a database and how the statistical analyses of the database were performed. After presenting the findings of the analyses, this paper concludes with a discussion of the results.

2. The Journalism Genre: An Overview

This literature review provides an overview of relevant academic papers and discussions for this research. We start by situating popular culture concerning journalism in the field of cultural studies and relating it to the concept 'ideology'. Then we elaborate on the representation of journalism throughout history and the recurring semantics and syntax of the genre that has persisted. Third, we add an intersectional approach to studying representations of journalism by also taking into account research on the representation of female and ethnic and sexual minority journalists. As most research is oriented towards the United States of America, we conclude this literature review with an elaboration on the specific political and media system of Flanders, Belgium and an overview of the main takeaways.

2.1. Journalism in Popular Culture

Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) highlighted the importance of studying the portrayals of journalism in fiction movies and series because of three reasons. First, because of the importance of journalism in a democratic society. Second, because the ubiquity of portrayals of journalism in popular culture shape perception more than the actual press as most people will never set foot in a newsroom. And third, because popular culture is a powerful tool for thinking about what journalism is and should be (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Studying popular culture can be situated within the broad and interdisciplinary field of cultural studies. Renowned academics such as Stuart Hall and David Morley have contributed to this field drawing from a broad range of traditions including Marxism, Culturalism, (Post)Structuralism, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and many more (Barker, 2003). Providing an overview of what cultural studies is, goes beyond the scope of this research. However, an understanding of ideology, one of the most important concepts of the field, is needed. The next paragraphs will elaborate on this concept in relation to fiction movies and series, and more specifically to the journalism genre which is the subject of this research.

Popular culture is not neutral but ingrained with ideological assumptions. It both reflects and constructs those assumptions at the same time. Within Cultural Studies, ideology is considered a conceptual framework to give meaning to and interpret events and the world

around us. This framework appears to be natural and neutral and is implicitly disseminated through institutes such as education and media. Even though it appears neutral it is not but rather the conceptual framework of the current dominant elite. However, resistance is possible and consequently the dominant framework is in constant negotiation and can be subverted by competing frameworks (Hall, 1982). Fiction movies and series are purveyors of ideology and myth of which the latter refers to a storytelling technique that draws on archetypal figures to express prevailing beliefs, ideals, and values. On the one hand, they present a commonsensical worldview to represent shared values and core beliefs as such playing an ideological role in reiterating the existing distribution of knowledge. On the other hand, they do not necessarily preserve the social order but might also try to change it (Lule, 2001; Ehrlich, 2005, 2006; McNair, 2011b). Zynda (1979, p. 32) stated that 'as the press serves as a watchdog on government, so Hollywood, likewise on behalf of the public and with a like commercial basis, keeps an eye on the press.' As such, popular culture can be considered 'the fifth estate' watching over the fourth estate which is the press (McNair, 2011b, p. 138).

Depictions of journalists in fiction movies and series communicate what journalism is, should, and could be and contribute to public opinion about journalists in real-life (Ehrlich, 1997; Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2011a, 2011b; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Peters, 2015; Painter, 2019). First, they aid in discursively constructing journalistic roles that manifest themselves in assumptions and expectations about appropriate and legitimate ways of journalistic practice (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). As a consequence, journalists work according to norms, rules, and procedures which are understood to be natural (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Second, these depictions do not only aid in constructing journalistic roles but also affect the public perception of journalism including the credibility and public trust of journalists (Saltzman, 2005; Painter, 2019). Research into the journalism genre has been mainly focused on Hollywood. It stated that Hollywood contributes to shaping the public's image of the press and only a few other institutions received such consistent attention from filmmakers (Zynda, 1979; McNair, 2011a). According to Schatz (1981, p. 261), the culture industry, and more specifically film, consists of 'formal strategies for renegotiating and reinforcing American ideology.' Movies are 'the central myth-making medium' where societies articulate, explore, interrogate, and critique journalistic values. Hollywood engages with the role of journalism in

a democratic society in which journalists are 'defenders of society's right to know, civic virtue and the underdog' (Vaughn & Evensen, 1991, p. 829; Ehrlich, 2006; McNair, 2011b).

However, not only fiction movies are purveyors of myth, but fiction series similarly engage in (re)producing the same ideologies about journalism (Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005; Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015; Peters, 2015; 2017). Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) stated that little has been written about television's portrayal of the press despite the fact that television reaches a bigger audience than movies. In addition, the emergence of streaming services such as Netflix have brought into existence a new kind of TV viewing. Entire seasons are downloaded and consumed in multiple times on the viewer's chosen platform anytime and anywhere (McNair, 2014). McNair (2014) stated that the emergence of streaming services brought about the high-quality production of series including major film stars taking leading roles which closed the status gap between TV and cinema that used to exist. Series often stretch multiple seasons with twelve or more episodes resulting in character developments over hours and hours of plot in which audiences are immersed. The best series are 'works of art in their depth, complexity and moral ambiguity' similar to movies (McNair, 2014, p. 243). Therefore, Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) advocated also including fiction series in research into the journalism genre.

American studies into the journalism genre stated that fiction movies and series engage in disseminating 'the free press myth'. This 'free press myth' refers to an ideological framework that consists of 'the popular belief that a privately owned, market-driven press is necessary for the functioning of American democracy and the survival of a free people' (Ehrlich, 2005, p. 103). This relates to the press's ideological and historically grown societal function in the United States of America which Hallin and Mancini (2004) categorise within the North Atlantic or Liberal model. With growing literacy and the early development of liberal institutions and capitalism in the eighteenth century, the press became a crucial political institution. By pursuing an institutional function, the press was designed to 'act on behalf of the people and report on and give voice to those in positions of political, corporate, economic and social power' (Schultz, 1998, p. 1). Consistent with the social responsibility model of journalism that emerged in the early 20th century, this institution embodied the democratic ideal to hold those with power accountable and consequently articulated some core values such as the freedom

of the press, independence, and objectivity to secure this critical watchdog function (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956; Ehrlich, 1997; Schultz, 1998; Ehrlich, 2005, 2006).

Movies and series also reiterate this vision of the press through the 'free press myth'. However, this model has been critiqued by scholars stating that the 'free press myth' obscures the fact that journalism serves the political and economic agendas of media owners and advertisers (Ehrlich, 2005). Due to developments such as commercialisation and the rise of infotainment, the press has become 'a hybrid political institution constrained by competing imperatives' (Schultz, 1998, p. 4). In addition, journalists have undercut their own image of upstanding professionals and truth seekers through fabrications of news and other news blunders (Ehrlich, 2005). That the American press does not always reflect this theoretical ideal is also one of the core narratives that fiction movies and series about journalism engage with. On the one hand, they legitimate the press as an institution by constantly reiterating stories of powerful and heroic news media, similarly to how the press legitimates other institutions. On the other hand, they also highlight conflicting cultural perceptions of journalism which are inherent to the journalism profession (Tuchman, 1978; Ehrlich, 1997). These conflicting values include among other things subjectivity versus objectivity and public interest versus corporate interest (Ehrlich, 1997, 2005) on which we will elaborate more in the next sections. Ehrlich (1997, p. 277) stated that 'movies mediate between these conflicting values. They speak to a culture that distrusts the press, yet still expects it to protect and promote the public interest.' In addition, fiction movies and series do not only reproduce traditional ideologies about journalism but also stereotypical gender and racial relationships in relation to journalism on which we will elaborate more in-depth later (Ehrlich, 1997; Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017). Journalism movies and series point out this tension between how journalists want to be perceived and how they are perceived by the outside world, as such representing a constant negotiation (Zelizer, 2004; Ehrlich, 2006). Consequently, journalists have complained about their portrayals in movies for as long as the genre exists and an ambivalent relationship between journalists and moviemakers has always been present (Ehrlich, 1997).

The news industry has thus often critiqued Hollywood for negatively portraying journalists. However, contrary to what one might think, not only positive representations of the press reiterate the 'free press myth'. Negative portrayals in movies and other popular culture

artifacts can also reinforce the professional authority of journalists. Cases of journalists who undermine the 'free press myth' are often portrayed as individual cases who face repercussions for their actions as such representing the system itself as beyond reproach (Ehrlich, 2005). A case study of the movie *Shattered Glass*, which focuses on a reporter fabricating stories and being exposed by his editor, pointed out that even though myth can be a force for social change by calling attention to contradictions in real-life, more often it smoothes over these contradictions, thus engaging in paradigm repair (Lule, 2001; Ehrlich, 2005, 2006, 2019). The movie portrays journalistic failings from which lessons are drawn as such maintaining the status quo of the press and engaging with paradigm repair. This fits the 'free press myth' in which individual journalists might go astray but the system remains true to its principles and corrects itself (Ehrlich, 2005, 2006). Other elements that might have contributed to the journalist going astray such as the news media's culture are downplayed which deflects attention from journalism's broader problems. It ignores the idea that 'commercial journalism has abdicated its responsibilities to democratic self-government in the pursuit of greater revenues and higher returns for investors' (McChesney & Schott, 2004, p. 4 as cited in Ehrlich, 2005, p. 113). However, this is precisely what myths are for, they do not just reflect reality but tell us what we once were and what we might still become (Schudson, 1992). *Shattered Glass* thus stressed the importance and the press's ability and responsibility to report the truth. The story is an exemplary model aimed at altering or shaping the social order towards the 'free press myth' (Lule, 2001; Ehrlich, 2005, 2006).

Even though myths predominantly reiterate existing ideologies, as illustrated by the previous example, they do have the potential to be a force for social change. By imagining what the press could be, these movies do not only reiterate the 'free press myth' by engaging in paradigm repair. They also point towards the myths' failings and respond to concerns of their respective era such as the increase of commercialisation, sensationalism, technological change, and exploitation (Ehrlich, 2006). Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) highlighted the potential of fiction to not only reiterate traditional ideologies but also think about what journalism is and should be often in relation to societal changes. The press is an important institution for democratic societies, however, since the second decade of the 21st century, the news media have been continuously criticized due to ethics scandals, charges of bias, corporate cutbacks, and especially a steady decline in public trust (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). As previously stated,

this trend is not solely limited to the United States of America. Moreover, the Reuters institute (2020) reported that there is a worldwide decline in trust in the news media. The image of Western news media as 'journalism in crisis' has become dominant due to increased commercialisation and technological change. Journalism is considered less stable in terms of both structure and professional identity which has unpredictable consequences for the institution of the press and the participatory democracy. Nelson (2019) referred to this as a transition in media regimes. Popular culture plays an important role in imagining this future. Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) stated that the journalist can be considered a 'symbolic prop' for addressing such social concerns including the impact of new technologies, the changing roles of women and of ethnic and sexual minorities, and the uses and abuses of institutional power, not only for journalism but also for other professions.

Studying the portrayals of journalism in popular culture and the ideologies and myths they reiterate today has thus become even more important. Painter (2019) stated that the majority of movies and series about journalism originate in the U.S. and promote American values. This might shape journalistic norms and the public perception of those norms worldwide. However, other countries also produce stories about journalism and the press as such providing non-American depictions of the profession, but these representations have not been extensively studied yet. Therefore, especially research into the depictions of journalists in other countries than the United States of America is needed (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). In addition, little is known about how these representations shape the profession and the public perceptions of that profession. Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) wondered if a 'Mean Journalist' syndrome might exist in which popular culture cultivates the impression that journalists are 'sleazier' than they are in real life. Or if depictions of journalists make the profession seem more intriguing to draw prospective young journalists to the field. Therefore, it is crucial to both take into account popular culture and the reception of that popular culture by the public and by journalists. As previously illustrated, journalism in real-life is marked by societal changes and popular culture evolves accordingly but certain depictions of journalism persist (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Whether journalism movies and series engage or critique the 'free press myth', they draw on similar narratives, semantics, and syntax (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). This refers to the genre's recurring semantics which alludes to the building blocks (e.g. the setting, iconography, acting...) and syntax that stresses how those building blocks are arranged

(Altman, 1984). By means of these elements the genre continuously mediates between opposing cultural values and as such represents broader cultural tensions (Ehrlich, 1997; Langman, 2009; McNair, 2011b; Peters, 2015). The next section will elaborate on the recurring characters, themes, semantics and syntax that characterise the genre in relation to the genre's development throughout history.

2.2. The Journalism Genre throughout History

Depictions of journalism in popular culture have evolved parallel to historical changes. This refers to the concept 'media regimes' which is used to divide history into periods with their own distinct conceptualizations of media, citizenship, and democracy (Nelson, 2019). As previously stated, the Western media is depicted as 'journalism in crisis' which corresponds with a transition in media regimes that currently characterizes the press (Nelson, 2019). However, certain recurring characteristics in the journalism genre still persist (Zynda, 1979; Ehrlich, 1997). These characteristics include the negotiation between positive and negative portrayals, a heroes-villains dichotomy, and the representation of conflicting cultural values on which we will elaborate in the following paragraphs. However, we will commence by providing an overview of existing research into the American journalism genre to form a basis for this study.

Many of the first American movies about journalism were adaptations of plays, novels, and musicals. Often these were written by former journalists who either fell in love with journalism or were disillusioned by the profession. As such, since the beginning of the genre, the profession has been represented as glorious, critiqued, or both at the same time (Ehrlich, 1997). As these popular representations are often written by onetime journalists, studying these representations offers the opportunity to study how journalists perceive journalism themselves while at the same time critiquing these self-representations which are in real-life often ingrained with contradicting cultural values (Zelizer, 2004; Ehrlich, 2006). One of the first journalism movies was *The Front Page* (1931) that set the tone for the whole genre. Journalists were represented as young reporters with big dreams who had a hard time to adapt to how the press is organized. They either proved themselves by uncovering an important story or were represented as stuck in the business which slowly turned them into cynical journalists who disregard all ethical standards (Ehrlich, 1997).

Journalism movies produced in the United States of America have been extensively studied throughout the years due to the popularity of the genre. In Ehrlich's (1997) overview of different studies, there is a distinction between the pre-war era, the 1950s, and the 1970s. Zynda (1979) made a similar distinction between movies produced before and after the 1950s. In the pre-war era, journalism movies were mostly (romantic or screwball) comedies, dramas, or melodramas with a rather negative depiction of the press. Journalists were portrayed as 'newsmongers' (Ehrlich, 2006) defined by their cunning, brashness, and passion for the story (Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005). Excessive drinking was often portrayed as part of the character to survive their job (Ehrlich, 1997; Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005). As previously stated, these characters served in paradigm repair of the free press myth by either being punished for their actions or by still aiding the public good through their unconventional ways (Ehrlich, 2006). Still, the representations were predominantly negative. Consequently, starting in the 1930s, The American Society of Newspaper Editors started lobbying for better portrayals of journalism with apparent effect (Ehrlich, 1997). Especially after the second world war, reporters were regularly portrayed as the guardians of democracy (Vaughn & Evensen, 1991; Ehrlich, 1997). This trend did not last very long as in the 1950s journalism movies got darker and can be considered prime examples of film noir in which the 'bad' journalist reappeared (Ehrlich, 1997, 2006). Even movies with more positive representations of journalists simultaneously harboured negative depictions (Ehrlich, 1997). Journalists were represented as bitter cynics with troubled romantic relationships and even if they managed to succeed in uncovering an important story, they often faced other negative repercussions such as losing their love interest or their job (Ehrlich, 1997). In the 1950s, the focus also shifted from the journalist as an individual to the journalist as a member of a news organization which reflects the increasing importance of the organisation and bureaucracy after world war two in the U.S. (Zynda, 1979). In the 1970s, there was a slight shift in the representations of journalism due to the changing political climate. The Vietnam war and the Watergate Scandal aided the popularity of conspiracy films focusing on institutions such as businesses and the government involved in cover-up operations. In these movies, journalists were often represented as heroes by exposing these operations such as in *All the President's Men* (1976), a movie about the journalists who uncovered the Watergate Scandal (Ehrlich, 1997). However, even in these movies, negative depictions occurred as the narratives also represented journalists as 'going

too far' in trying to uncover these operations as such causing negative consequences for themselves and their loved ones (Ehrlich, 1997). In addition, these movies warned what could happen if the central tenets of professional journalism such as truth and reason become subsumed by entertainment and commercial logic (Ehrlich, 2006). Zynda (1979, p. 23) also confirmed these various mixed representations:

'All the President's Men portrays socially conscious reporters successfully practicing journalistic ideals concerning truth and the responsibilities of the press in a democracy. The subsequent *Network* and *Between the Lines*, however, demonstrate how fragile these values are, and how quickly they fade when the press becomes simply another organization for generating profits.'

This dualism and presence of cultural tensions are thus inherent to genre films and even though depictions evolve according to societal changes, this dichotomy between positive and negative representations has persisted in contemporary movies. Even with the increasing importance of technology for journalism in the 21st century which changed the day-to-day functioning of the profession, the 'free press myth' which is articulated through positive and negative portrayals of journalism and the hero-villain dichotomy still stands (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Ehrlich's (1997) overview of research into the representation of journalism in movies pointed out that the relationship between movies and the press is fundamentally ambivalent and reflects the ambivalent relationship between the press and the broader public. Some authors such as Good (1998) considered movies as aiming to represent the press negatively, whereas other authors reported both positive and negative representations. On the other side of the spectrum, some authors including Vaugh and Evensen (1991) and Zynda (1979) even claimed that Hollywood was not critical enough of the press as they considered the movie industry a fifth estate watching over the fourth estate (Ehrlich, 1997; McNair, 2011b). McNair (2011b) stated that since 1997 there are predominantly positive representations in contrast to the tendency in journalistic writing to accuse journalism movies of negative stereotyping.

As previously stated, these movies are considered to both reinforce and criticise cultural values (Schatz, 1981). This represents an inherent contradiction of genre films consisting of

dualistic semantics and syntax (Ehrlich, 1997). The characters in these movies experience problems with conflicting values which are generally resolved by the end of the movie (Schatz, 1981; Kaminsky, 1985; Altman, 1987; Ehrlich, 1997). Even though some scholars claim that journalism movies do not constitute a genre as the syntax has not remained stable enough but rather that journalists have been represented in a variety of other genres (Altman, 1978 as stated in Ehrlich, 1997; McNair, 2010), Ehrlich (1997, 2005) does believe that the same syntax as in the first journalism movies such as *The Front Page* (1931) has persisted and can still be recognized. Discussing whether popular culture and more specifically movies about journalism constitute a genre goes beyond the scope of this research. However, we do recognise that popular culture about journalism is characterised by certain recurring characteristics. Therefore, we do refer to it as a genre to gather all fictional depictions of journalists. Painter (2019) highlighted two types of depictions. The first type is the depictions of journalists as primary and instrumental characters and plots that focus on journalism. The second is depictions of journalists as featured or sometimes central characters and plots that do not focus on journalism or only feature it as an incidental element.

