

Exploring Representation of Journalism and the Free Press Myth
in Flemish and International Fictional Movies and Series

By

Maxine De Wulf Helskens (1)
Sarah Van Leuven (2)
Frederik Dhaenens (3)
Ghent University

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 words constitute a memorable quote from the renowned movie *The Post* (2017, Steven Spielberg). This case is one of many fiction films and series about journalism in which the democratic responsibility of journalists is stressed and illustrates how fiction movies and series engage with the role of journalism in a democratic society. These representations affect the public perception of journalism, including the credibility and public trust of journalists (Saltzman, 2005; Painter, 2019). Therefore, popular culture is a powerful tool for thinking about what journalism is and should be.

First, these fictional portrayals aid in discursively constructing journalistic roles that manifest themselves in assumptions and expectations about appropriate and legitimate ways of journalistic practice (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Research has illustrated that journalism fiction disseminates an ideology aligned with the 20th-century social responsibility model of the institution of the press, often referred to as the "free press myth" (Ehrlich, 2005). Second, fictional representations of journalism can be considered a symbolic prop to address the changing roles of female and minority journalists (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Nonetheless, research demonstrates that there is not only a lack of diversity in non-fictional newsrooms but also in the fictional representation of journalism, including a reproduction of gender and racial

stereotypes in the (fictional) newsroom (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017; Van Leuven et al., 2019).

Existing research on journalism in popular culture is heavily oriented towards the United States of America and does not take into account how journalism fiction is produced and received in other countries. Even though Painter (2019) stated that the majority of movies and series about journalism originate in the U.S. and promote American values, other countries and regions with different media and political systems and sociocultural contexts also produce stories about journalism. As such, what the free press myth entails can be entirely different in countries with, for example, strong public broadcasting systems. Still, these non-American journalism representations have not been extensively studied yet – with the exception of several studies into journalism fiction in the U.K. which has a comparable media system to the U.S. - and the results of the existing American studies cannot be generalized.

Therefore, this paper uses a mixed-method approach to study how journalists are represented and perceived in fiction movies and television series released between 2000 and 2021 consumed in Flanders, Belgium. This region is selected because of its specific media and political system, which results in a unique journalistic culture divided amongst its three different language communities: Flanders (Dutch), Wallonia (French), and the German-speaking community (German) (Raats et al., 2015; Mertens & Standaert, 2017). Belgium also has a unique film industry that is - like its media and political systems - divided amongst its language borders constituting small markets for the dissemination of popular culture, resulting in limited budgets and scale problems (Raats et al., 2015). Because of the differences between the language communities that make generalizing results regarding media and journalism in Belgium impossible, we opted to focus only on Flanders instead of the entire country.

Flanders is part of a strong social welfare region that considers media companies (public and to a lesser extent commercial) to be social institutions for which the state is (partially) responsible. As such, in contrast to the U.S., there is a fairly high amount of state intervention, constituting a strong public broadcasting system and lower levels of commercial pressure. Nevertheless, the high amount of state intervention co-exists with self-regulation and freedom of the press enforced by the constitution. Concerning the film industry, Flanders is characterized "by immense popularity of domestic content and a relatively strong production sector" (Raats et al., 2015 p. 1) due to its cultural state program, which supports approximately 80% of domestic film production. This provides an alternative for foreign (i.e., Hollywood) popular culture in terms of the cultural values and ideology that are disseminated (Willems, 2016).

First, by using a survey (N=150), we studied which fiction movies and television series that represent journalists Flemish audiences recalled and which manifest data of these movies and series they remembered (e.g., plot, diversity in characters, journalistic roles). This resulted in a database of 124 unique cases, consisting of 101 international productions and 23 Flemish productions (no productions from other Belgian regions were mentioned) on which we performed a descriptive statistical analysis. Second, using critical textual analysis, we examined the two top-listed international (*The Post & Spotlight*) and Flemish (*De Dag & De Twaalf*) productions and data mentioned by Flemish audiences in relation to the free press myth and diversity in journalism. This study should by no means be interpreted as aiming to uncover all facets of how Flemish audiences make sense of journalism fiction, but instead should be considered a valuable explorative study to form the foundation for upcoming research into this topic and region. In what follows, we first situate this study vis-à-vis previous (predominantly American) research into journalism fiction.