Similar to other genres, these movies constitute their own stock characters and relationships (Ehrlich, 1997, 2005). Ehrlich (1997) distinguished four elements that recur in journalism movies: a reporter, an editor, a story or scoop, and a love interest. In the most classic form, this reporter clashes with an editor about a big story while at the same time struggling romantically with a love interest or partner. By means of this struggle over news and romance, the plot attempts to resolve a broader cultural conflict in which it both critiques as reinforces certain cultural values (Ehrlich, 1997). Zynda (1979) also stated that there is a certain stability in the syntax of journalism movies and mentioned another four elements that are represented in such movies: the character of the reporter, the nature of the press organization, the social role of the press, and how the press is structured and commanded. 'The films show how the press is structured and commanded, how it relates to the larger society that the audience experiences, what the journalists are like, how they interact, and how they achieve success in the press' (Zynda, 1979, p. 17). Even though the depictions of journalism change over time according to the societal context, these elements persist. In addition, two themes keep returning which are 'glamour' and 'critique of the press'. Life in the press is 'represented as glamorous and exciting, full of economic, professional and romantic possibilities' (Zynda,

1979, p. 23), however, a critique of the press is also always present: 'The persistent combination of glamor and criticism signifies an ambivalence toward the press, an ambivalence that crystallizes in the characterization of successful reporters' (Zynda, 1979, p. 25).

Several authors have tried to categorize the different roles which journalists embody in popular culture of which Saltzman (2005) provided an overview. First, the author mentions the anonymous reporters referring to an intrusive pack of harassing journalists that invade the privacy of others. Second, the columnists and critics of which the first are ready to sacrifice anyone and anything for their career and the second are cold-blooded and use their power to get what they want. Third, the cub reporters referring to beginning journalists who still have to learn everything. Then follow the editors who scream out orders, fire reporters and decide what stories to run. If they are not the star of the movie, they seldomly leave their desk. The next category is that of the flawed male journalists referring to all-male media reporters. They combine both good and bad traits and try to get the story at all costs often using unethical techniques as long as it is in the favour of the public good. Next are the investigative reporters who are represented as the real journalism heroes. They risk everything to publish a story that will help the public. They are followed by memorable newsroom families that stress how journalists have to give up their personal life for their job and consequently consider their colleagues as their extended family. Another category is that of the photojournalists and newsreel shooters who are among the most courageous but also corrupt journalists willing to do everything to get an exclusive picture. Next are the publishers and media owners who use the media for their own ends in pursuit of economic and political power destroying the media's role in a free society. Then the real-life journalists who are thrown into movies to give the stories more authenticity. They can be found in almost every movie either as background or as a commentator for what happens to the protagonists of the story even when it has nothing to do with journalism. The sob sisters represent the next category referring to the female journalists who have trouble combining the masculine traits of journalism with the feminine traits that are expected from them. Next are the sports journalists who are most often used for the realistic portrayal of sports celebrities in biographies but are also portrayed as journalists willing to do everything for an exclusive. And last are the war and foreign

correspondents who similar to the investigative reporters are willing to risk everything for a story that will help the public.

In addition to this categorization, the journalism genre, similar to other genre films, consists of an outlaw hero and an official hero: the wisecracking outlaw journalist who is opposed to authority and/or the official journalist who is a conscientious professional (Ehrlich, 2005). Often these characters are both present and represent opposing values in relation to each other. The official hero puts the common good before their own notions of right and wrong whereas the outlaw hero ridicules that authority and morality. The outlaw hero often has to pay for these transgressions. However, the latter is not always represented as going outside the bounds but can also be represented as heroic by taking matters into their own hands to right wrongs. As such, the official hero represents the American belief in collective action and the objective legal process whereas outlaws represent an individual and ad hoc approach that is needed in crises and extraordinary situations. This refers to American culture's traditional dichotomy of individual and community which can never be fully reconciled (Ray, 1985 as mentioned in Ehrlich, 2005, 2006) and helps maintain a status quo by discouraging a systemic and collective approach to societal problems (Saltzman, 2002; Ehrlich, 2006). This is manifested in a representation of journalists as either heroes or villains, a dichotomy that is already present since before the existence of film including in literature and theatre (Ehrlich, 1997 2006, 2015; McNair, 2011b). This heroes-villains' dichotomy can be linked to the categorization of Saltzman (2005). The heroes are often the flawed male reporters, newshounds, and sob sisters who tried to get the story at all cost. They could get away with anything as long as it was in favour of the public good. This 'I'll-do-anything-for-the-story-mentality' has seldom changed throughout history (Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005). War and foreign correspondents and investigative reporters are considered the ultimate heroes. The villains are more concerned with the commercial such as the editors and the media owners. The worst depictions of journalists are called 'scandal mongers' portraying the news media as corrupt including power-hungry gossip columnists (Saltzman, 2003).

Specific for the journalism genre, the representations are thus more complex than solely representing a mythical image of the fourth estate (Zynda, 1979; Ehrlich, 1997). The above-mentioned heroes-villains dichotomy is related to the positive and negative representations

of the press (Zynda, 1979; Ehrlich, 1997, 2005; McNair, 2011b; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Consequently, positive representations can be defined as representations of journalism as a glorious and exciting profession in which journalists are heroes who defend democracy by chasing stories and living extraordinary lives all in the favour of the people's right to know. Heroes are often journalists that struggle to maintain their ethical and fourth estate responsibilities against commercial and other pressures focusing on a normative dilemma. These are heroic depictions set against pragmatic realities that constrain the ideal of the free press (McNair, 2014). In addition, heroes can be outlaw heroes too. Journalists can get away with anything including lying, cheating, bribing, betraying, and violating ethical codes as long as they do it in favour of the public good (Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005). Negative representations are defined as depictions of journalism as a ruthless business, aimed at making profit by exploiting innocent people. In these representations, journalists are villains who consider their own career as more important than the public good. The public is also often represented as only desiring sensational news thus steering the press away from their watchdog function (Zynda, 1979). These movies can either be considered to not take the liberal democratic ideal of the press seriously (McNair, 2014) or to represent the importance of the ideal by showing the repercussions for journalists who do not live up to it (Lule, 2001; Ehrlich, 2005, 2006; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). By representing this dualism, Hollywood deals with competing cultural values that journalists in real-life experience (Ehrlich, 1997). Ehrlich (1997) stated that this distinction crystallises into opposing values such as objectivity versus subjectivity, cynicism versus idealism, life-work balance, and the public interest versus the corporate and private interest on which we elaborate in the next paragraph.

The first set of competing values, objectivity versus subjectivity, refers to the pursuit of journalists for objective news. Objectivity is still seen as the ideal of news production, however, it is also increasingly acknowledged that objectivity is a myth in itself. Movies deal with this struggle by representing what happens to journalists who go too far by pursuing complete objectivity or journalists who disregard this ideal completely, often resulting in obsession or death. The second set of competing values, cynicism versus idealism, stresses the representation of cynical journalists in movies. These journalists are often punished which communicates a message of what is expected from journalists in real-life. The third set, life-work balance, especially focuses on the representation of female journalists. In general, the

profession is represented as not easy to combine with homework or relationships. Not only female journalists but also male journalists pay the price for engaging with this profession. However, women experience disproportionately more problems as they are expected to be the homemaking figure. These representations seem progressive as women are shown with a 'man's job', but in reality, they reiterate existing stereotypes by representing women as incapable to fulfil their housework or having to give up their job to marry. This will be further elaborated on in the following sections. The last set of competing values concerns the public, private, and corporate interests. Movies dramatically represent the commercial pressure on news organizations and its consequences which often include suicide, murder, and fraud. In addition, journalists are either represented as untrustworthy as they abuse innocent people for their own gain or as heroes as they save innocent and repressed people by uncovering a story. Whether they are represented as heroes or villains, journalists are often depicted as powerful with their actions bringing about impactful consequences for the broader public (Ehrlich, 1997).

With the emergence of new technologies, another set can be added. Ferrucci and Painter (2017) identified an additional set of opposing cultural values, print versus digital journalists, that emerged as a consequence of technological change. Earlier we mentioned how the press is increasingly criticised since the second decade of the 21st century concerning ethics scandals, charges of bias, corporate cutbacks, and especially a steady decline in public trust (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). This is linked to social concerns such as the impact of new technologies (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Since the 1990s, the news industry made the transition to multimedia journalism characterized by the use of new technologies and convergence (Ferrucci & Painter, 2017). Ferrucci and Painter (2017) conducted a textual analysis of the series *House of Cards* to analyse how the distinction between print and digital journalism is portrayed in popular culture. They concluded that the series depicts digital journalists differently than their print counterparts. First, it portrays print journalists as hesitant to use new technologies whereas digital journalists, who are often younger, embrace these technologies but employ them negatively often resulting in journalistic failing. Second, print journalists abide by ethical norms often lecturing digital journalists who break these norms. Last, the goals of both groups of journalists differ. Print journalists are still portrayed according to the 'free press myth', whereas digital journalists are less concerned with the

principles central to this myth. Their primary goal is to use technology to attain personal attention rather than to inform the public. This illustrates that even though technology can be used positively to inform the public, digital journalists are not portrayed as doing so. Therefore, when studying contemporary popular culture, it is important to take into account current societal changes and how they influence the depictions of journalists in relation to the 'free press myth'. This illustrates that even in contemporary popular culture the basic characteristics of the genre are still present, but how these manifest changes according to societal changes. This also includes the changing roles of women and ethnic and sexual minorities in relation to journalism (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Ehrlich, 2019) on which we will elaborate in the next section.

2.3. Journalism and Intersectionality

Representations of journalism in popular culture do not only reproduce traditional ideologies that manifest themselves in the 'free press myth' but also reproduce gender and racial stereotypes in relation to journalism (Ehrlich, 1997; Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017). The journalist can be considered a 'symbolic prop' for addressing social concerns such as the changing roles of women and of ethnic and sexual minorities, not only for journalism but also for other professions (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Representations of female journalists are not new and similar to other journalism portrayals, representations about female journalists engage with conflicting cultural values. Ehrlich (1997) highlighted the work-life set of conflicting cultural values and Good (1998) mentioned similar gender-related sets including career versus marriage, workplace versus home, co-workers versus family, freedom of the night versus middle-class domesticity, the individual versus the collective, feminism versus femininity, and agency versus victimization (as mentioned in Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017). Saltzman (2003) summarizes this in a dichotomy that stresses the ongoing dilemma female journalists face: incorporating masculine traits that characterise journalism as being aggressive, self-reliant, curious, tough, ambitious, cynical, cocky, and unsympathetic while still embodying the female features which society desires such as being compassionate, caring, loving, maternal, and sympathetic.

Painter and Ferrucci (2012, 2015, 2017) conducted several studies into the portrayal of female journalists in popular culture. They stressed that feminism in its simplest form can be understood as a creation of society to provide women with equal opportunities as men. They categorized depictions of feminism in contemporary popular culture within the tradition of post-feminism or third-wave feminism which combines feminist ideas with postmodern concepts. The authors stated that women on television are systemically underrepresented and are usually reduced to traditional feminine roles. The journalism genre seems to break this traditional mold by representing women as journalists but still tends to situate women within overarching patriarchal schemes (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017). This was also stated by Ehrlich (1997), Good (1998), and Saltzman (2003). The journalism genre serves as the perfect battleground of the sexes: 'the underrated girl reporter could prove she was as capable as the male, and the boy reporter could gloat that no girl could possibly keep pace with him. The sob sister became a popular newspaper heroine' (Saltzman, 2003, p. 2).

The label 'sob sister' was brought to life in the early 20th century to reinforce the stereotype of female journalists being emotional and soft which was used by editors to appeal to readers' sympathies. However, since the first decades of the 20th century, there was also an increase in representations of female journalists as independent and hard-boiled willing to do the same things as her male counterparts to get a story. As such, the dichotomy came into existence in which women had to balance the masculine traits which are required for working in journalism with the feminine traits that society expects a woman to embody (Saltzman, 2003). The genre continuously balanced empowering and stereotypical portrayals of women. This was a change in comparison to other genres in which women were typically the love object or dramatic catalyst (Saltzman, 2003). In the journalism genre, women could have a job and were represented as independent without necessarily endangering their femininity. And even though the sob sister did have to prove herself to her male counterparts, often screwed up and at some point needed the help of a man, more often she was represented as hardworking and independent outreporting every other male journalist (Saltzman, 2003).

Nevertheless, at the end of the plot, sob sisters, no matter how strong, were eventually expected to succumb to their desire for their love for a man, marriage, and children (Ehrlich, 1997; Good, 1998; Saltzman, 2003). In addition, women were portrayed as using beauty and

sex as weapons to further their ambitions (Saltzman, 2003). As such, female journalists were rarely presented as fully developed human beings but rather as 'Super Bitch' or 'Super Whore' (Ghiglione, 1990 as cited in Saltzman, 2003 and Painter & Ferrucci, 2017). And if female journalists were represented as 'too strong and independent', they were often portrayed as reluctant to admit they were lesbian women, their sexual preference figuring strongly in the plot (Saltzman, 2003). This dichotomy has persisted throughout history and the sob sister can still be recognized in 21st-century images (Saltzman, 2003). This means women can only be considered successful when they adopt male characteristics or if they use their femininity, and more specifically their beauty and sex, to get to the top: 'For every positive image of a successful female journalist in film, TV, novels and short stories, there are a dozen stereotypical clichés – the male reporter saving the inept female reporter, the ravishing female doing whatever it takes to get the story, the tough editor or publisher who is miserable because she has given up what she wants most – the love of a good man and children' (Saltzman, 2003, p. 5).

Painter and Ferrucci's (2012, 2015, 2017) analyses of the series *Sports Night*, *The Newsroom*, and *House of Cards* confirmed that these representations persist in contemporary popular culture. They concluded that even though female journalists might be represented in leading roles and management functions, a situation which is hard to find in an actual newsroom according to the authors, several recurring themes depicted these characters in a sexist manner. First, they were represented as acting unprofessionally both in behaviour and dress. Second, they displayed what the authors called 'overtly feminine characteristics'. Third, they placed their personal lives before their work and let personal difficulties affect their professionalism. Fourth, even though they exerted a management position, they were deferential to men for ethical decisions. Fifth, they were depicted as bad at their job, lacking knowledge compared to the male characters. And last, the analysis of *House of Cards* indicated that women are often portrayed as disregarding ethical standards. As such, female journalists are represented at the centre of all journalistic errors. Even though women are shown in positions of power, they are still incapable to function without the protection and support of men. In addition, the authors even suggested that these portrayals could be one of the reasons why fewer women than men seek a reporting job even though over 60% of the journalism and mass communication graduates is a woman (Painter & Ferrucci, 2015).

In contrast to the previous authors, McNair (2011b, 2014) communicated a more positive vision of the representation of female journalists. He stated that even though female journalists have always been represented, their number and context of appearance has increased and changed significantly since 2008. They have always been represented as sassy, intelligent, and courageous but their representations today have changed according to an 'evolving sex-political environment and culture' (McNair, 2011b, p. 142). They embody a new kind of feminism which is an expression of positive changes that have affected the lives of real women. They re-evaluate femininity in what used to be considered 'women's issues in journalism'. Movies and series such as *The devil wears Prada* and *Sex and the city* contain debates about these women's issues such as the worthiness of gossip columns or fashion spreads which are often critical but no longer presented as laughable journalism (McNair, 2011b). As such, movies and series about women in journalism 'reflect a professional culture and working environment where sexism is, if not dead, in sharp decline' (McNair, 2014, p. 243). Zynda (1979) also stated that women in journalism are portrayed equal to men and often even as their betters. In addition, not only women are increasingly represented in the journalism genre, but also minority groups (Ehrlich, 2019). The next paragraph will elaborate on the representation of ethnic and sexual minorities in relation to journalism.

Whereas a great amount of American research into the representation of male and female journalists exists, research on the representations of ethnic and sexual minorities in the journalism genre is very rare. Nevertheless, Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) stated that the journalism genre addresses social concerns such as the changing roles of ethnic and sexual minorities. Problems of ethnic minorities and LGBTQ journalists have also been depicted in popular culture about journalism (Ehrlich, 2019). The portrayals of journalists as heroes and villains celebrate differences while at the same time pointing to unmanageable rifts rooted in race, gender, and sexuality (Ehrlich, 2019). However, as previously stated, there is little research into these representations. Therefore, we will shortly elaborate on the representation of ethnic and sexual minorities in relation to popular culture in general.

When it comes to representations in popular culture, ethnic and sexual minorities are often underrepresented or depicted stereotypically. Since the 1990s representations have become more mixed and are more comparable to other groups. However, in some dimensions,

representations of ethnic and sexual minorities still differ from those of white and heterosexual men and women. Concerning ethnic minorities, black characters are more likely to be less respected and to be more provocatively and unprofessionally dressed (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2017). Latino characters are only represented in a restricted set of roles including criminals, exotic lovers/sex objects, servants/blue-collar workers, and unintelligent objects of ridicule (Greenberg & Baptista-Fernandez, 1980; Tukachinsky et al., 2017). In addition, African American women are mostly objectified as sexual commodities instead of romantic characters and feminine beauty is portrayed as related to light skin, straight hair, thinness, youthfulness, and middle-class status (Brooks & Hébert, 2006).

Concerning sexual minorities, gay and lesbian characters are experiencing a greater amount of acceptance within mainstream television shows, whereas before the 1990s they remained practically hidden (Gauntlett, 2008). Although there is an increase in LGBTQ representations in popular culture, it often remains problematic (Davis, 2008). LGBTQ people have consistently been stereotyped as comic relief, villains and/or criminals, mentally and/or physically ill, and victims of violence (McInroy & Craig, 2017). These stereotypes are still prevalent and continue to contribute to homophobia and heterosexism. In addition, representations of homosexual men outnumber women. There is also a lack of diverse representations including transgender and non-binary genders, diverse ages, races, and socio-economic statuses (McInroy & Craig, 2017). In most cases, LGBTQ characters are portrayed as struggling with their identity in which gender and sexual orientation is overemphasized and seen as something that needs to be dealt with (McInroy & Craig, 2017). In addition, even when LGBTQ+ representations are present, heteronormative ideals are still reiterated. This refers to cisgender heterosexuality being constructed as natural and good representing acceptable and unacceptable embodiments of gender and sexuality. This manifests in denying LGBTQ+ characters active sexuality, presenting sexual and gender diversity as a problem for cisgender leads, or presenting LGBTQ+ characters with traditional heterosexual norms such as marriage and procreation (Vanlee, Dhaenens, & Van Bauwel, 2018). Intersectional representations of characters that combine different identity categories such as African American bisexual transgender characters also remain rare. As such, traditional ideologies about ethnic and sexual minorities are still reiterated even though popular culture can play a role in subverting or deconstructing these discourses (Vanlee et al.,

2018). Whether the journalism genre similarly engages in reiterating these ideologies has yet to be studied.

The previous sections elaborated on the role that popular culture plays in disseminating myths and ideologies and how it does so by focusing on how the genre's recurring semantics and syntax were manifested throughout history. In addition, we also elaborated on the depiction of female journalists in the genre and the representations of ethnic and sexual minorities in popular culture in general. However, these studies were predominantly oriented towards the United States of America. This research attempts to contribute to the knowledge about the journalism genre by also taking into account non-American contexts, in this case, Flanders, Belgium. Therefore, the next section will elaborate on the specific political and media system of Flanders and how it both relates and differs from the American model.

2.4. Journalism in Flanders, Belgium

Flanders has its own unique production sector and media system as a consequence of its complex political structure and different language communities. According to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparative research of media systems, Flanders can be situated within the democratic-corporatist model. Therefore, it differs from the liberal model of the United States of America. The structure of the political and media system of the country and region is rooted in their historical context. There are some similarities such as the early development of liberal institutions and the high journalistic professionalism resulting in Flemish journalists perceiving their journalistic role similar to what is communicated by the American 'free press myth'. They prioritize providing reliable and objective information to the public and operating as a critical watchdog (Van Leuven et al., 2019). But they differ significantly concerning their political system which also influences their media system.