The American Journalist and the Free Press Myth

Popular culture is not neutral but infused with ideological assumptions. Within cultural studies, ideology is considered a conceptual framework to give meaning to and interpret events and the world around us. Fiction movies and series are purveyors of ideology. They contribute to public opinion about journalists in real life and influence the values, norms, and practices of the journalistic profession (Ehrlich, 1997; Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2011a; Peters, 2015; Painter, 2019). According to Schatz ((1981, p. 261), movies are "the central myth-making medium" where societies articulate, explore, interrogate, and critique norms and values. As such representations of journalism in fiction similarly explore and critique journalistic norms and 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). Studies into American journalism fiction found that movies and series continue to disseminate "the free press myth." This myth refers to an ideological framework consisting 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 framework can be considered a myth as it is expressed in fiction movies and series through recurring characteristics such as the representation of journalists as heroes and/or villains, the negotiation between positive and negative portrayals of the press, and the representation of conflicting values such as objectivity versus subjectivity in news production, cynicism versus idealism, life-work balance, and the public interest versus the corporate and private interest (Zynda, 1979;

Ehrlich, 1997; Ghiglione & Saltzman, 2005; McNair, 2011b, 2014; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015).

The “free press myth” is not just reiterated in positive representations of the journalism profession. Negative portrayals can also reinforce the professional authority of journalists. Journalists who undermine the free press myth ideal are often portrayed as individual cases who face repercussions for their actions, thus confirming the system itself as beyond reproach (Lule, 2001; Ehrlich, 2006, 2019). As such, the myth 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). Therefore, this model has been criticized by scholars who claim that the free press myth obscures the fact that journalism serves the political and economic agendas of media owners and advertisers (Ehrlich, 2005).

This criticism refers to developments such as commercialisation and the rise of infotainment that turned the press into “a hybrid political institution constrained by competing imperatives” (Schultz, 1998, p. 4). The press is an important institution for democratic societies, but since the beginning of the 21st century, 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). In addition, journalists have undercut their own image of upstanding professionals and truth seekers through fabrications of news and other news blunders (Ehrlich, 2005). This trend is not limited to the United States of America. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2020, 2021, 2022) reported that countries worldwide are struggling with a declining 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. According to Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011), the trend towards more commercial news media has brought about more entertaining news

content that undermines quality journalism, cuts in editorial budgets to increase profits, more media concentration and the increasing influence of marketing managers on news content.

This has led authors in journalism studies to debate the role of news media in modern Western societies as either public service-oriented or profit-driven market-oriented institutions. That the profession thus does not always reflect the theoretical ideal of the free press is also one of the core narratives with which journalism fiction engages.

Fiction has potential to point towards the free press myth's failings and respond to concerns in each respective era, such as the increase of commercialisation, sensationalism, technological change, and exploitation, which changed the day-to-day functioning of the profession (Ehrlich, 2006). It can do so by highlighting and critically examining conflicting cultural perceptions of journalism, such as the extent to which journalists can be objective and the impact of commercial interests on the editorial autonomy of newsrooms. Moreover, this underscores that representations of journalism can be more complex and less polarized than suggested by the heroes-villains dichotomy and can at the same time both challenge and reiterate the liberal democratic ideal of the press. Fiction consequently plays an important role in imagining the future of the press during this change in what Nelson (2019) called "media regime." The journalist can be considered a "symbolic prop" for addressing the social concerns central to this change, including the impact of new technologies, the changing roles of women and ethnic and sexual minorities (on which we will elaborate in the next paragraph), and the uses and abuses of institutional power, not only for journalism but also for other professions (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Studying the portrayals of journalism in popular culture and the ideologies and myths they continue to reiterate has thus become even more important.

Representations of Female and Minority Journalists

Journalism has not only faced challenges regarding a changing media environment, but also experienced changes concerning diversity in the profession. More specifically, there has been an increase in the number of female journalists in non-fictional newsrooms; however, they remain underrepresented (Van Leuven et al., 2019). Moreover, female journalists are still confronted with deep-rooted horizontal and vertical gender segregation manifested in traditional obstacles such as work-life balance and stereotypical gender assumptions (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2015). Furthermore, societies worldwide have become more diverse in terms of people with ethnic, racial and sexual minority identities, but this diversity has not yet been translated to the newsroom. Only 4.2% of Flemish journalists do not have a Flemish ethnicity. Also, 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).

Fiction can serve as an example to represent a more diverse newsroom. McNair (2011b, 2014) stated that female journalists have always been represented but that their number and context of appearance have increased and changed significantly since 2008, representing them as sassy, intelligent, and courageous (McNair, 2011b, p. 142). Painter and Ferrucci (2012, 2015, 2017) added that journalism fiction seems to break the traditional mould of systemically underrepresenting and reducing women to traditional feminine stereotypes. However, they also found that female journalists are still placed within overarching patriarchal schemes, which is in line with older research of Ehrlich (1997), Good (1998), and Saltzman (2003). According to those authors, fictional representations of journalism reproduce gender and racial stereotypes and engage with conflicting values, thus possibly confirming deep-rooted gender segregation and harassment towards female and

minority journalists worldwide. Ehrlich (1997) highlighted the work-life set of conflicting values and Saltzman (2003) stressed the ongoing dilemma fictional female journalists face: incorporating masculine traits that characterise journalists 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.

Moreover, not only are women increasingly represented in journalism fiction, but also minority groups (Ehrlich, 2019), although research is scarce. Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) stated that journalism movies and series address social concerns, such as the changing roles of ethnic and sexual minorities. The portrayals of journalists as heroes or villains recognize differences, while at the same time pointing to unmanageable rifts rooted in race, gender, and sexuality (Ehrlich, 2019). However, as minority groups were previously under- or even not represented in such fiction, their increased appearance entails a burden of representation in which these depictions risk essentializing what it means to have a minority identity as a journalist (Mercer, 1990).

Methodology

This research presents an analysis of journalism fiction movies and television series consumed in Flanders, Belgium. First, by using a survey (N=150), we studied which productions Flemish audiences recalled and which manifest data of the productions they remembered (e.g., plot, diversity in characters, roles). We opted to use this method as there is no existing standardised measurement system to observe the popularity of fiction movies and television series of both Flemish and international origin. As such, the survey served as a crowdsourced method to build a database on which we could perform a descriptive statistical analysis. Moreover, this method facilitated gaining insight into how Flemish audiences recalled these productions. We included both ordinary Flemish audiences, as these

representations contribute to the public perception of journalism, and Flemish journalists, as these representations also influence the construction of journalistic roles.

For the demarcation, we considered fiction movies and television series of both Flemish and international origin released from January 1st, 2000, until February 20th, 2021. We used this demarcation to be able to relate the results of the analyses to the changing media environment identified in the literature review. Second, using critical textual analysis, we interpreted how the two top-listed international (*The Post & Spotlight*) and Flemish (*De Dag & de Twaalf*) productions and data mentioned by Flemish audiences relate to the free press myth and diversity in journalism. The data about the productions in the database is not necessarily the correct data, but as respondents recall it (e.g., a respondent indicating that no female journalists are represented even though this was this case). This information is thus likely biased, but therefore meaningful for studying how audiences recall and make sense of the representations.

Survey

The survey was pretested on 10 respondents, incorporating a think-out-loud procedure to ensure the validity of the survey. We used convenience sampling¹ through social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter) and the official websites of Universiteit Gent and Vrije Universiteit Brussel. We disseminated the call for participation through the channels of the Flemish journalism syndicates to reach journalists. 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

¹ As we used convenience sampling, the results are not representative for the Flemish population. However, this is not a problem for this study as the main purpose was to build a database through crowdsourcing. Convenience sampling made it possible to reach respondents with extensive knowledge about journalism movies and series, including actual journalists.

the survey, which brought the total number of respondents to $N = 154$. However, we could not record any demographic information about these respondents as they did not complete the entire survey. After data cleaning, the number of valid responses was $N = 150$. For 123 of those respondents, the demographic information was available (see Table 1).

The survey was conducted through Qualtrics and asked respondents to list fiction movies and series about journalism from 2000 until now that they could recall. They could list up to 5 international and/or 5 Flemish movies or series. We split the questions according to the geographic origin of the production to encourage respondents to think about and list Flemish examples, on top of classic and well-known Hollywood productions such as *The Post*. For every case they could recall, they were asked to answer the same set of questions about the plot and the character information in the productions.² We also wanted to know how respondents perceived the representation of journalism by including a bipolar matrix with four scale points asking to indicate what applied most to each title e.g., powerful - powerless, ethical - unethical, trustworthy – untrustworthy. Based on this matrix, we created the "perception" scale consisting of six items that relate to the free press myth. These items were power, necessity, glamour (exciting or not), ethics, trustworthiness, and priorities (commercial/private or public). The Chronbach's Alpha of the scale was 0,786 indicating a good item correlation.