Flanders is part of a strong social welfare state which considers media companies (public and to a lesser extent commercial) to be social institutions for which the state is (partially) responsible. As such, there is a fairly high amount of state intervention constituting a strong public broadcaster. However, this state intervention co-exists with freedom of the press and

self-regulation constituting a paradox. This contrasts with the United States of America characterised by little state intervention resulting in a weak public broadcaster. Even so, most West-European countries including Flanders, Belgium have experienced an evolution towards a more liberal media landscape since the 1980s due to trends including the cultural imperialism of the U.S., technological changes, globalization, and commercialization (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Evens & Raats, 2016). Still, Hallin and Mancini (2004) nuanced this evolution by stating that due to political and media differences between countries it is unlikely that all countries will ever function in the same manner. Even though their model has been critiqued and expanded by other scholars, it remains an important conceptualization for comparative research into media systems that takes into account the historical and political context of countries.

In the previous section, we have mainly elaborated on Flanders as Belgium is divided into a Flemish and French-speaking community. This is also reflected in the organization of the news landscape resulting in significant differences between the different language communities in Belgium. Flanders predominantly corresponds to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) democratic-corporatist model whereas the French-speaking community also portrays characteristics of their polarized pluralist model. This is accompanied by differences in journalistic culture concerning the profile and profession of journalists and their perception of ethics, new trends in journalism, and their journalistic role (Van Leuven et al., 2019). In addition, this results in different public perceptions of journalism along the language border including trust in the news media which is slightly lower in Wallonia than in Flanders (Mertens & Standaert, 2017; Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020).

In contrast to other (multilingual) federal countries both the commercial media companies and public broadcasters of the Flemish and French-speaking community operate entirely autonomous lacking an overarching federal institute. This reflects Belgium's political organisation. In addition, the public broadcasters in Belgium have the commission of reinforcing a cultural identity associated with the different language communities whereas the public broadcasters in other federal countries are expected to reinforce national cohesion (Sinardet, De Swert, & Dandoy, 2004). Therefore, there is no such thing as a 'Belgian media system' as there are no national news media.

This division is also present in the film industry which is divided amongst Belgium's language borders constituting small markets for the dissemination of popular culture resulting in diseconomies of scale problems (Raats et al., 2015). Whereas Wallonia is highly dependent on its neighbouring country 'France' for audio-visual productions, Flanders is characterized 'by immense popularity of domestic content and a relatively strong production sector' despite its small market (Raats et al., 2015 p. 1). This can be explained by the cultural and selective state program in Flanders which supports approximately 80% of domestic film production to provide an alternative for foreign (i.e., Hollywood) popular culture (Willems, 2016). As such, not only domestic content is popular in Flanders, but also foreign productions are frequently consumed by the Flemish population. This is especially due to globalization and the increasing success of streaming services such as Netflix which has a penetration of 40% in the Flemish population (Imec, 2019). Therefore, this research stresses the importance of taking into account both domestic and foreign journalism movies and series.

Last, concerning an intersectional perspective, female journalists in Flanders are still confronted with a deep-rooted horizontal and vertical gender segregation manifesting in traditional obstacles such as work-life balance and stereotypical gender assumptions (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2015). Only 28% of Flemish journalists are women, a number that decreases with ageing. 42,7% of female journalists reports having experienced discrimination of which 32% based on their gender. When it comes to minorities in journalism, only 4.2% of Flemish journalists does not have a Belgian ethnicity. In addition, 11% of Flemish minority journalists report having experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity and another 2.4% based on their sexual orientation (Van Leuven et al., 2019). Digital technology has also brought about an increase in (online) harassment which disproportionately affects women and ethnic and sexual minorities (De Vuyst & Gober, 2019).

Consequently, this research will take an intersectional perspective to study the portrayal of journalism for both foreign and domestic productions consumed in Flanders. Little is known about the fictional representation of gender and ethnic and sexual minorities in Flemish journalism movies and series. However, we do know that, in general, women and ethnic minorities are represented proportionally less according to their real-life presence in Flemish

fiction programming. Flemish fiction movies and series abide by certain gender-specific themes for both men and women as such reinforcing gender stereotypes especially in relation to profession (Jacobs & Hooghe, 2014). Concerning ethnic minorities, representations are often linked to frames such as 'trouble' and 'religion', however, for the most part, their representations are absent from fiction programming (Jacobs & Hooghe, 2014). Concerning sexual minorities, almost 40% of all Flemish fiction series from 2001 to 2016 portrayed LGBTQ+ characters. It should be noted that these representations concerned predominantly white, middle class, and gender-conforming gay men adhering to traditional identities which confirms heteronormative representations. However, violence against and the killing of LGBTQ+ characters was not found in these Flemish fiction series setting it apart from the treatment of sexual and gender diversity in fiction in the U.S. (Vanlee et al., 2018).

2.5. Conclusion

Journalism movies and series are an important myth-making medium for disseminating the 'free press myth' that started to emerge at the beginning of the 20th century. In addition, popular culture does not only reiterate this myth but also articulates, explores, interrogates, and critiques journalistic values (Lule, 2001; Ehrlich, 2005, 2006; McNair, 2011b). Since the beginning of cinema, there has been an ongoing conflict in the depiction of journalists as either heroes or villains representing ongoing opposing cultural values that are present in real-life (Zynda, 1979; Ehrlich, 1997; Zelizer, 2004; Ehrlich, 2005; Saltzman, 2005; Ehrlich, 2006; McNair, 2011b; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). In addition, these representations do not only occur in fiction movies but also in fiction series about journalism which stresses the need to also include series in research into the journalism genre (Ehrlich, 1997; Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2011a, 2011b; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Peters, 2015; Ferrucci & Painter, 2017; Painter, 2019). These representations contribute to the conception of the professional role of journalists and public opinion about journalism (Saltzman, 2005; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Painter, 2019). Moreover, they might contribute to diversity in the profession concerning gender and ethnic and sexual minorities (Saltzman, 2003; Painter & Ferrucci, 2012; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Painter & Ferrucci, 2015, 2017). Nevertheless, research on journalism in popular culture that also takes into account the representation of female journalists and ethnic and sexual minorities is heavily oriented towards the United States of America and does not focus on how the journalism genre is produced and received in other countries and regions

(Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). As such, this paper tries to contribute to the field by conducting such research in Flanders, Belgium due to the region's specific political and media system.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research questions and Research Method

Research on journalism in popular culture that also takes into account the representation of female journalists and ethnic and sexual minorities is heavily oriented towards the United States of America and does not focus on how the journalism genre is received in other countries and regions (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Therefore, this research proposes an analysis of the journalism genre in Flanders, Belgium due to the region's specific political and media system. To study how the journalism genre shapes the perception of journalism in Flanders, an understanding of what the journalism genre in Flanders looks like is needed. Therefore, this research aims to formulate an answer to the research question 'How is journalism represented in fiction movies and series that are considered important by Flemish journalists and the Flemish public?' We focus on both Flemish journalists and the Flemish public as these representations contribute to both the construction of journalistic roles and the public perception of journalism in real life (Ehrlich, 1997; Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2011a, 2011b; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Peters, 2015; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Painter, 2019). We expect that journalists will also engage differently with representations of journalism compared to the broader Flemish public as the second group has little to no experience with journalistic practice in real life and is thus dependent on these representations (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). In addition, we consider fiction movies and series of both Flemish as foreign origin. The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to compose a database of the fictional representations of journalists in movies and series that are part of the collective memory of Flemish journalists and the Flemish public and second, to conduct a descriptive analysis of that database to provide insights into how said cases are received by Flemish journalists and the Flemish public. As such, we unite the field of journalism studies and film and media studies and aim to facilitate further qualitative exploration and reception research concerning the journalistic genre in non-American contexts and more specifically Flanders, Belgium.

In order to answer the main research question, the statistical analysis of the database attempted to answer the following sub-questions concerning the interplay between production context (cf. year of release, nationality of producers, country of production, type

and genre), representation of journalism, information on the plot, and demographic information of the respondents (cf. Vanlee et al., 2018):

- Does the information on the plot differ according to the production context? (First level and second level)
- Is the representation of journalism perceived differently by the Flemish public and journalists depending on the information on the plot and the production context? (Second level)
- How does the data differ among respondents with different demographic characteristics including profession, sex, age and (non-)minority identity? (Second level)

The levels refer to the level of analysis. An analysis on the first level concerns the unique titles in the database whereas the second level refers to the respondents. We will further elaborate on these levels in the next paragraphs.

3.2. Specifics of the Database

The primary aim of this study is to provide a database containing fiction movies and series that are considered important by the Flemish public and Flemish journalists to facilitate quantitative analysis. As there is no current standardised measurement system to observe the popularity of both movies and series of both Flemish and international origin, we opted to use a survey as this method facilitated uncovering the journalism fiction movies and series that are considered important in Flanders. In this research, 'important' refers to both positive and negative representations of journalism that Flemish audiences and journalists could recall indicating that the cases belong to a collective Flemish memory. Because existing American research takes movies and to a lesser extent series as a starting point for analysing the representation of journalism, we also decided to focus on movies and series to be able to compare our findings to existing research. We especially stress the importance of taking into account series too as they portray comparable characteristics as movies concerning the representation of journalism and are of equal and perhaps even greater importance in studying how the representations of journalists shape the perception of journalism (McNair, 2014; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). In addition, we focus on fiction movies and series as fiction is shown to be of great importance in imagining what journalism is, should, and could be

(Ehrlich, 1997; Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2011a, 2011b; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; Peters, 2015; Painter, 2019).

We used spatial and temporal demarcations concerning the cases included in the database. For the spatial demarcation, we focused on audiences and journalists in Flanders, Belgium due to the region's specific political and media system and lack of research concerning the journalism genre. In addition, our familiarity with the Flemish audience and language facilitates and enriches an analysis in this region. However, this does not imply that we did only take into account Flemish productions. As previously stated, both Flemish and foreign productions are highly consumed in Flanders and both might aid in shaping the perception of journalism in real life. The added value of taking into account foreign productions, even though American productions have already been extensively studied, is that we can gain insights into how these international productions are perceived and interpreted by a non-American audience (which may be different than by an American audience due to different ideas and expectations about what journalism is and should be). We were especially interested in how the perceptions of the representations differ or resemble between the two groups. In addition, foreign productions in this sense embody more than solely American productions and allow for studying other (European) productions that might also influence Flanders. The interplay between both Flemish and foreign productions and the myths they disseminate is an interesting topic of study concerning the conceptualization of journalism in Flanders. For the temporal demarcation, we focused on films and series released from January 1st, 2000 until February 20th, 2021. The respondents of the survey were explicitly asked to only provide cases released in that time period. We used this demarcation to be able to relate the results of the analyses to recent changes and tendencies in journalism which are mentioned in the literature review.

3.3. Specifics of the Survey

To construct the database and facilitate statistical analyses, a survey was sent out to Flemish journalists and the Flemish public to gather information about the fictional representations of journalism in movies and series that they consider important. By using this method, we were able to analyse (both foreign and Flemish) fiction movies and series that are relevant in

Flanders and gain insight into how these cases are perceived by Flemish journalists and the Flemish public.

3.3.1. Respondents

The survey was pretested on 10 respondents including a think-out-loud procedure and a feedback moment to ensure the validity of the survey. We used convenience sampling through social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter) and the websites of the universities VUB and UGent. We collaborated with the journalism syndicates 'Vlaamse Vereniging van Journalisten' (VVJ) and 'Vlaamse Journalisten Vereniging (VJV)' to disseminate the call for participation among journalists and we mailed the survey to specific newsrooms including those of VRT NWS and Het Nieuwsblad to recruit respondents. The respondents had to be at least 18 years old to abide by guidelines concerning informed consent. The initial response rate was $N = 647$ of which 127 respondents completed the survey. We decided to also include the respondents who filled out the answers for at least one title in the survey which brought the total number of respondents to $N = 154$. However, we could not record any demographic information about these respondents who are therefore excluded from the analyses concerning this information. After data cleaning, the number of valid responses was $N = 150$. Of 123 of those respondents, the demographic information was available. 26 respondents (21.1%) indicated to be (former) journalists. The majority of respondents are women (61.8%), however, specifically for the (former) journalists, sex is more equally distributed among the respondents. 12 respondents (46.2%) of that category identify as a woman and 14 (53.8%) identify as a man. Only two respondents – who both belong to the category of other profession - did not specify their sex (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents (rounded one decimal place).

Characteristics		(Former) Journalist (N = 26)		Other Profession (N = 97)		Total (N = 123)	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex	Men	14	53.8	31	32.0	45	36.6
	Women	12	46.2	64	66.0	76	61.8
	X	0	0.0	2	2.0	2	1.6
Age	18 - 30	13	50.0	60	61.9	73	59.4
	31 - 40	7	26.9	9	9.3	16	13.0
	41 - 50	2	7.7	12	12.4	14	11.4
	51 - 60	2	7.7	8	8.2	10	8.1
	60 +	2	7.7	8	8.2	10	8.1
Minority	Not a Minority	23	88.5	84	86.6	107	87.0
	Sexual Minority	2	7.7	10	10.3	12	9.7
	Ethnic Minority	1	3.8	3	3.1	4	3.3

In both categories, 50% or more of the respondents is between 18 and 30 years old whereas other age categories are less frequently represented. Only 30 respondents (24.4%) are between 31 and 50 years old and 20 (16.2%) are older than 51. Concerning having a minority identity 107 respondents (87.0%) do not consider themselves as an ethnic or sexual minority. This was similar for both (former) journalists as respondents with a different profession. Only 12 respondents (9.7%) indicated to belong to a sexual minority whereas only 4 (3.3%) indicated the same for an ethnic minority group. No other minority groups were listed.

It should be noted that as we used convenience sampling, the respondents cannot be considered as representing society. However, this should not necessarily be a problem as the main purpose of this study is to build a database with cases that are considered important. Convenience sampling made it possible to reach respondents with extensive knowledge about journalism movies and series including journalists. This can be considered an asset to this research as it made it possible to distinguish cases relevant to specific groups that would otherwise not have been included.

3.3.2. Questionnaire

The survey was conducted through Qualtrics and asked respondents to list fiction movies and series about journalism from 2000 until now that they considered important. First, they were

asked how many international fiction movies and series with journalists they could recall. Second, they were asked if they could also recall Flemish fiction movies and series with journalists. As respondents considered the latter more difficult, they were given the option to answer 'no'. As such, respondents provided at least 1 international movie or series and at most 5 international and 5 Flemish movies or series. Respondents could also choose the option 'more than 5 cases' to indicate their knowledge on the topic but were not able to list more than 5 cases per category. We split the questions according to the origin of the movie or series to encourage respondents to also think about and list less known Flemish cases, a category that would otherwise have been forgotten. Respondents with extensive knowledge about journalism in popular culture could list many cases whereas others only had to list one to avoid the risk of non-completion of the survey. Especially (former) journalists opted to list multiple titles for both international as Flemish titles. Respondents with a different profession opted more frequently to only list one title and in the case of the Flemish titles chose to not list a title more often than (former) journalists (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Number of titles respondents listed (rounded one decimal place).

Characteristics		(Former) Journalist (N = 26)		Other Profession (N = 97)		Total (N = 123)	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of International Titles	1	6	23.1	41	42.3	47	38.2
	2	6	23.1	19	19.5	25	20.3
	3	3	11.5	13	13.4	16	13.0
	4	4	15.4	9	9.3	13	10.6
	5	1	3.8	2	2.1	3	2.4
	More than 5	6	23.1	13	13.4	19	15.5
Number of Flemish Titles	0*	16	61.5	74	76.3	90	73.2
	1	2	7.7	18	18.6	20	16.3
	2	3	11.6	4	4.1	7	5.7
	3	5	19.2	0	0.0	5	4.0
	4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	5	0	0.0	1	1.0	1	0.8
	More than 5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

*0 is not listed for the number of international cases as this was not an option in the survey

For every case they could recall, they were asked to answer the same questions. These questions were inspired by the research of Vanlee et al. (2018) that analysed the

representation of LGBTQ+ characters in Flemish series. To do so they also constructed a database to facilitate statistical analyses.

The questions gathered information that can be divided into 3 subcategories that relate to the research questions on the second level: The first category gathered information on the plot of the cases. This included the description of the plot, the country where the narrative is set, and how the respondents perceived the representation of journalism (this consisted of a bipolar matrix with 4 scale points asking to indicate what applied most to the case e.g., powerful - powerless, ethical - unethical, trustworthy – untrustworthy). The second category gathered information on the characters. This included the number of journalists, their sex, their role in the movie/series, and whether they belonged to a minority group. The third category gathered demographic information about the respondents including their profession, sex, age, and whether they belong to a minority group. Last, the survey gave respondents the possibility in an open question to add specifics about the cases that they considered important and to add other cases that came to mind. A specific overview of the survey questions can be consulted in the attachments (8.1).

3.4. Construction of the Database

Based on the survey, we established the database in three steps. But before we started this process, we cleaned the data. We deleted the recorded responses of which the survey was not fully completed taking into account the exceptions mentioned above ($N = 497$). Then we checked the fully completed recorded responses and deleted the responses of respondents that did not fill out the survey correctly (cf. answering the open questions with meaningless entries) ($N = 4$) after which we moved on to the construction of the database.

First, we listed all the cases delivered by respondents by manually checking and coding all cases. In total, there were 396 titles of which 343 foreign titles and 53 Flemish titles. To construct the database, we created a new document that we organized on two levels. The first level is the level of the title referring to the unique cases without the duplicates whereas the second level is the level of the respondents that listed the duplicates underneath each unique case. We added a column that kept track of how many times a specific case was listed

as this also provided insight into the importance of the case for Flanders. Not considering the duplicates, the database consists of 139 unique cases of which 114 foreign titles and 25 Flemish titles. The two levels allowed us to analyse the data on both an objective (verified) as a subjective level. The verified data concerns the cross-referencing of data as we will discuss in the next paragraph whereas the subjective data refers to the data provided by respondents. As such, analyses on the second level do not include 'correct' data about the cases in the database but what respondents remember about these cases.

Second, we cross-referenced the answers of the respondents to fill out the verified information on the first level for each title. In this project, the process of cross-referencing entailed comparing the listed data per title and checking whether this information was confirmed by other respondents that listed the same title. We used this process for specific data including whether the title is a film or series, a description of the plot, where the plot is set, how many journalists are present in the plot, the role and sex of the journalists and whether they belonged to a minority group. We checked the accuracy of this data by conducting our own search actions and completed the database concerning the verified data such as year of release, country of production, and director(s). For these search actions, we cross-referenced the information of Wikipedia and IMDB (an online database for movies and series). By cross-referencing the answers of the respondents (only for titles that were listed multiple times) and checking the data with our own search actions, we made sure we constructed an accurate database on the first level to conduct the descriptive quantitative analysis. However, in some cases, respondents provided contradictory information about the same title. Similar to the information about titles that were only listed by one respondent, we then relied on the secondary information provided by IMDB and Wikipedia. We also worked the other way around: if there was no secondary information available, we relied on the information provided by respondents. When both the respondents and our online search actions could not provide certainty about a title, we opted to remove the titles from the database to ensure an accurate statistical analysis. This was the case for 2 titles which brought the total number of titles in the database to 137.

After cross-referencing the data, we checked the database for titles that did not fit in the demarcations. The database consisted of several titles that were non-fiction or released

before 2000. However, some of these titles were listed multiple times by respondents indicating that they are part of the collective memory and therefore are still relevant today. We opted to use a benchmark to decide which titles to delete which was the number of times the title was listed. If such a title was listed by at least two respondents, it remained in the database. We deleted 4 documentaries and 8 cases released before 2000. In addition, there was one title that we also removed as it consisted of a character that the respondent wrongly interpreted as a journalist. This brings the total number of titles in the database to 124.

Third, we wanted to provide more in-depth insight into how respondents subjectively constructed the titles included in the database on the second level. To do so, we coded the answers to the survey questions that looked into how respondents perceived the titles they listed. We established three different categories based on the total score of the bipolar matrix with four scale points, 6 being the lowest score and 24 the highest. The bipolar scale consisted of 6 options: journalism is represented as powerful(1)/powerless(4), necessary(1)/not necessary(4), exciting(1)/boring(4), ethical(1)/unethical(4), reliable(1)/unreliable(4), commercial first(1)/public first(4). We recoded the last option into public first(1)/commercial first(4). We used benchmarks to create the categories. A score between 6 and 12 indicated that the respondents perceived the characteristics central to the free press myth to be strongly present in the case. A score between 13 and 18 indicated they perceived these characteristics to be moderately present and a score between 19 and 24 indicated that these were weakly present. As we cannot cross-reference these data, this information cannot be analysed on the first level.

Last, we added the demographic information of the respondents on the second level of the database. As we cannot cross-reference these data, this information can also not be analysed on the first level. The database can be consulted separately. These steps enabled the construction of a database on which the statistical analysis could be performed. The statistical program SPSS was used to support that analysis. Most of the information in the database was already coded into values except the information on the production context and the plot. We opted to group these categories to be able to include the variables in the analysis. We grouped the year of release into 3 categories which are cases released before 2000, between 2001 and 2010 and between 2011 and 2021. The information about the producers was grouped into

categories according to their nationality which includes non-American producers, American producers, and a collaboration between non-American and American producers. The countries of both the production as the plot are grouped into 5 categories that are Europe (not including Belgium), Belgium (more specifically Flanders), United States (or a co-production with the United States), United Kingdom (or a co-production with the United Kingdom), and other international countries. For the genre, we relied on the first genre provided by IMDB and for the grouping of the plot, we used open coding of the responses entered in the open text fields in the survey to create groups. We analysed all entries in the open text fields and established 11 different categories. 'Promotion' is the first category and includes titles that tell a story about journalists who are focused on their job and are challenged to work hard and compete with their co-workers for a promotion. They often have trouble with balancing their work with their private life and might have a love interest that makes keeping that balance more challenging. The second category is 'Investigative' and focuses on journalists who attempt to uncover a mystery (e.g. a murder, a scandal). They might go undercover, work with the police or even put their lives in danger to get the facts and expose them. 'War Correspondent' is the third category and concerns war correspondents who travel to another country to cover the war or of whom their past work as a war correspondent plays a crucial role in the story. The fourth category is 'Scoop Journalism' and features journalists who are desperate to get a scoop and will do anything including harassing people to get it. This often includes sensational news and gossip. The journalist can be represented as an individual or as part of a 'mob'. The fifth category is 'Background' and concerns cases in which journalism is not the primary focus. It can be one of the characters' jobs on which the story does not predominantly focus or it can be a journalist or group of journalists that are represented to move the story along. 'Corruption' is the sixth category and features journalists who are corrupt and can be bought to twist the facts and spread fake news (or keep something silent). They are portrayed as unethical and untrustworthy. The seventh category is 'Activism' and focuses on either journalists who want to fight the power and actively use the media for their own purposes or stories about wrongdoings in journalism such as sexual harassment. The last 4 categories are combinations of these categories. The above-mentioned research questions guided the statistical analysis of which the results will be discussed in the next section.

4. Results

The database consists of 124 titles of both international and Flemish origin. As discussed in the previous section, the research questions guided the analysis of that database. We used SPSS to generate frequency tables and cross tables on both the first and second levels of the database. The most important tables are included in the analysis¹. In the next sections, we first elaborate on the general tendencies of the database. We then continue to discuss the analysis of the plot and characters, the representational practices, and the demographic information of the respondents. We end with a discussion and conclusion of the results.

4.1. General Tendencies of the Database

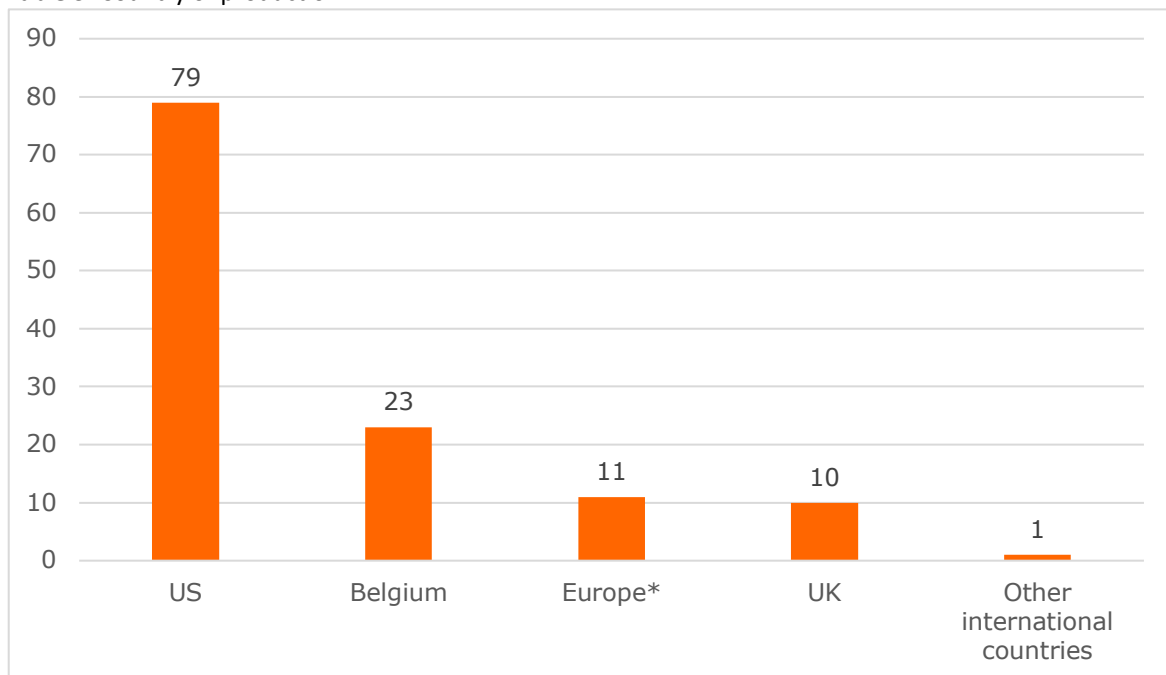
This section will look into the information of the production context of the 124 titles included in the database to form the foundation for the analysis. The majority of those titles are series (70 titles or 56.5%) and to lesser extent movies (54 titles or 43.5%). Of the titles that originate from a country other than the United States, most are series (38 titles or 84.4%) whereas of the titles that originate from the US, most are movies (47 titles or 59.5%). This confirms the importance of also taking into account series especially when analysing non-American titles. These titles are in most cases listed by only one (65 times or 52.4%) or two (21 times or 16.9%) respondents but in rare cases, up to 33 respondents listed the same title (e.g., movie *Spotlight*). All titles that were listed 9 or more times originate from the United States. This indicates that specific movies or series have received a certain popular currency in Flanders that other titles cannot easily compete with.

With regard to the year of release, 89 titles (71.8%) were released after 2011, 27 titles (21.8%) date between 2001 and 2010 and 8 titles (6.5%) were released before 2000. The latter are the titles that did not fit the demarcations but were listed by multiple respondents and therefore kept in the database.

¹ Due to the limited number of titles, we choose to only include the absolute values for clarity of interpretation. If percentages are listed, these are rounded one decimal place and therefore do not always add up to 100%.

Concerning the country of production and the nationality of the producers, 79 titles (63.7%) originate from or are a co-production with the United States. Belgium² is also well represented with 23 titles (18.5%) in the database, most likely because we specifically asked respondents to list Flemish cases. No titles from the French-speaking part of Belgium were listed. The other titles originate from other countries such as 11 (8.9%) of European origin, 10 (8.1%) from or a co-production with the United Kingdom and 1 (0.8%) from another international country (Table 3).

Table 3. Country of production.



*Europe does not include Belgium

Of the 124 titles, 54 (43.5%) have been produced by an American director and 9 (7.3%) through a collaboration between directors of both American and non-American nationality. It is remarkable that 61 (49.2%) of the directors has a non-American nationality as more than 60% of the titles originates from the United States.

The genres that can be most often encountered are drama (35 titles or 28.2%), comedy (30 titles or 24.2%), crime (23 titles or 18.5%) and biography (17 titles or 13.7%). To a lesser extent

² As there are no titles from Wallonia included in the database, Belgium refers more specifically to Flanders.

the genres action (10 titles or 8.1%), adventure (5 titles or 4.0%) and animation (2 titles or 1.6%) are also present. There is only one case (0.8%) that is classified as horror and one (0.8%) that is classified as romance (Table 4). This reflects earlier research that stated that most representations of journalism occur within the comedy and drama genres (Ehrlich, 1997).

Table 4. Genre.

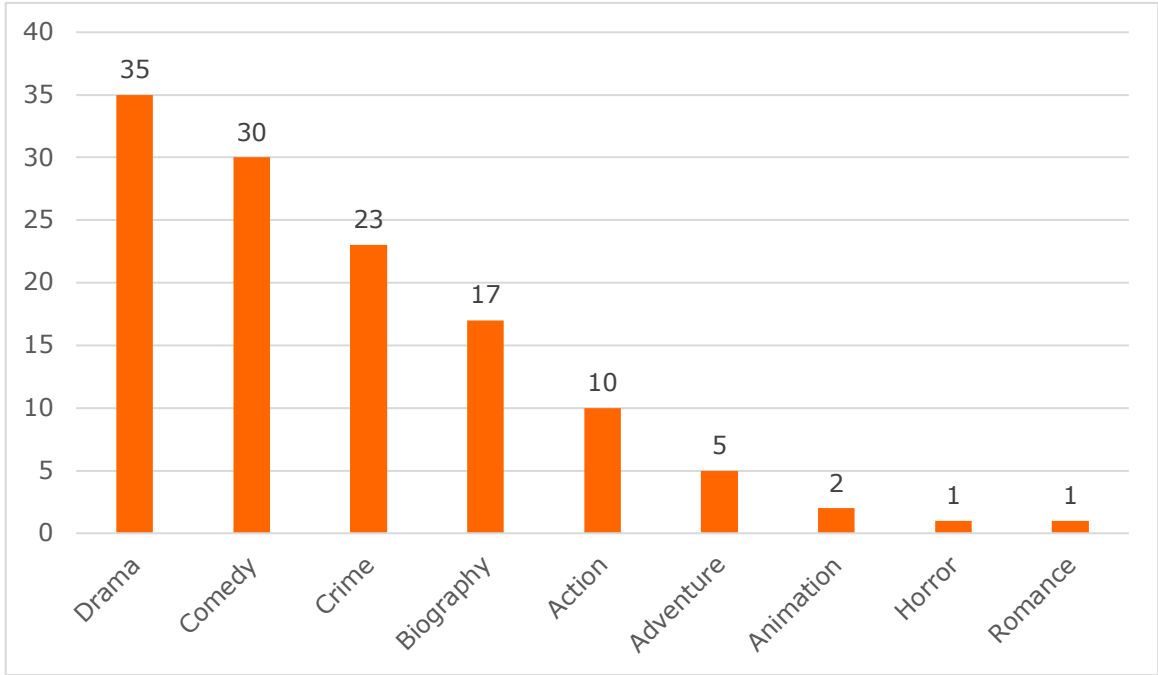


Table 5. Cross Table Genre – Country of Production (absolute values).

	Europe	Belgium	US*	UK*	Other	Total
Action	1	2	7	0	0	10
Adventure	0	1	4	0	0	5
Animation	0	0	2	0	0	2
Biography	0	1	14	2	0	17
Comedy	0	4	23	3	0	30
Crime	6	2	10	4	1	23
Drama	4	13	17	1	0	35
Horror	0	0	1	0	0	1
Romance	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	11	23	79	10	1	124

*Or co-production

The most frequent genres for the United States are comedy (23 titles or 29.1%), drama (17 titles or 21.5%) and biography (14 titles or 17.7%). This is similar to Belgium with drama (13

titles or 56.5%) and comedy (4 titles or 17.4%) in the first and second place. This contrasts with the other countries that have crime in the first place. This often concerns titles from Scandinavian countries where the crime genre has become quite popular and has reached foreign audiences including American and British audiences (Forshaw, 2012) (*Table 5*).

4.2. Analysis of the Plot and Characters

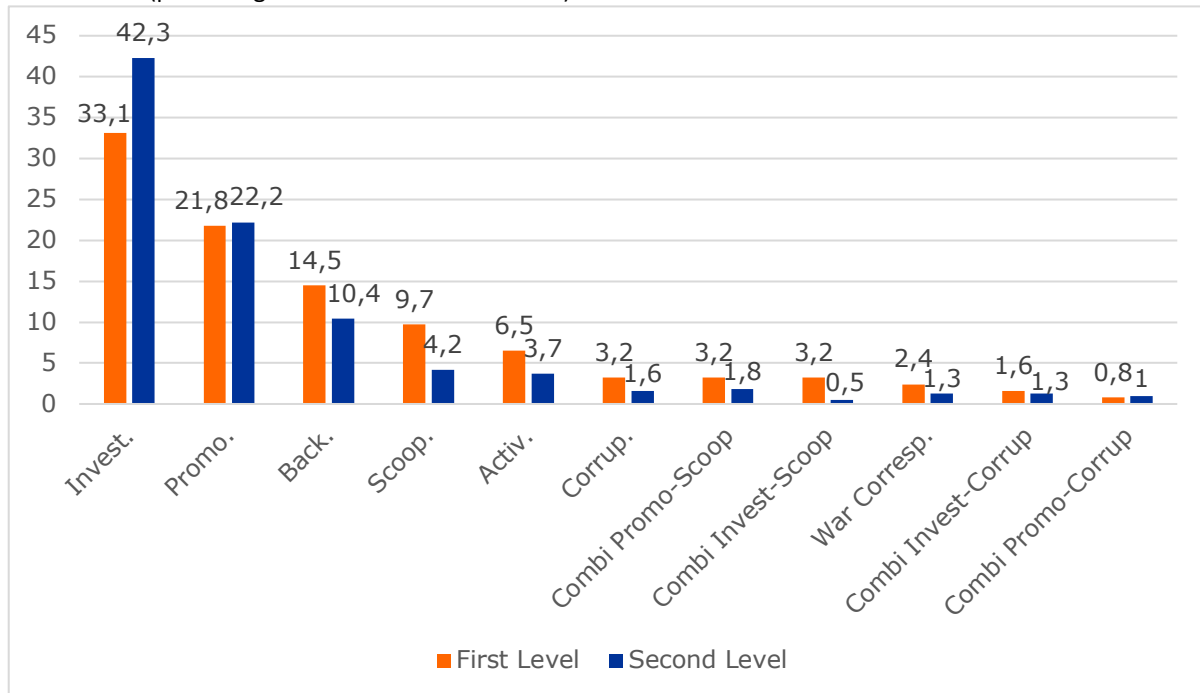
This section elaborates on the analysis of the plot and characters on both the first and second levels. The first level concerns the verified data that was established through cross-referencing ($N = 124$) whereas the second level concerns the data entered by each individual respondent ($N = 383$). The total on the second level varies as respondents could indicate that they did not know the answer resulting in missing values. The next paragraphs look into the information on the plot and relate it to the production context discussed above. We compared the data of both the first and second levels to be able to identify differences between how respondents recall the information about the titles and the verified information and how this impacts the analyses.

4.2.1. Heroes versus Villains

The plot that is most frequently represented on the first level in the database is investigative with 41 titles (33.1%). This is followed by promotion with 27 titles (21.8%), background with 18 titles (14.5%), and scoop journalism with 12 titles (9.7%). Other categories that are less present are war correspondent (3 titles or 2.4%), corruption (4 titles or 3.2%), and activism (8 titles or 6.5%). Combinations of those categories also occurred but are less frequent than the first-mentioned categories. The most predominant combinations are promotion and scoop journalism and scoop journalism and investigative (each 4 titles or 3.2%).

On the second level, respondents classified the titles similar to the first level, however, we encountered a higher percentage for investigative (162 titles or 42.3%) and promotion (85 titles or 22.2%) and a lower percentage for background (40 titles or 10.4%), scoop journalism (16 titles or 4.2%), and the other categories (*Table 6*).

Table 6. Plot (percentages for first and second level).



*Missing values second level N = 37

This confirms previous research that stated that representations of journalism often focus on a struggle over news and romance (Ehrlich, 1997). The promotion category has been encountered since the beginning of the journalism genre. Ehrlich (1997) stated that representations about journalism likely focus on journalists who have to prove themselves by uncovering an important story which is hard to balance with their private and/or romantic life. After the 1970s there was a shift in representation towards conspiracy films focusing on institutions such as businesses and the government involved in cover-up operations (Ehrlich, 1997). This corresponds with the investigative category. The few titles released before 2000 that are included are predominantly investigative (5 titles or 62.5%) and promotion (2 titles or 25.0%) on the first level. It is striking that the investigative category is less present in the categories between 2001 and 2010 (7 titles or 25.9%) and between 2011 and 2021 (29 titles or 32.6%). This is less visible for the category promotion as with 12 titles (44.4%) it stands out with a higher percentage in 2001 and 2010 compared to 13 titles (14.6%) between 2011 and 2021. On the second level, we noticed a similar trend, notwithstanding the higher percentage for investigative as discussed in the previous paragraph. However, respondents did classify cases released before 2000 as promotion less often in comparison to the verified data (5 titles or 12.2%) (Table 7).

Table 7. Plot – Year of Release (absolute values for first and second level).

	Before 2000		2000-2010		2011-2021		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
Promo.	2	5	12	30	13	50	27	85
Invest.	5	34	7	21	29	107	41	162
War Corresp.	0	0	0	0	3	5	3	5
Scoop.	0	0	2	2	10	14	12	16
Back.	0	1	2	2	16	37	18	40
Corrup.	0	0	1	2	3	4	4	6
Activ.	1	1	0	0	7	13	8	14
Combi	0	0	1	1	0	3	1	4
Promo-Corrup								
Combi	0	0	0	0	2	5	2	5
Invest-Corrup								
Combi	0	0	1	1	3	6	4	7
Promo-Scoop								
Combi	0	0	1	0	3	2	4	2
Invest-Scoop								
Total	8	41	27	59	89	246	124	346*

*Missing values second level N = 37

On the first level, the category scoop journalism is more present within the cases released after 2000 whereas before it is absent (2 titles or 7.4% between 2000 and 2010 and 10 titles or 11.2% between 2011 and 2021). This is similar for the category corruption (4 titles or 3.2% that is only present in the last two categories (1 title or 3.7% between 2000 and 2010 and 3 titles or 3.4% between 2011 and 2021). The same trend was encountered for the second level. This could indicate that either journalists who disregard ethical standards are more present in recent titles or that the recent titles that respondents recall consist of such journalists whereas the titles released before 2000 that they recall do not. The latter could mean that more positive representations of journalism are more easily retained in the long-term memory of the respondents. In addition, the few titles (6 or 4.8%) that have been listed by 10 respondents or more all belong to the categories investigative (4 titles or 66.7%) and promotion (2 titles or 33.3%) indicating that these representations more easily become part of the collective memory. This could also explain why the category background is more present in the titles released between 2011 and 2021 than before on both levels (16 titles or 18.0% on the first

level and 37 titles or 15.0% on the second level). However, further research is needed to confirm this.

Consequently, the database also partly confirms the classification of Saltzman (2003). The category investigative in this database corresponds with what the author called investigative reporters. Scoop journalism also includes the anonymous reporters represented as an intrusive pack of harassing journalists that invade the privacy of others (Saltzman, 2003). The author's war and foreign correspondents and real-life journalists can also be encountered in the categories war correspondent and background. In addition, this confirms the heroes-villains dichotomy encountered in previous research into the genre (Ehrlich, 1997, 2005, 2006, 2015; Saltzman, 2003; Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2011b).

Table 8. Plot – Country (absolute values for first and second level).

	Europe		Belgium		US*		UK*		Other		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
Promo.	1	1	4	5	22	79	0	0	0	0	27	85
Invest.	5	5	7	14	24	138	4	4	1	1	41	162
War Corresp.	1	1	0	0	1	3	1	1	0	0	3	5
Scoop.	1	0	5	11	5	4	1	1	0	0	12	16
Back.	1	7	4	10	11	18	2	5	0	0	18	40
Corrup.	0	0	0	0	4	6	0	0	0	0	4	6
Activ.	1	1	1	1	6	12	0	0	0	0	8	14
Combi	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	4
Promo-Corru												
Combi	1	2	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	5
Invest-Corrupt												
Combi	0	0	1	1	2	5	1	1	0	0	4	7
Promo-Scoop												
Combi	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	1	0	0	4	2
Invest-Scoop												
Total	11	17	23	45	79	270	10	13	1	1	124	346**

*Or co-production

**Missing values second level N = 37

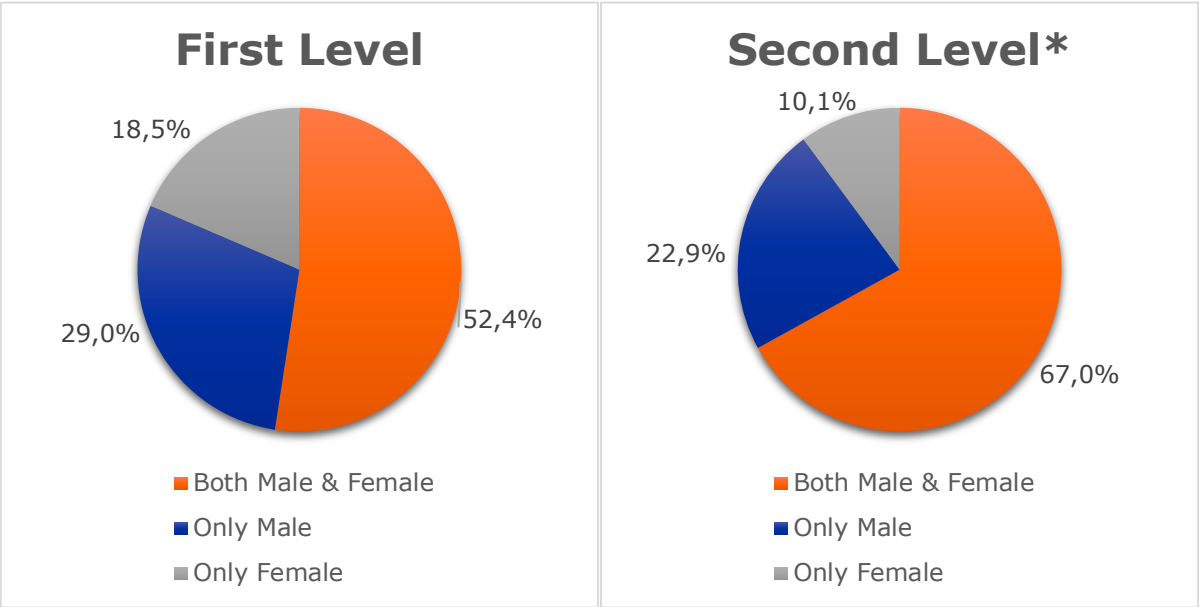
Whereas the titles with plots within the categories investigative and/or promotion were for all countries most frequently encountered on the first level, titles from Belgium stand out with

categories such as scoop journalism (5 titles or 21.7%) and background (4 titles or 17.4%) that are also predominantly present next to investigative and promotion. Especially scoop journalism seems to occur more for Belgian titles in comparison to other countries. With the exception of the category other international countries which consists of only 1 title, the United States produced the lowest percentage of titles that fall within the category scoop journalism (5 titles or 6.3%). On the second level, we noticed a similar trend with the exception that the United States did not score the lowest for scoop journalism but Europe (and other international countries) did with no titles in that category (*Table 8*).

4.2.2. Diversity in the Genre

Concerning the diversity in characters in the database on the first level, most titles consist of either more than 2 journalists (65 titles or 52.4%) or only 1 journalist (48 or 38.7%). 65 titles (52.4%) represent both male and female journalists. If only one sex is represented, this is more frequently the case for male journalists (36 titles or 29.0% versus 23 titles or 18.5% for female journalists). A similar trend was encountered on the second level (*Table 9*).

Table 9. Sex Journalists.



*Missing values is N = 47

However, when comparing both levels, a difference occurs when looking at the roles of the journalists. The verified information indicates that if female journalists are represented, they

more often have a leading role (57 titles or 64.8% of 88 titles in which a female journalist is represented) than men (50 titles or 49.5% of the 101 titles in which a male journalist is represented). This is also the case for the second level, but respondents seem to assign a leading role more often to both male (184 titles or 63,9%) and female (181 titles or 72.4%) journalists (*Table 10*).

Table 10. Role Male Journalists (absolute values for first and second level).

	Both Male and Female		Only Male		Only Female		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
	Leading Role	29	138	21	46	0	0	50
Side Role	36	75	15	29	0	0	51	104
Total	65	213	36	75	0	0	101*	288**

*Not applicable is N = 23

** Not applicable is N = 34 and missing values N = 61

Table 11. Role Female Journalists (absolute values for first and second level).

	Both Male and Female		Only Male		Only Female		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
	Leading Role	44	161	0	0	13	20	57
Side Role	21	55	0	0	10	14	31	69
Total	65	216	0	0	23	34	88*	250**

*Not applicable is N = 36

** Not applicable is N = 77 and missing values N = 56

When only male journalists are represented on the first level of the database, they tend to have a leading role more frequently (21 titles or 58.3%) but when both male and female journalists are represented, they more frequently have a side role (36 titles or 55.4%) (*Table 10*). This contrasts with the representation of female journalists who more often have a leading role both when only female journalists are represented (13 titles or 56.5%) as when both male and female journalists are represented (44 titles or 67.7%) (*Table 11*). This contrast was not encountered on the second level. Respondents assigned a leading role more often to

both male as female journalists independent of whether only one sex or both were represented.

The plots in which only female journalists are most frequently represented on the first level are investigative (6 titles or 26.1%), promotion (4 titles or 17.4%), scoop journalism and background (both 3 titles or 13.0%). It is striking that of all titles within the category war correspondent, 2 (66.7%) represent only female journalists whereas no titles in that category represent only male journalists. The plots in which only male journalists are most frequently represented are investigative (18 titles or 50.0%), background (8 titles or 22.2%) and scoop journalism (3 titles or 8.3%). Here we noticed a difference with the second level. Respondents classified titles with only female journalists less often within investigative (7 titles or 21.9%) and more often in promotion (8 titles or 25.0%), scoop journalism (5 titles or 16.6%) and background (6 titles or 18.8%). Only male journalists were classified more often in investigative (43 titles or 59.0%) and scoop journalism (9 titles or 12.3%) and less often in background (10 titles or 13.7%). As such, female journalists seem to be less often represented in titles concerning investigative journalism in comparison to men on both levels. This confirms previous research that looked into the representation of female journalists. Whereas women on television are systemically underrepresented and are usually reduced to traditional feminine roles, the journalism genre seems to break this traditional mould by representing women in leading roles but still tends to situate women within overarching patriarchal schemes (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017). We cannot conclude anything about the representational practices of female journalists in the titles without an in-depth analysis but can conclude that if only female journalists are represented, this is more often the case in titles of categories other than investigative on the first level and other than investigative and background on the second level (*Table 12*).

Table 12. Plot – Sex Journalists (absolute values for first and second level).

	Both Male and		Only Male		Only Female		Total	
	Female							
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
Promo.	21	63	2	6	4	8	27	77
Invest.	17	94	18	43	6	7	41	144
War Corresp.	1	3	0	0	2	2	3	5
Scoop.	6	1	3	9	3	5	12	15
Back.	7	17	8	10	3	6	18	33
Corrup.	2	3	2	1	0	1	4	5
Activ.	5	11	1	1	2	2	8	14
Combi	0	3	0	0	1	1	1	4
Promo-Corru								
Combi	1	4	0	0	1	0	2	4
Invest-Corrup								
Combi	3	4	1	2	0	0	4	6
Promo-Scoop								
Combi	2	0	1	1	1	0	4	1
Invest-Scoop								
Total	65	203	36	73	23	32	124	308*

*Missing values second level N = 75

The titles in the database on the first level released before 2000 do not consist of any titles that represent only female journalists whereas 4 titles (50.0%) represent only male journalists. This trend is countered by the titles released between 2000 and 2010 (4 titles or 14.8% with only female journalists and 8 titles or 29.6% with only male journalists) and between 2011 and 2021 (19 titles or 21.3% with only female journalists and 24 titles or 27.0% with only male journalists). This could indicate that women have been increasingly represented throughout the years as also stated by McNair (2011b, 2014). However, when looking at the second level the percentage of titles released after 2000 that represents only women remains rather stable (7 titles or 11.9% between 2000 and 2010 and 27 titles or 11.3% between 2011 and 2021). This could be countered by the higher percentage of titles with both male and female journalists after 2000 which contrasts with the first level for which the representation of both male and female journalists is similar for the three categories fluctuating around 50% (Table 13).

Table 13. Year of Release – Sex Journalists (absolute values for first and second level).

	Both Male and Female		Only Male		Only Female		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
	Before 2000	4	18	4	21	0	0	8
2000-2010	15	35	8	17	4	7	27	59
2011-2021	46	172	24	39	19	27	89	238
Total	65	225	36	77	23	34	124	336*

*Missing values second level N = 47

For both male as female journalists on the first level, all the titles before 2000 portrayed them in a leading role. For titles released between 2000 and 2010, this is 14 titles (60.9%) for male journalists and 15 (79.0%) for female journalists. For titles released between 2011 and 2021, this is 28 titles (40.0%) for male journalists and 38 (58.5%) for female journalists. This indicates either that recent titles portray journalists more often in a side role in which the difference with titles before 2000 is the largest for male journalists or that respondents recall titles with journalists with a side role better when these are recent. However, respondents seem to recall this differently as on the second level they indicated that both male as female journalists were also represented in a side role before 2000 (5 titles or 13.5% for male journalists and 4 titles or 25% for female journalists of those titles). For titles released after 2000, they indicated a lower percentage of titles with male journalists in a leading role (29 titles or 58% between 2000 and 2010 and 123 titles or 61.2% between 2011 and 2021), whereas they indicated a higher percentage for female journalists in the titles between 2000 and 2010 (33 titles or 82.5%) (Table 14 & 15).

Table 14. Year of Release – Role of Male Journalists (absolute values for first and second level).

	Leading Role		Side Role		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
Before 2000	8	32	0	5	8	37
2000-2010	14	29	9	21	23	50
2011-2021	28	123	42	78	70	201
Total	50	184	51	104	101*	288**

*Not applicable is N = 23

** Not applicable is N = 34 and missing values N = 61

Table 15. Year of Release – Role of Female Journalists (absolute values for first and second level).

	Leading Role		Side Role		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
Before 2000	4	12	0	4	4	16
2000-2010	15	33	4	7	19	40
2011-2021	38	136	27	58	65	194
Total	57	181	31	69	88*	250**

*Not applicable is N = 36

** Not applicable is N = 77 and missing values N = 56

Concerning the country of production on the first level, titles from Europe, followed by the UK, consist of only female journalists more often than other countries (3 titles or 27.3% for Europe and 2 titles or 20.0% from the UK). However, titles from the United Kingdom, followed by the United States, also consist of only male journalists more often than other countries (4 or 40.0% for the UK and 25 or 31.6% for the US). On the second level, titles from the United Kingdom and Belgium more equally represent only male (4 or 30.8% for the UK and 13 or 28.9% for Belgium) or female journalists (2 or 15.4% for the UK and 7 or 15.6% for Belgium) (Table 16).

Titles that originate from the United States more often have both male and female journalists in a leading role (37 or 57.8% for male journalists and 41 or 75.9% for female journalists) whereas in titles from Belgium male journalists more often have a leading role (11 or 55.0%) and female journalists more often have a side role (10 or 52.6%). On the second level, the titles from all countries of production represent female journalists most often in a leading role and male journalists most often in a side role with the exception of the United States for which respondents attributed a leading role more often to male journalists (165 or 72.1%).

Table 16. Country of Production – Sex Journalists (absolute values for first and second level).

	Both Male and		Only Male		Only Female		Total	
	Female		1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
	1 st	2 nd						
Europe	6	13	2	3	3	4	11	20
Belgium	16	25	4	13	3	7	23	45
US**	39	180	25	56	15	21	79	257
UK**	4	7	4	4	2	2	10	13
Other	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Total	65	225	36	77	23	34	124	336*

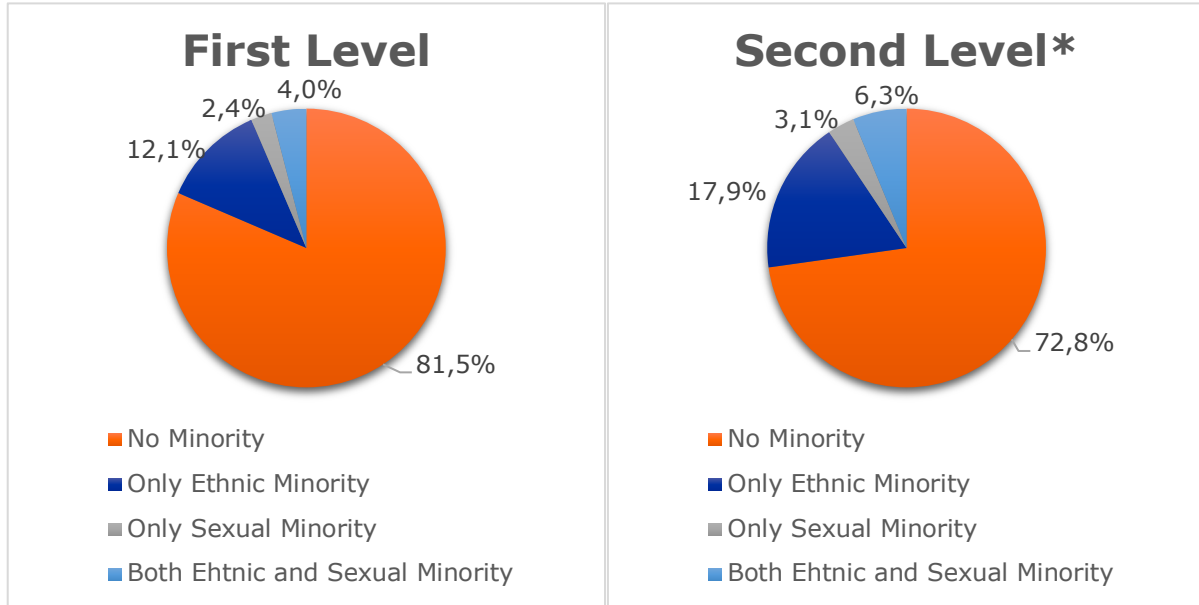
*Missing values second level N = 47

**Or co-production

Only in some titles on the first level of the database journalists with a minority identity were represented (23 titles or 18.5%) confirming that ethnic and sexual minorities have been depicted in the genre (Ehrlich, 2019) but are still underrepresented. Of those 23 titles, the majority represents journalists with only an ethnic minority identity (15 titles or 65.2%). 3 titles (13.0%) represent a journalist who identifies as a sexual minority and 5 titles (21.7%) represent a journalist with both an ethnic and sexual minority identity (*Table 17*). As such the database also includes intersectional representations. However, similar to other genres, it still remains rare (Vanlee et al., 2018).

Of the titles in which journalists with a minority identity are represented, 12 (52.2%) represent them in a leading role and 11 (47.8%) in a side role. On the second level, the respondents indicated that a higher percentage of titles (61 titles or 27.2%) represent this category but the distribution of the different minority categories is similar to the first level. Respondents did indicate that journalists with a minority identity occur more often in side roles (45 or 73.8%) than in leading roles (16 or 26.2%).

Table 17. Titles with Journalists with a Minority Identity.



*Missing Values is N = 159

When journalists with only an ethnic minority identity are represented, they less often have a leading role (6 titles or 40.0%) whereas this is the opposite for titles with journalists with only a sexual minority identity (2 titles or 66.7%) or journalists with both an ethnic as sexual minority identity (4 titles or 80.0%). This is not the case for the second level, for which respondents indicated that all categories are more often shown in a side role (*Table 18*).

Table 18. Titles with Journalists with a Minority Identity – Role Journalists with a Minority Identity (absolute values for first and second level).

	Leading Role		Side Role		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
Only Ethnic	6	10	9	30	15	40
Only Sexual	2	2	1	5	3	7
Both Ethnic and Sexual	4	4	1	10	5	14
Total	12	16	11	45	23*	61**

*Not applicable is N = 101

** Not applicable is N = 163 and missing values N = 159

On the first level, most representations of journalists with a minority identity are in titles released between 2011 and 2021. This includes 12 titles (80.0%) for journalists with an ethnic

minority identity, 2 titles (66.7%) for journalists who identify as a sexual minority and 5 titles (100.0%) for journalists with both an ethnic and sexual minority identity. No titles released before 2000 include journalists with a minority identity with the exception of 1 title that includes an ethnic minority. This contrasts with the second level that includes 4 titles (9.8%) with a journalist with an ethnic minority before 2000 (*Table 19*).

Table 19. Titles with Journalists with a Minority Identity – Year of Release (absolute values for first and second level).

	Before 2000		2000-2010		2011-2021		Total	
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
No Minority	7	24	24	36	70	103	101	163
Only Ethnic	1	4	2	6	12	31	15	41
Only Sexual	0	0	1	3	2	5	3	8
Both Ethnic and Sexual	0	0	0	2	5	14	5	16
Total	8	28	27	47	89	153	124	228*

*Missing values second level N = 155

The titles released between 2011 and 2021 consist of the highest percentage of journalists with only an ethnic minority identity (31 titles or 20.3%) or with both an ethnic or sexual minority identity (14 titles or 9.2%). Titles released between 2000 and 2010 have the highest percentage of journalists who identify as a sexual minority (3 titles or 6.4%). This could indicate that respondents do not recall the presence of journalists with a minority identity correctly but assumed that these categories will likely be present in the titles in the database, more specifically in recent titles (*Table 19*).

On the first level, titles from the United Kingdom, followed by the United States more often include journalists with a minority identity (3 titles or 30.0% for the UK and 18 titles or 22.8% or the US) than other countries (2 or 8.9% for Belgium and 0 for Europe and other international countries). For all countries, journalists with a minority identity were more or less equally represented with leading and side roles. A similar trend was encountered on the second level with the exception of roles for Belgian and American titles as respondents indicated that titles

of both countries represent journalists with a minority identity most often in side roles (6 titles or 85.7% for Belgium and 39 titles or 73.6% for the US).

The plots in which journalists with an ethnic minority identity occur most frequently on the first level are investigative (4 titles or 26.7%), scoop journalism, background, activism and promotion (each 2 titles or 13.3%) and war correspondent and corruption (both 1 title or 6.7%). They appear more often in titles concerning corruption, scoop journalism, activism and war correspondent than journalists who do not have a minority identity (*Table 20*).

Table 20. Plot – Titles with Journalists with a Minority Identity (absolute values for first and second level).

	No Minority		Only Ethnic		Only Sexual		Both Ethnic and Sexual			
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd
Promo.	21	28	2	8	1	4	3	11	27	51
Invest.	35	78	4	14	2	2	0	2	41	96
War Corresp.	2	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	3	4
Scoop.	10	9	2	5	0	0	0	0	12	14
Back.	16	20	2	3	0	0	0	0	18	23
Corrup.	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	2
Activ.	5	3	2	4	0	0	1	2	8	9
Combi	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Promo-Corru										
Combi	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2
Invest-Corrup										
Combi	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	3
Promo-Scoop										
Combi	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1
Invest-Scoop										
Total	101	148	15	36	3	8	5	16	124	208*

*Missing values second level N = 175

On the second level, respondents listed similar categories with the exception of the category corruption for which they did not list any titles with journalists with a minority identity. The only titles in which a journalist with a sexual minority identity is represented on the first level can be classified within investigative (2 titles or 66.7%) and promotion (1 title or 33.3%).

Respondents on the second level, also listed war correspondent for one title (12.5%). On both levels, most titles in which journalists who have both an ethnic as sexual minority identity are represented are also promotion (3 titles or 60.0% on the first level and 11 titles or 68.8% on the second level) (*Table 20*).

4.3. Representational Practices

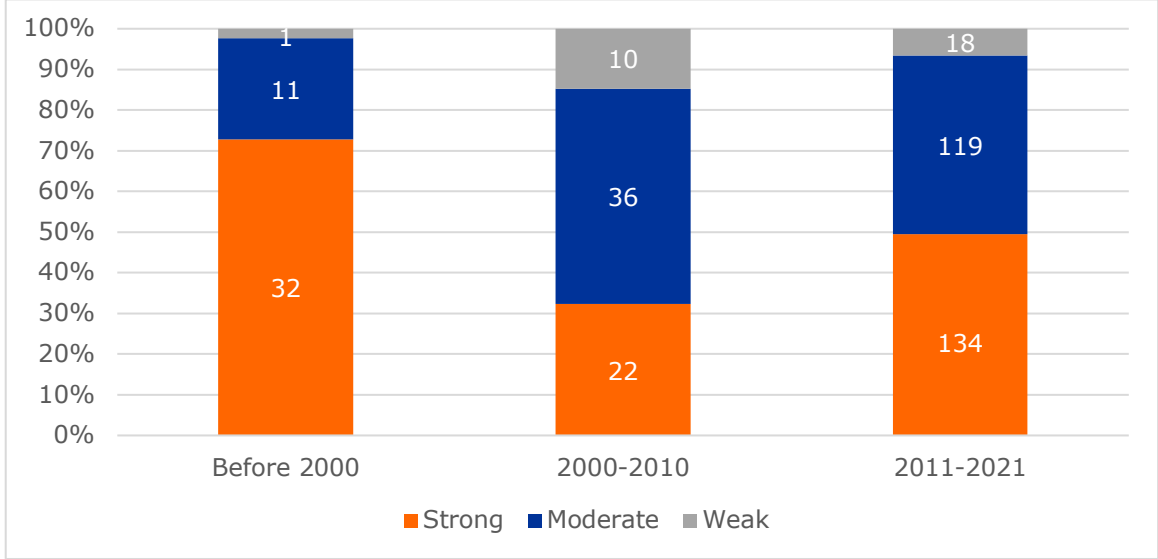
The next paragraphs elaborate on how the respondents perceive the representations of journalism in the titles they listed. The analyses were executed on the second level as they concern the subjective interpretation of the titles as remembered by the respondents. We first discuss the representation in relation to the production context and information on the plot and characters and end with a discussion of titles that stood out during the analysis.

4.3.1. Free Press Myth

The respondents were asked to answer a bipolar matrix with 4 scale points asking to indicate what applied most to the case. Based on the total score we categorized the answers into 3 categories: free press myth strongly present, free press myth moderately present and free press myth weakly present. Respondents listed 188 times (49.1%) that the free press myth was strongly present, 166 times (43.3%) that the myth was moderately present and 29 times (7.6%) that it was weakly present. This confirms previous research that stated that the journalism genre engages in disseminating the free press myth in which a privately owned, market-driven press is necessary for the functioning of democracy (Ehrlich, 2005, p. 103).

Of the titles released before 2000, 32 (72.7%) are classified in the category of free press myth strong whereas 22 (32.4%) between 2000 and 2010 and 134 (49.4%) between 2011 and 2021. This means that respondents perceived the free press myth to be more often strongly present in titles released before 2000 and after 2010 and more often moderately present between 2000 and 2010 (36 titles or 52.9%) (*Table 21*).

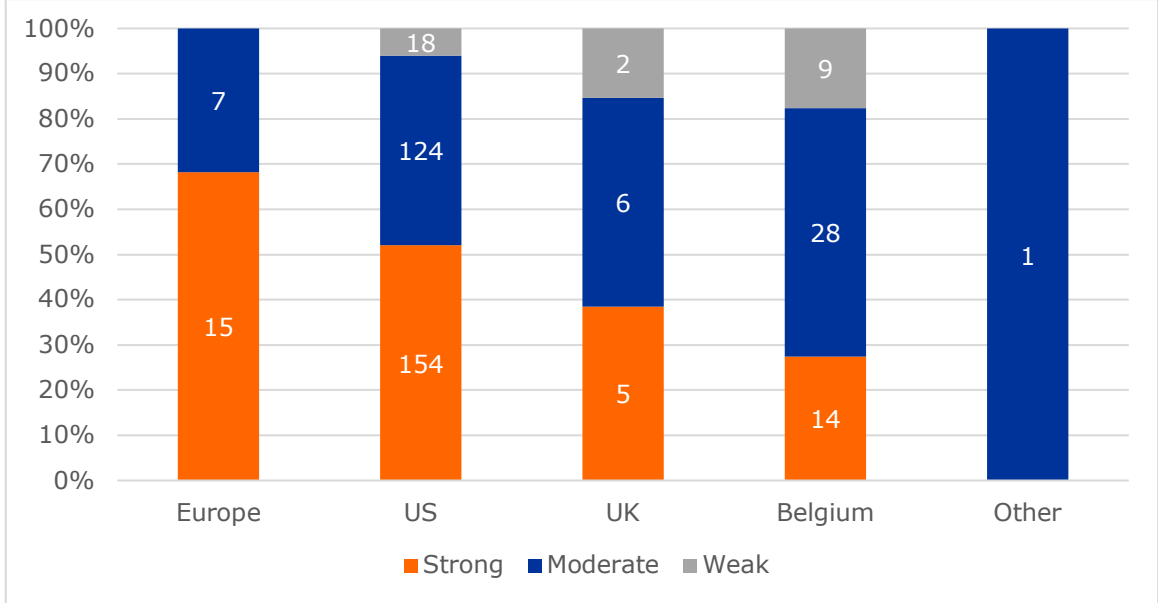
Table 21. Free Press Myth – Year of Release (absolute values).



*Missing values second level N = 0

Concerning the country of production, the category free press myth strong was more often encountered for titles that originate in Europe (15 titles or 68.2%) or the United States (154 titles or 52.0%) than for Belgium (14 titles or 27.5%), the United Kingdom (5 titles or 38.5%) or other international countries (0 titles). The last 3 categories were most often classified under free press myth moderate. Free press myth weak was most present for Belgian titles (9 or 17.6%) and titles from the United Kingdom (2 titles or 15.4%) (Table 22).

Table 22. Free Press Myth – Country of Production (absolute values for second level).



*Missing values second level N = 0

For series, free press myth moderate was encountered most often (88 or 52.1%) whereas, for movies, the percentage of free press myth strong was the highest (123 titles or 57.5%). Free press myth weak was the lowest for both types but was lower for movies (13 titles or 6.1%) than for series (16 titles or 9.5%).

With regard to the genre, free press myth strong is highest for biography (69 titles or 81.2%) and lowest for comedy (11 titles or 18.3%), horror and romance (both 0 titles). Titles within the category comedy seem to be classified most often as free press myth moderate (40 titles or 66.7%). Of all genres, adventure has the highest percentage of free press myth weak (2 titles or 22.2%).

The percentage of free press myth strong is the highest for the plots war correspondent (5 titles or 100.0%) and investigative (123 titles or 75.9%) followed by activism (5 titles or 35.7%) and promotion (28 titles or 32.9%) (*Table 23*).

Table 23. Plot – Myth (absolute values for second level).

	Strong	Moderate	Weak	Total
Promo.	28	50	7	85
Invest.	123	38	1	162
War Corresp.	5	0	0	5
Scoop.	0	13	3	16
Back.	7	26	7	40
Corrup.	0	4	2	6
Activ.	5	8	1	14
Combi	0	3	1	4
Promo-Corru				
Combi	2	2	1	5
Invest-Corrup				
Combi	1	5	1	7
Promo-Scoop				
Combi	2	0	0	2
Invest-Scoop				
Total	173	149	24	346

*Missing Values second level N = 37

The combinations of scoop journalism and investigative and investigative and corruption were also often labelled as free press myth strong (2 titles or 100.0% for the first combination and 40.0% for the second combination). The percentage of free press myth moderate was most present for the other categories and highest for scoop journalism (13 titles or 81.3%). The highest percentage of free press myth weak was for corruption (2 titles or 33.3%) (*Table 23*).

Of the titles in which only 1 journalist is represented, free press moderate was most often encountered (40 titles or 54.1%) whereas, for titles with 2 or more journalists, free press strong was most present (24 titles or 61.5% for titles with 2 journalists and 128 titles or 57.7% for titles with 2 or more journalists). When only male journalists are represented, there is no difference between the percentage of free press myth strong and free press myth moderate (both 35 titles or 45.5%). But when only female journalists are represented free press myth moderate occurs more often (18 titles or 53.0%) than free press myth strong (11 titles or 32.4%). Free press myth weak is also more present in titles with only female journalists (5 titles or 14.7%) than with only male journalists (7 titles or 9.1%). When both male and female journalists are represented, free press myth strong is most present (122 titles or 54.2%) (*Table 24*).

Table 24. Myth – Sex Journalists (absolute values for second level).

	Both Male and Female	Only Male	Only Female	Total
Strong	122	35	11	168
Moderate	94	35	18	147
Weak	9	7	5	21
Total	225	77	34	336*

*Missing values is N = 47

The titles with male journalists in a leading role are most often classified as free press myth strong (116 titles or 63.0%) whereas in comparison titles with female journalists in a leading role are less often classified as such (99 titles or 54.7%). Titles with male and female journalists in a side role are most often classified as free press myth moderate (59 titles or 56.7% for male journalists and 35 titles or 50.7% for female journalists). Free press myth weak was most often encountered for titles with male and female journalists in a side role (10 titles or 9.6% for male journalists and 6 titles or 8.7% for female journalists) (*Table 25 & 26*).

Table 25. Myth – Role Male Journalists (absolute values for second level).

	Leading Role	Side Role	Total
Strong	116	35	151
Moderate	62	59	121
Weak	6	10	16
Total	184	104	288*

*Missing values is N = 95

Table 26. Myth – Role Female Journalists (absolute values for second level).

	Leading Role	Side Role	Total
Strong	99	28	127
Moderate	75	35	110
Weak	7	6	13
Total	181	69	250*

*Missing values is N = 133

For titles that did not represent journalists with a minority identity, free press myth strong was the most present (84 titles or 51.5%). Titles with journalists with only an ethnic minority identity or only a sexual minority identity had a more even distribution of free press myth strong (18 titles or 43.9% for ethnic minority and 4 titles or 50.0% for sexual minority) and free press myth moderate (19 titles or 46.3% for ethnic minority and 4 titles or 50.0% for sexual minority).

Titles that represent journalists with both an ethnic and a sexual minority identity are most often classified as free press myth strong (11 titles or 68.8%). Free press myth strong is most present both when journalists with a minority identity have a leading role (10 titles or 55.6%) and a side role (24 titles or 49.0%) (*Table 27*).

Table 27. Myth – Titles with Journalists with a Minority Identity (absolute values for second level).

	No Minority	Only Ethnic	Only Sexual	Both Ethnic and Sexual	Total
Strong	84	18	4	11	117
Moderate	64	19	4	5	92
Weak	15	4	0	0	19
Total	163	41	8	16	228*

*Missing values is N = 155

4.3.2. Top-listed Titles

As several titles were listed 10 times or more, this section elaborates on the specifics of these titles on the second level. The title that was listed most was *Spotlight* (33 times), followed by *The Post* (28 times), *All the President's Men* (22 times), *The Newsroom* (20 times), *the Superman Franchise* (12 times) and *the Millennium Trilogy: The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (10 times). Specific for Belgian titles, *De Twaalf* (8 times) and *De Dag* (6 times) were listed most. The respondents that listed these cases most often are not (former) journalists (83 or 59.7%), are women (63 or 45.3%), are between 18 and 30 years old (67 or 48.2%) and do not identify as a minority (111 or 79.9%).

Both the top-listed and Belgian titles were released between 2011 and 2021 with the exception of *All the President's Men* that was released before 2000. All top-listed titles are of American origin except the Millennium Trilogy which is a co-production of the United States and Sweden. The latter is, besides the Belgian titles, also the only title of which the plot is situated in Europe. Apart from *The Newsroom*, all titles are movies which contrasts with the 2 Belgian top-listed titles that are both series.

All the President's Men, *Millennium Trilogy*, *Spotlight* and *The Post* were unanimously classified within the category investigative by respondents and *The Newsroom* and the *Superman Franchise* were unanimously classified within promotion. *De Twaalf* was also classified the same by all respondents within the category scoop journalism. The only case the respondents did not agree on is *De Dag* with 3 entries for scoop journalism and 3 for background.

2 or more journalists is the category that was most listed for all top-listed titles except the Belgian titles. All respondents that listed *De Twaalf* indicated that only one journalist is represented whereas for *De Dag* 3 respondents (50.0%) reported the presence of 1 journalist and 3 (50.0%) of more than 2 journalists. For 5 of the 6 top-listed titles, the majority of respondents indicated that both male and female journalists are represented. Only for *All the President's Men*, most respondents (13 or 76.5%) reported only male journalists. Specific for the Belgian titles, all respondents reported only male journalists for *De Twaalf* and for *De Dag*

3 (75.0%) reported only female journalists and 1 (25.0%) both male and female journalists (Table 28).

Table 28. Top-listed Titles – Sex Journalists (absolute values for second level).

	Both Male and Female	Only Male	Only Female	Total
All the President's Men	4	13	0	17
De Dag	1	0	3	4
De Twaalf	0	8	0	8
Millennium Trilogy	8	1	1	10
Spotlight	30	0	0	30
Superman Franchise	9	1	1	11
The Newsroom	19	0	0	19
The Post	24	1	0	25
Total	95	24	5	124*

*Missing values is N = 15

The majority of the respondents listed that both the male and female journalists appeared in a leading role in the top-listed titles. Only for *All the President's Men*, the few respondents that reported the presence of female journalists all indicated that they appeared in a side role. All respondents reported that the Belgian titles present both male and female journalists in side roles.

All respondents who listed *The Post*, *Millennium Trilogy*, *Superman Franchise* and *De Dag* indicated that no minority journalists were represented. Most did the same for *All the president's Men* (13 or 92.9%) and *Spotlight* (16 or 88.9%). 1 respondent (7.1%) for *All the President's Men* and 2 (11.1%) for *Spotlight* indicated the presence of a journalist with an ethnic minority identity. *The Newsroom* and *De Twaalf* are the most diverse according to respondents. For the first title, 5 respondents (41.7%) reported a journalist with an ethnic minority identity, 1 (8.3%) reported a journalist with a sexual minority identity and 5 (41.7%) reported a journalist with both an ethnic and sexual minority identity. For the second title, 6 respondents (85.7%) reported a journalist with an ethnic minority identity (Table 29).

Table 29. Top-listed Titles – Titles with Journalists with a Minority Identity (absolute values for second level).

	No Minority	Only Ethnic	Only Sexual	Both Ethnic and Sexual	Total
All the President's Men	13	1	0	0	14
De Dag	3	0	0	0	3
De Twaalf	1	6	0	0	7
Millennium Trilogy	3	0	0	0	3
Spotlight	16	2	0	0	18
Superman Franchise	6	0	0	0	6
The Newsroom	1	5	1	5	12
The Post	10	0	0	0	10
Total	53	14	1	5	73*

*Missing values is N = 66

The respondents that reported journalists with a minority identity in *De Twaalf* and *Spotlight* all indicate that they are represented in a side role. The one respondent who reported a journalist with an ethnic minority in *All the president's Men* indicated that the journalist is represented in a leading role whereas the respondents that reported the same for *De Twaalf* indicate that the journalist is represented in a side role. For *The Newsroom*, the majority of respondents (9 or 69.2%) reports a journalist with a minority identity in a side role.

The free press myth is for most of the top-listed titles strongly present (105 or 75.5%) but was not encountered for the Belgian titles for which free press moderate is most present (10 or 71.4%).

4.4. Profile of Flemish Respondents

The next sections discuss the demographic information of the respondents including profession, sex, age and (non)-minority identity in relation to the production context, the information on the plot and characters and the representational practices in the titles they listed. As again this section of the analysis concerns the subjective interpretation of the respondents, it was executed on the second level of the database.

4.4.1. Different Profiles

As some respondents listed multiple titles whereas others listed only one, some respondents are included multiple times in this analysis. The total number of entries is $N = 383$ of which there are 33 missing values (8.6%) because of the inclusion of respondents that did not fill out the entire survey. 103 of all entries (29.4%) indicated that they are (former) journalists whereas 247 (70.6%) reported another profession. 142 (40.6%) are men, 204 (58.3%) are women and 4 (1.1%) did not specify their sex. Most respondents are between 18 and 30 years old (204 or 58.3%) and do not have a minority identity (307 or 87.7%). 39 (11.1%) identify as a sexual minority and 4 (1.1%) as an ethnic minority (*Table 30*).

Table 30. Demographic information of respondents on second level (rounded one decimal place).

Characteristics		(Former) Journalist ($N = 103$)		Other Profession ($N = 247$)		Total ($N = 350^*$)	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex	Men	51	49.5	91	36.8	142	40.6
	Women	52	50.5	152	61.5	204	58.3
	X	0	0.0	4	1.6	4	1.1
Age	18 - 30	39	37.9	165	66.8	204	58.3
	31 - 40	36	35.0	14	5.7	50	14.3
	41 - 50	16	15.5	31	12.6	47	13.4
	51 - 60	9	8.7	19	7.7	28	8.0
	60 +	3	2.9	18	7.3	21	6.0
Minority	Not a Minority	91	88.3	216	87.4	307	87.7
	Sexual Minority	1	1.0	3	1.2	4	1.1
	Ethnic Minority	11	10.7	28	11.3	39	11.1

*Missing values is $N = 33$

The biggest difference between (former) journalists and respondents with a different profession is their age. In general, journalists seem to be older whereas non-journalists are more often between 18 and 30 years old. The only 'older' age category that was found more often for non-journalists is 'older than 60' (18 non-journalists or 7.3% versus 3 journalists or 2.9%). The older respondents are most often men whereas the younger are most often women. Respondents with a minority identity are in most cases women or respondents who did not specify their gender and between 18 and 30 years old.

Respondents who are male or 60 years or older listed titles before 2000 more often (23 male respondents or 16.2% versus 16 female respondents or 7.9% and 8 older than 60 or 38.1% versus 22.5% or lower for other age categories) than female or younger respondents who listed titles after 2000 more often (188 female respondents or 92.2% versus 119 male respondents or 83.3% and 193 between 18 and 30 or 94.6% versus 86.0% or lower for other age categories) (*Table 31*).

Table 31. Age Respondents – Year of Release (absolute values on second level).

		Before 2000	2000-2010	2011-2021	Total
Sex	Men	23	23	96	142
	Women	16	40	148	204
	X	1	0	3	4
Age	18-30	11	40	153	204
	31-40	7	8	35	50
	41-50	5	9	33	47
	51-60	9	4	15	28
	60+	8	2	11	21
Total		40	63	247	350*

*Missing values is N = 33

(Former) journalists listed titles that originated in Belgium (22 respondents or 21.4%) or the UK (6 respondents or 5.8%) more often than respondents with another profession who more often list European (16 respondents or 6.5%) and American (195 or 78.9%) titles.

Table 32. Sex Respondents – Country of Production (absolute values on second level).

		Europe	Belgium	US**	UK**	Other	Total
Prof.	(Former) Journalist	4	22	71	6	0	103
	Other	16	29	195	6	1	247
Sex	Man	8	18	114	2	0	142
	Women	11	32	150	10	1	204
	X	1	1	2	0	0	4
Total		20	51	266	12	1	350*

*Missing values N = 33

**Or co-production

Women also listed more titles from Belgium (32 or 15.7%) and the United Kingdom (10 or 4.9%) than men who listed more titles from the United States (114 or 80.3%) and Europe (8 or 5.6%). Respondents who did not specify their sex listed titles from the United States most often (2 or 50.0%) followed by Belgium and Europe (each 1 or 25.0%) (*Table 32*).

(Former) journalists listed series more often (52 or 50.5%) than respondents with a different profession who listed movies more often (143 or 57.9%). Women and respondents who did not specify their gender listed series more often (97 women or 47.5% and 3 unspecified or 75.0%) than men who listed movies more often (86 men or 60.6%).

Men and respondents with a different profession listed all genres more frequently except biography and drama that were listed most by (former) journalists (27 for biography or 26.2% and 44 for drama or 42.7%) and comedy, crime and drama that were listed more by women (45 for comedy or 22.1%, 32 for crime or 15.7%, and 69 for drama or 33.8%) (*Table 33*).

Table 33. Demographic Information Respondents – Genre (absolute values on second level)

		Action	Adventure	Animation	Biography	Comedy	Crime	Drama	Horror	Total
Prof.	(Former) Journalist	4	2	1	27	14	11	44	0	103
	Other	30	6	4	50	44	42	70	1	247
Sex	Men	15	3	3	42	13	20	45	1	142
	Women	19	3	2	34	45	32	69	0	204
	X	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	4
Age	18-30	27	4	3	37	44	25	63	1	204
	31-40	3	2	0	15	6	7	17	0	50
	41-50	4	2	1	9	4	10	17	0	47
	51-60	0	0	1	8	3	4	12	0	28
	60+	0	0	0	8	1	7	5	0	21
Total		34	8	5	77	58	53	114	1	350*

*Missing values N = 33

The genres that respondents who did not specify their gender listed are adventure, biography, and crime. Biography and crime were reported most by respondents of 31 years or older

whereas action and comedy were listed most by respondents between 18 and 30 years old (27 for action or 13.2% and 44 for comedy or 21.6%) (*Table 33*).

4.4.2. Profiles and Representation

Respondents with another profession listed most plots more frequently except investigative, scoop journalism and the combinations that were more listed by (former) journalists (53 for investigative or 56.4%, 8 for scoop journalism or 8.5%, and 6 for the combinations or 6.4%). Men listed the plots investigative (71 or 53.8%), corruption (4 or 3.0%) and the combinations (7 or 5.3%) more often than women (73 for investigative or 40.6%, 2 for corruption or 1.1% and 8 for the combinations or 4.4%).

Younger respondents listed all plots more often except promotion which is more equally divided and investigative which was most listed by respondents who are 60 years or older (3 or 17.6% versus 29.3% or lower for other age categories) (*Table 34*).

Table 34. Demographic Information Respondents – Plot (absolute values on second level)

		Promo.	Invest.	War Corr.	Scoop.	Back.	Corrup.	Activ.	Combi	Total
Prof.	(Former) Journalist	17	53	1	8	6	1	2	6	94
	Other	60	94	4	8	31	5	11	9	222
Sex	Men	26	71	2	6	13	4	3	7	132
	Women	51	73	3	9	24	2	10	8	180
	X	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Age	18-30	48	72	4	13	28	4	11	10	190
	31-40	12	22	0	2	3	1	0	1	41
	41-50	7	24	1	1	3	1	2	3	42
	51-60	7	15	0	0	3	0	0	1	26
	60+	3	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
Total		77	147	5	16	37	6	13	15	316*

*Missing values N = 67

(Former) journalists listed titles with more than 2 journalists more often (72 or 75.0%) than respondents with another profession who listed titles with 1 (57 or 27.0%) or 2 (27 or 12.8%) journalists more frequently. Women and respondents that did not specify their sex listed titles with only one journalist more often (48 or 28.4% for women and 2 or 66.7% for unspecified) than men who listed titles with 2 or more journalists more often (17 or 12.6% for 2 journalists and 95 or 70.4% for 2 or more journalists) (*Table 35*).

Table 35. Demographic Information Respondents – Number Journalists (absolute values on second level)

		1	2	More than 2	Total
Prof.	(Former) Journalist	16	8	72	96
	Other	57	27	127	211
Sex	Men	23	17	95	135
	Women	48	18	103	169
	X	2	0	1	3
Total		73	35	199	307*

*Missing values N = 76

Both (former) journalists as respondents with another profession portray similar percentages when it concerns titles with both male and female journalists (142 or 64.8% for respondents with another profession and 60 or 65.9% for (former) journalists). But (former) journalists listed titles with only male journalists more often (25 or 27.5%) than respondents with another profession who listed titles with only female journalists more often (28 or 12.8%). A similar trend is noticeable with regard to the sex of respondents as there is little difference in titles listed with both male and female journalists (87 or 68.0% for male respondents and 114 or 64.0% for female respondents). However, female respondents listed titles with only female journalists more often (24 or 13.5%) than male respondents who listed titles with only male journalists more often (32 or 25.0%). Respondents who did not specify their sex listed titles with only male journalists most often (2 or 50%). Respondents older than 60 listed titles with only male journalists more often (9 or 45.0%) than other age categories (37.0% or lower) (*Table 36*).

Table 36. Demographic Information Respondents – Sex Journalists (absolute values on second level)

		Both Male and Female	Only Male	Only Female	Total
Prof.	(Former)	60	25	6	91
	Journalist				
	Other	142	49	28	219
Sex	Men	87	32	9	128
	Women	114	40	24	178
	X	1	2	1	4
Age	18-30	115	34	27	176
	31-40	33	10	1	44
	41-50	28	11	4	43
	51-60	17	10	0	27
	60+	9	9	2	20
Total		202	74	34	310*

*Missing values N = 73

(Former) journalists seem to have attributed a leading role to male journalists more often (55 or 67.9% versus 109 or 58.9%) than respondents with another profession who attributed a leading role more often to female journalists (122 or 73.1% versus 43 or 69,4%). Men also attribute a leading role more often to male journalists (85 or 71.4% versus 77 or 53.5%) whereas women attributed a side role more often (67 or 46.5% versus 34 or 28,6%). Men attributed a leading role more often to female journalists than women who attributed a side role more often (68 or 73,1% and 25 or 26,9% versus 96 or 71.6% and 38 or 28.4%). Older respondents more frequently attributed a side role to female journalists than younger respondents (*Table 37*).

Table 37. Demographic Information Respondents – Sex Journalists (absolute values on second level)

		Leading		Side		Total	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
Prof.	(Former) Journalist	55	43	26	19	81	62
	Other	109	122	76	45	185	167
Sex	Men	85	68	34	25	119	93
	Women	77	96	67	38	144	134
	X	2	1	1	1	3	2
Age	18-30	83	104	61	36	144	140
	31-40	29	21	11	10	40	31
	41-50	20	26	19	6	39	32
	51-60	20	9	6	6	26	15
	60+	12	5	5	6	17	11
Minority	Not a Minority	150	145	85	58	235	203
	Sexual Minority	14	20	16	5	30	25
	Ethnic Minority	0	0	1	1	1	1
Total		164	165	102	64	266*	229**

*Missing values is N = 117

**Missing values is N = 154

Respondents with no minority identity most often attributed a leading role to male (150 or 63.8%) journalists whereas respondents with a minority identity most often attributed a side role to male journalists (1 or 100% for respondents with an ethnic minority identity and 16 or 53.3% for respondents with a sexual minority identity). However, for female journalists, respondents with a sexual minority identity attributed a leading role most often (20 or 80.0%) whereas respondents with an ethnic minority identity still attributed a side role most often (1 or 100.0%) (Table 37).

Respondents with another profession more frequently listed titles with no minority (116 or 76.8%) than (former) journalists who listed all minority categories more often. Men listed titles with journalists without a minority identity more often (59 or 77.6%) than women.

Respondents who did not specify their sex most often listed titles with no journalist with a minority identity (3 or 75.0%) (Table 38).

Table 38. Demographic Information Respondents – Titles with Journalists with a Minority Identity (absolute values on second level)

		No Minority	Only Ethnic	Only Sexual	Both Ethnic and Sexual	Total
Prof.	(Former) Journalist	37	11	5	7	60
	Other	116	24	3	8	151
Sex	Men	59	10	3	4	76
	Women	91	24	5	11	131
	X	3	1	0	0	4
Age	18-30	81	24	2	8	115
	31-40	22	4	1	4	31
	41-50	23	5	3	1	32
	51-60	14	1	2	2	19
	60+	13	1	0	0	14
Minority	Not a Minority	133	30	7	12	182
	Sexual Minority	18	5	1	3	27
	Ethnic Minority	2	0	0	0	2
Total		153	35	8	15	211*

*Missing values is N = 172

The older the respondent, the less likely they listed a title with a minority identity. Respondents with a sexual minority listed titles with a journalist with only an ethnic (5 or 18.5%) or both an ethnic and sexual minority identity (3 or 11.1%) more often whereas respondents without a minority identity listed titles with only a sexual minority more frequently (7 or 3.8%). However, there is only a small difference with respondents with a sexual minority identity (1 or 3.7%). Respondents with an ethnic minority identity listed no titles with journalists with a minority identity (Table 38).

Respondents with no minority identity more often attributed a leading role to journalists with a minority identity (14 or 29,2%) than respondents with a minority identity (1 or 10.0% for respondents with a sexual minority identity, respondents with an ethnic minority identity did not list titles with journalists with a minority identity).

Concerning the free press myth, (former) journalists indicated that they perceived a title that portrayed free press myth strong more often (61 or 59.2%) than respondents with another profession (109 or 44.1%) who more often perceived free press myth moderate (116 or 47.0%) and weak (22 or 8.9%). The same trend is visible for women who more often perceived free press myth moderate (95 or 46.6%) and weak (19 or 9.3%) than men and respondents who did not specify their gender. The last 2 groups most often perceived free press myth strong (77 or 54.2% for men and 3 or 75.0% for unspecified).

Older respondents more frequently perceived free press myth strong than younger respondents (17 or 81.0% for 60+ versus 75 or 36.8% for respondents between 18 and 30). Younger respondents more often perceived free press myth moderate and weak. Respondents between 18 and 30 years old were also the only group that perceived free press myth moderate more often than free press myth strong (108 or 52.9% versus 75 or 36.8%) whereas it was the opposite for the other groups.

Last, both respondents with no minority identity as respondents with a sexual minority identity identified free press myth strong most often (150 or 48.9% and 19 or 48.7%) but respondents with an ethnic minority identity perceived free press myth moderate most often (2 or 50.0%). Free press myth weak was also more often perceived by respondents with an ethnic minority identity (1 or 25%) followed by respondents with a sexual minority identity (5 or 12.8%) (*Table 39*).

Table 39. Demographic Information Respondents – Free Press Myth (absolute values on second level)

		Strong	Moderate	Weak	Total
Prof.	(Former) Journalist	61	36	6	103
	Other	109	116	22	247
Sex	Men	77	56	9	142
	Women	90	95	19	204
	X	3	1	0	4
Age	18-30	75	108	21	204
	31-40	32	17	1	50
	41-50	26	15	6	47
	51-60	20	8	0	28
	60+	17	4	0	21
Minority	Not a Minority	150	135	22	307
	Sexual Minority	19	15	5	39
	Ethnic Minority	1	2	1	4
Total		170	152	28	350*

*Missing values is N = 33

5. Discussion

5.1. General Reflection

The previous sections discussed the analysis of the database on both the first level with verified data and the second level with subjective data of the respondents. We analysed 124 unique titles most of which are series. This confirms the importance of taking into account series when analysing the journalism genre, especially when also including non-American titles as most of those titles are series.

The database most prominently included recent titles released after 2010. The genres we encountered correspond with previous research stating that titles with representations of journalism are most often drama and comedy (Ehrlich, 1997), especially for American and Belgian titles. However, based on the titles in this database we can also add crime and biography to that list of which crime was most often encountered for countries other than Belgium and the United States, more specifically Scandinavian countries.

With regard to the plots, the investigative and promotion plots were encountered most. Promotion concerns journalists who are focused on their job and are challenged to work hard and compete with their co-workers for a promotion. They often have trouble with balancing their work with their private life and might have a love interest that makes keeping that balance more challenging. Investigative focuses on journalists who attempt to uncover a mystery (e.g. a murder, a scandal). They might go undercover, work with the police or even put their lives in danger to get the facts and expose them. Background and scoop journalism were also frequently encountered. Background concerns titles in which journalism is not the primary focus. It can be one of the characters' jobs on which the story does not predominantly focus or it can be a journalist or group of journalists that are represented to move the story along. Scoop Journalism features journalists who are desperate to get a scoop and will do anything including harassing people to get it. This often includes sensational news and gossip. The journalist can be represented as an individual or as part of a 'mob'. However, respondents indicated having encountered the first two plots more often and the last two less often than the verified data.

This confirms previous research in which these different representations were encountered (Ehrlich, 1997, 2005, 2006, 2015; Saltzman, 2003; Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2011b) and partly overlaps with the classification of journalists as discussed by Saltzman (2003). It also underlines that as most titles in the database were released after 2010, the plots still recur, and the journalism genre has a rather stable syntax (Ehrlich, 1997, 2005).

In addition, older titles were more often classified as investigative and promotion whereas more recent titles were more often classified as scoop journalism and corruption. As stated above, this could indicate that either journalists who disregard ethical standards are more present in recent titles or that the recent titles that respondents recall consist of such journalists whereas the titles released before 2000 that they recall do not. The latter could mean that positive representations of journalism are more easily retained in the long-term memory of the respondents. In addition, the titles that were listed multiple times were more often classified as investigative and promotion which could indicate that titles with these plots more easily become part of the collective memory. However, further research is needed to confirm this.

When focusing on the Belgian titles, we noticed that these were more frequently classified as scoop journalism and background in comparison to other countries. The United States and the United Kingdom even scored lowest of all countries within the category scoop journalism. This indicates a difference between the journalism genre in Belgium and the journalism genre in other countries.

Concerning the diversity in characters, most titles represent more than 2 and both male and female journalists. If only one journalist is included, it is more often a man. Female journalists more frequently receive a leading role than male journalists when only one sex is represented, however, this was not perceived as such by respondents who thought both men and women more often received a leading role than a side role when only one sex is represented. They also indicated that women, when they are represented, most often have a leading role whereas men more often have a leading role when no women are represented.

Female journalists are most frequently represented in the plots investigative, promotion, scoop journalism and background whereas male journalist in the plots investigative, background and scoop journalism. Respondents placed female journalists less often in investigative than in the other plots whereas they placed male journalists more often in investigative and scoop journalism. As such, women are not underrepresented in the genre and are assigned leading roles but still seem to be placed in the 'serious roles' less often than men (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017). However, we cannot conclude anything about the representational practices of female journalists in the titles without an in-depth analysis.

In addition, it appears that female journalists are more represented in recent titles in comparison to older ones as also stated by McNair (2011b, 2014). Specifically for the genre war correspondent, there were no titles in which only male journalists were represented, but there were titles in which only female journalists were represented. This could also indicate a trend towards more representation of female journalists in titles with this specific plot.

In general, fewer journalists are represented in a leading role in the recent movies in the database. This could indicate that either recent titles portray journalists more often in a side role in which the difference with titles before 2000 is the largest for male journalists or that respondents recall titles with journalists with a side role better when these are recent. However, there is a difference between the first and second levels of analysis as respondents indicated that women appear more often in leading roles in titles after 2000 whereas men appear less often in such roles after 2000. Concerning the country of production titles from the United States represented both male and female journalists most often in leading roles whereas titles from Belgium tended to represent female journalists most often in side roles. This contrasted with the data that respondents listed as they indicated that titles from all countries more often portray female journalists in a leading role and male journalists in a side role with the exception of the United States. This points out a contrast between the actual representation of journalists and how they are perceived by Flemish respondents.

There is little representation of journalists with a minority identity, but they are present. This confirms research that stated that these characters are present in the genre but are still underrepresented (Ehrlich, 2019). The most present categories are journalists with only an

ethnic or both an ethnic and sexual minority identity. Most of these characters were represented in titles from the United Kingdom or the United States. These characters were also most often represented in a leading role. However, respondents indicated that more journalists with a minority were represented than the verified data but did report them more often in a side role.

The representation of journalists with a minority identity mainly occurs in titles after 2010. However, respondents also reported such titles in the other time periods. This could indicate that respondents do not recall the presence of journalists with a minority identity correctly but assume that these categories will likely be present in the titles in the database, more specifically in recent titles.

Journalists with a minority identity are more frequently portrayed in the plots corruption, scoop journalism, activism and war correspondent than journalists with no minority identity. Respondents did not report any titles with journalists with a minority identity with the plot corruption again underlining a difference between the recall of the respondents and the verified data.

5.2. Appearance of the Free Press Myth

Concerning the presence of the free press myth, most respondents perceived it to be strongly present in the database. This indicates that journalism in most titles is represented as an exciting profession that is powerful and necessary and that journalists behave ethically, are reliable and put the public good before the commercial. This confirms previous research that stated that the journalism genre engages in disseminating the free press myth in which a privately owned, market-driven press is necessary for the functioning of democracy (Ehrlich, 2005, p. 103).

For titles before 2000 and after 2010, the free press myth is most strongly present whereas between 2000 and 2010 more moderately. Especially in titles that originated from the United States and Europe (not including Belgium), the myth is strongly present. However, for titles from Belgium and the United Kingdom the free press myth is more moderately present. Titles in which the free press myth was weakly present were also most often encountered for

Belgium and the United Kingdom. This indicates that respondents recognized the free press myth less in titles from these countries and therefore underlines the need to also take into account other countries than the United States when studying the journalism genre.

Especially movies and the biography genre seem to be classified with press myth strong whereas comedy seems to be least classified with strong and most with moderate. Respondents perceived the free press myth most strongly present for more positive representations of journalism such as the plots investigative and war correspondent followed by activism and promotion. For scoop journalism, the moderate presence of the free press myth was most encountered and free press myth weak was highest for corruption.

The higher the number of journalists presented in the title, the stronger the free press myth is present. When both male and female journalists are represented, the title is most often classified with free press myth strong. If only female journalists are present, free press myth moderate is most encountered and the percentage of free press myth weak is highest. For titles with only male journalists, there is not much difference between free press myth strong and moderate. When journalists appear in side roles, free press myth moderate is encountered most often and the percentage of free press myth weak is highest. When they appear in a leading role, free press myth strong is more frequently encountered for male journalists than for female journalists. This indicates that if (only) male journalists appear in a leading role, the titles are more often perceived as strongly representing the free press myth, whereas this is less the case for female journalists. This means that respondents perceive journalism in the titles in which only female journalists appear as less powerful, necessary, ethical, and reliable than when their male counterparts are represented.

When journalists without a minority identity or journalists with both an ethnic and sexual minority identity are represented, the free press myth is most often strongly present. When only one of the minority identities is represented, free press myth strong and moderate are more equally represented. Independent of whether journalists with a minority identity are represented in a leading role or not, free press myth strong is most present.

Some titles in the database stood out as they were listed by 10 respondents or more. Those titles did not include Belgian titles but were all American or co-productions with the United

States and were all, except 1 title, movies. Respondents answered unanimously for most of the cases stating that the plots investigative and promotion were most present, and more than 2 journalists were represented in the top-listed titles. There was only 1 title released before 2000 that was also the only title that did not represent female journalists according to most respondents. There are only 2 top-listed Belgian titles that are all series and can be classified with the plots scoop journalism and background. These titles also represent less than 2 journalists, or respondents could not agree on the number of journalists. Those titles both portray journalists in a side role and one does not portray female journalists. Both the American as Belgian top-listed titles were not very diverse as only 1 American and 1 Belgian title represents journalists with a minority identity. Both represent them in side roles. The free press myth was for most of the top-listed titles strongly present but was not encountered for the Belgian titles for which free press moderate was most present.

5.3. Different Flemish Profiles

Some respondents listed multiple cases and are therefore included multiple times in this analysis. In total there were 383 entries of which 33 missing values as these respondents did not finish the entire survey. Most of the respondents were not (former) journalists, were young, women and did not have a minority identity. The (former) journalists were a little bit older than the other respondents as they were more often between 31 and 40 years old.

The older respondents listed older titles more often. Women and (former) journalists listed more often series and titles that originated from Belgium and the United Kingdom whereas men and respondents with another profession listed more often movies and titles from the United States and Europe.

The genres biography and drama were most often listed by (former) journalists and comedy, crime and drama were most often listed by women. Older respondents listed biography and crime more often in comparison to younger respondents who listed action and comedy more often.

(Former) journalists, older respondents and men more often listed the plots investigative, corruption, scoop journalism and combinations of those plots. They also more often listed

titles with more than 2 and only male journalists in a leading role. Older respondents attributed a side role more often to female journalists.

Older respondents, men and respondents with another profession less frequently listed titles with journalists with a minority identity. Respondents with a minority identity less often reported journalists with a minority identity than respondents without a minority identity.

With regard to the free press myth, (former) journalists, older respondents, men and respondents who did not specify their gender perceived the free press myth to be strongly present more often whereas younger respondents and women, more often perceived it to be moderately present. Respondents with a minority identity, especially with an ethnic minority identity, perceived the free press myth to be moderately and weakly present more often than respondents without a minority identity.

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to uncover what the journalism genre in Flanders looks like by researching how journalism is represented in fiction movies and series that are considered important by Flemish journalists and the Flemish public. To do so, we conducted a descriptive analysis on a layered database that was constructed based on a survey we sent out to the Flemish public and Flemish journalists.

The analysis pointed out that representations of journalism in fiction movies and series from the United States play an important role in Flanders. Nevertheless, titles from other countries, including Belgium and more specifically Flanders, also occurred. In relation to the first sub-question 'How does the information on the plot and characters differ according to the production context?', we noticed a clear difference between the Flemish and American titles. First, non-American productions were most often series. Second, whereas the plots and genres that were also linked to the journalism genre by previous research were encountered - confirming the stable syntax of the genre - the Flemish titles seemed to be classified with plots concerning the sensational sides of journalism more often than the American titles both by the verified data as the respondents. This indicates that the country of origin has an impact on how journalism is presented and perceived in Flanders. In addition, there is more diversity in the plots within the recent titles in the database whereas the older titles mostly concerned representations of investigative journalists or journalists who attempt to make it in the profession. This could indicate that these plots are more easily retained in the long-term memory but should be confirmed by further research. Concerning the characters, previous research that stated that women are more equally represented in comparison to other genres and are also increasingly represented throughout the years was confirmed. However, similar to that research, we noticed that when female journalists are represented, this is less often the case in the more 'serious' plots such as investigative journalism than male journalists. We also encountered a difference between the countries of production as Flemish titles seem to portray female journalists less often in a leading role, however, the difference is small. In addition, we noticed that the recent titles included fewer journalists (both male and female) in a leading role which could also correlate with the long-term memory or point to a trend in the genre. Last, journalists with a minority identity are included in the titles in the database

(most often in those released after 2010 and in titles from the UK or US) but the representations remain rare. Nevertheless, if they are represented, they most often appear in a leading role. This could confirm that the journalism genre addresses social concerns such as the changing roles of ethnic and sexual minorities (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). However, they are more frequently represented in plots concerning corruption, sensationalism, and activism than journalists without a minority identity. Differences between the verified data and the data of respondents were encountered, especially concerning the information on the characters.

In relation to the second sub-question 'Is the representation of journalism perceived differently by the Flemish public and journalists depending on the information on the plot and characters and the production context?', we noticed that, in general, the free press myth was strongly present in the database. This indicates that the American conceptualization of what journalism is and should be is also consumed and perceived in Flanders. However, when looking at the Flemish and British titles, this myth was more moderately perceived. In addition, these were also the countries of production with most titles in which the myth was only weakly present. Titles with plots concerning investigative journalists, war correspondents and activism were most often perceived as strongly disseminating the free press myth. This indicates that the country of production and the plot of a title affect how respondents perceive journalism and that titles from different countries do not necessarily disseminate this American journalism ideal. Concerning the characters, the free press myth was most often only moderate or even weakly present when only female journalists were represented whereas this was not encountered if only male journalists were represented. Which role the journalists play also affects the perception as the myth was perceived to be more strongly present if they were portrayed in a leading role. However, again this trend was less encountered for female journalists in a leading role. Whether journalists with a minority identity were represented or not and which role they embodied had little influence on how respondents perceived the title.

Last, we attempted to answer the third sub-question 'How does the data differ among respondents with different demographic characteristics including profession, sex, age and (non-)minority identity?' We noticed a difference between (former) journalists and

respondents with another profession. The first category, similar to women, opted to list series from Belgium or the United Kingdom most often whereas the second category, similar to men, opted to list movies from the United States or Europe most often. The titles listed by (former) journalists more frequently consisted of plots including investigative journalism, sensationalism, and corruption with two or more, often only male, journalists. Older respondents and men listed the same kind of titles, but older respondents tended to assign a side role to female journalists more often than other age groups. Older respondents also preferred the crime genre more than the other groups who listed more titles with the genre action and comedy. The respondents who listed most titles with respondents with a minority identity were not the respondents with a minority identity, but the younger and female respondents without a minority identity. Concerning the free press myth, men, older respondents, and (former) journalists most often perceived the free press myth to be strongly present whereas the other categories perceived it more moderately. This indicates that the profession, sex, age and (non-)minority identity of respondents influences which titles and plots they recall and how they perceive the representation of journalism in those titles. The most apparent differences were encountered for the type, the country of production, the plot, the characters, and the presence of the free press myth.

With regard to the main research question ‘How is journalism represented in fiction movies and series that are considered important by Flemish journalists and the Flemish public?’, we can conclude that journalism in fiction movies and series that are considered important by Flemish journalists and the Flemish public is represented quite similar to what was already encountered by previous research due to the high number of American titles in the database. This confirms that these titles could play an important role in shaping the perceptions of journalism in Flanders. However, other countries of production were also included of which the analysis indicated that these do differ from the American titles, especially concerning the plot and the presence of the free press myth, and thus also differ from the results of previous research. Nevertheless, they could also aid in shaping the perception of journalism in Flanders. In addition, the intersectional perspective revealed differences between the representation of male and female journalists and journalists with a minority identity such as the plots in which they are represented and whether or not they were portrayed in a leading role depending on the year of release and country of production. Here again, taking into account

other countries than the United States has proven to be important as titles from different countries approach the representation of intersectional characters differently. Last, not only the country of production plays a role in how journalism is portrayed and perceived but also the demographic information of respondents. This research uncovered a difference between which titles are listed and how journalism is perceived by not only journalists and non-journalists but also men and women, older and younger respondents, and respondents with and without a minority identity.

As this research consisted of a descriptive analysis of a database constructed by a select number of Flemish respondents and did not concern a more in-depth statistical analysis, no significant correlations could be exposed. However, for this research this is not necessarily a problem as the intent was to form a foundation for further research into the journalism genre in Flanders. As we confirmed that American fiction movies and series about journalism are also highly important in Flanders, this merits further investigation. In addition, the difference between American and non-American titles and respondents with different demographic characteristics indicates that this an interesting research topic that has yet to be further explored in this context. Therefore, we will continue this research. First, by conducting in-depth textual analyses of a select number of titles in this database and second, by conducting focus groups and in-depth interviews with the Flemish public and journalists. This research was the first step in uncovering the influence of the representational practices of the journalism genre on the perception of journalism in Flanders.

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8. Attachments

8.1. Survey

This survey consists of twelve blocks and was conducted in Dutch. All the respondents were shown the first and last block. The first block distinguished which international and/or Flemish fiction movies and series the respondents could recall. The following ten blocks consist of the same questions and are linked to the cases inserted in the first block. For every movie or series the respondents entered, they were shown the corresponding block with the same questions (e.g. a respondent recalled two international cases and one Flemish case so was shown three blocks with the same questions). As such respondents were shown at least one block and at most ten blocks. However, at the end of the survey, they were provided the chance to add additional cases. The last block concluded the survey with questions concerning the demographic information of the respondents. As ten of the twelve blocks consist of identical questions, we will only include one block as an example below. The display logics are marked in yellow and the questions that required a response are marked in red with FR (Force Response).

Block 1

Q0 Deze vragenlijst kadert in een onderzoek van de VUB en UGent naar de representatie van journalisten in fictiefilms en fictieseries. Hiervoor willen we te weten komen welke films en series met journalisten als personage u kent en belangrijk vindt. De vragenlijst neemt slechts 5 minuten van uw tijd in beslag. Uw antwoorden en gegevens worden anoniem verwerkt.

Door deel te nemen aan deze vragenlijst bevestigt u dat u bovenstaande informatie hebt gelezen, 18 jaar of ouder bent, en toestemming geeft om uw antwoorden anoniem te verwerken en analyseren.

Indien u vragen heeft, kan u ons bereiken via volgend e-mailadres:
Maxine.Vanessa.G.De.Wulf.Helskens@vub.be

Page Break

Q1.0 We willen graag weten welke fictiefilms/series met journalisten als personage u kent en belangrijk vindt. Bij de volgende vragen krijgt u eerst de kans om de titels van internationale fictiefilms en/of series te noteren en daarna de titels van Vlaamse fictiefilms en/of series.

**Let op: Wij zijn op zoek naar fictiefilms en series vanaf het jaar 2000 die u zelf bekeken heeft.*

Q1.1 Hoeveel internationale* fictiefilms en/of series met journalisten als personage kent u?

**Hier zijn we op zoek naar films/series die niet in Vlaanderen werden gemaakt* FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / Meer dan 5 (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

Page Break

Q1.1.0 Noteer hieronder de titels van de internationale fictiefilms en/of series met journalisten als personage.

**Indien u de titel van de film/serie niet meer weet, kan u een kernwoord invullen. U krijgt later de kans een omschrijving in te vullen op basis waarvan wij kunnen trachten te achterhalen welke film of serie u bedoelt.*

Q1.1.1 Wat is de titel van uw eerste internationale fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak (zie 'titel case' block 2-11)

(Toon als Q1.1 = 1 of 2 of 3 of 4 of 5 of Meer dan 5)

Q1.1.2 Wat is de titel van uw tweede internationale fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.1 = 2 of 3 of 4 of 5 of Meer dan 5)

Q1.1.3 Wat is de titel van uw derde internationale fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.1 = 3 of 4 of 5 of Meer dan 5)

Q1.1.4 Wat is de titel van uw vierde internationale fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.1 = 4 of 5 of Meer dan 5)

Q1.1.5 Wat is de titel van uw vijfde internationale fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.1 = 5 of Meer dan 5)

Page Break

Q1.2 Hoeveel Vlaamse* fictiefilms en/of series met journalisten als personage kent u?

**Hier zijn we op zoek naar films/series die in Vlaanderen werden gemaakt* FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / Meer dan 5 (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

Page Break

Q1.2.1 Wat is de titel van uw eerste Vlaamse fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.2 = 1 of 2 of 3 of 4 of 5 of Meer dan 5)

Q1.2.2 Wat is de titel van uw tweede Vlaamse fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.2 = 2 of 3 of 4 of 5 of Meer dan 5)

Q1.2.3 Wat is de titel van uw derde Vlaamse fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.2 = 3 of 4 of 5 of Meer dan 5)

Q1.2.4 Wat is de titel van uw vierde Vlaamse fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.2 = 4 of 5 of Meer dan 5)

Q1.2.5 Wat is de titel van uw vijfde Vlaamse fictiefilm/serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

(Toon als Q1.2 = 5 of Meer dan 5)

Page Break

Block 2 - 11:

I1.0 Beantwoord nu voor 'titel case' onderstaande vragen.

I1.1 Is 'titel case' een film of serie? FR

Antwoordmogelijkheden: film / serie / Ik weet het niet (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

I1.2 Waar speelt het verhaal van 'titel case' zich af? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: in België / in een ander Europees land dan België (specifieer) / in de Verenigde Staten / in een ander internationaal land dan de Verenigde Staten / Ik weet het niet (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

I1.3 Omschrijf hier kort de verhaallijn van 'titel case' en specificeer welke rol journalisten hierin spelen. **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstvak

I1.4 Duid op onderstaande schaal met tegengestelde termen aan hoe journalistiek volgens u wordt voorgesteld in 'titel case'? **FR**

**Voorbeeld: Journalistiek wordt voorgesteld als: zeer machtig - matig machtig - matig machteloos - zeer machteloos.*

Antwoordmogelijkheden: machtig-machteloos / noodzakelijk-overbodig / spannend-saai / ethisch-onethisch / betrouwbaar-onbetrouwbaar / commerciële belang voorop-publieke belang voorop (schaal van 1 tot 4 per tegengestelde)

Page Break

I1.5 Hoeveel journalisten zitten in 'titel case'? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: 1 / 2 / Meer dan 2 / Ik weet het niet (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

Page Break

I1.6 Zitten er vrouwelijke journalisten in 'titel case'? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Enkel mannelijke journalisten / Enkel vrouwelijke journalisten / Zowel mannelijke en vrouwelijke journalisten (Toon als I1.5 = 2 of Meer dan 2) / Ik weet het niet (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

I1.7 Zitten er journalisten in 'titel case' die behoren tot een minoriteitsgroep (etniciteit, seksuele oriëntatie...)? **FR**

*LHBT staat voor lesbisch, homoseksueel, biseksueel en transgender

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Nee / Ja, etnische minderheid / Ja, LHBT-minderheid / Ja, ander (specifieer) / Ik weet het niet (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

Page Break

I1.8 Welke rol hebben de mannelijke journalisten in 'titel case'? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Hoofdrol (duid aan indien minimum 1 journalist een hoofdrol heeft) / Bijrol / Ik weet het niet (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

(Toon als I1.6 = Enkel mannelijke journalisten of Zowel mannelijke en vrouwelijke journalisten)

I1.9 Welke rol hebben de vrouwelijke journalisten in 'titel case'? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Hoofdrol (duid aan indien minimum 1 journalist een hoofdrol heeft) / Bijrol / Ik weet het niet (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

(Toon als I1.6 = Enkel vrouwelijke journalisten of Zowel mannelijke en vrouwelijke journalisten)

I1.10 Welke rol hebben de journalisten die behoren tot een minoriteitsgroep in 'titel case'? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Hoofdrol (duid aan indien minimum 1 journalist een hoofdrol heeft) / Bijrol / Ik weet het niet (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

(Toon als I1.7 = Ja, etnische minderheid of Ja, LHBT-minderheid of Ja, ander)

I1.11 Wilt u zelf nog iets toevoegen over de manier waarop journalisten worden afgebeeld in 'titel case'?

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstveld

Page Break

Block 12

Q2.0.0 Indien u tijdens het invullen van de vragenlijst aan nog andere fictiefilms en series dacht met journalisten als personage, kan u die hieronder noteren.

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Open tekstveld

Page Break

Q2.0 U bent bijna aan het einde van de vragenlijst. De laatste vragen gaan over uw persoonlijke gegevens. De antwoorden worden anoniem verwerkt.

Q2.1 Bent u een (voormalig) journalist? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Ja, ik ben (voormalig) journalist / Nee, ander beroep (specificeer) / Nee, student (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

Q2.2 Wat is uw geslacht? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Man / Vrouw / X (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

Q2.3 Wat is uw leeftijd? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: 18-30 / 31-40 / 41-50 / 51-60 / 60+ (slechts 1 antwoord mogelijk)

Q2.4 Behoort u tot een minoriteitsgroep? **FR**

Antwoordmogelijkheden: Nee / Ja, etnische minderheid / Ja, LHBT-minderheid / Ja, ander (verduidelijk) (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

Q2.5 Indien u graag zou deelnemen aan een vervolgstudie van dit onderzoek, kan u hieronder uw e-mailadres noteren (dit is niet verplicht).

Antwoordmogelijkheden: open tekstveld

End of Survey