The survey concluded by gathering demographic information about the respondents, including their profession, gender, age, and whether they belonged to a minority group. As some respondents listed multiple productions, whereas others listed only one, some respondents are included multiple times in this analysis. The total number of entries of productions is $N = 383$ (including duplicates), of which there are 33 missing values (8.6%) because of the inclusion of respondents that did not fill out the entire survey. After data

² I.e., a description of the plot, in which country the narrative is set, the number of journalists, their gender, their role in the production and whether the character belonged to a minority group.

cleaning and removing productions that did not fit the above-mentioned demarcations, the database consists of 124 unique productions (not including duplicates).³ As several of these that were released before 2000 were included multiple times by respondents, we decided to keep those productions in the database even though they do not fit our preliminary demarcation. The basic version of the database and the questionnaire can be consulted in the appendices.

The majority of the productions are television series (70 productions or 56.5%), while the remainder are movies (54 productions or 43.5%). Of the selections that originate from a country other than the United States, most are series (38 productions or 84.4%), whereas of the productions that originate from the U.S., most are movies (47 productions or 59.5%). Concerning the country of origin, 79 productions (63.7%) are from or a co-production with the United States. Flanders is also well represented with 23 productions (18.5%). The remaining productions 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 Mexico. All productions that were listed nine or more times originate from the United States. This indicates that specific U.S. movies or series have received a popular currency in Flanders that other productions cannot easily compete with. We conducted a descriptive statistical analysis (SPSS) of the database that focused on how respondents perceived the representation of journalism and the diversity in journalist characters in the productions in the database.

Textual analysis

As some productions stood out because they were listed multiple times, we decided to complement the study with a qualitative exploration of the data listed by respondents.

³ The database is organized on two levels: the first one referring to the unique cases without the duplicates (N=124) and the second one referring to all entries, including the duplicates and the data listed by respondents (N=383). The analysis was performed on the second level.

Studying four productions in depth, using critical textual analysis (McKee, 2003), we explored, first, how the six items central to the perception scale were represented and, second, how male, female, and minority journalists were represented. We selected the two most listed titles of Flemish and international origin. The Flemish productions are the series *De Twaalf* (*The Twelve*, 2019; 8 entries) and *De Dag* (*The Day*, 2018; 6 entries)⁴. For international productions, we analyzed the movies *Spotlight* (2015; 33 entries) and *The Post* (2017; 28 entries), both of which are American productions. We opted to analyse these productions as the number of times they were listed indicates they are easily recalled by respondents and thus might have a more widespread influence on how respondents perceive journalism than productions that were only listed one or two times. Despite the difference between the number of times the Flemish and international cases were listed, we still opted to keep this focus as this is also the central focus of this study: understanding how both national and international fiction shapes the perception of journalism in Flanders. Here we should also note that international cases were more represented in the database than Flemish cases, hence the difference in the number of times they were listed. In the next sections, we elaborate on the descriptive statistical analysis of the database and the textual analysis of the top-listed productions.

Results

Free press myth

The perception scale looked into how respondents perceived the representation of journalism in the productions they listed. If respondents graded the production close to 1, they believed

⁴ *De Twaalf* (*The Twelve*, 2019) focuses on the trial of a woman who allegedly killed her daughter. Twelve ordinary people are called for jury duty and have to decide whether she is guilty or not. Journalist Fabrice Boks reports on the trial for an online news outlet and attempts to gain access to classified information by bribing a jury member. *De Dag* (*The Day*, 2018) focuses on a hostage crisis in a small bank during a cold winter's day. The series tells the story from two different perspectives: that of the police negotiators and that of the criminals and their victims. Journalist Kristien Delaruelle and her crew report on the crisis and put the lives of the victims in danger by prioritizing sensational news coverage over discrete communication on the crisis.

journalism is represented as powerful, necessary, exciting, reliable, and placing the public good before commercial or private interests. This indicated a positive representation of the press according to the free press myth. If respondents graded the production closer to 4, this indicated the opposite and thus a more negative representation of the press. However, such negative representations can still reiterate the free press myth if the institution of the press itself is represented as beyond reproach (Lule, 2001; Ehrlich, 2006). Most titles in the database were scored between 2 and 2.99 (190 or 49.6%), underlining that the representation of the press in these productions is not entirely positive or negative. This is in line with our previous argument that representations of journalism can be more complex than suggested by the heroes-villains dichotomy. Nevertheless, there is a trend towards positive representations (151 or 39.4% scores between 1 and 1.99), as these surpass the negative representations (42 or 11.0% scores between 3 and 4).

Several variables impact the perception of the productions in the database. First, we found a significant difference among countries as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(3,378) = 6.286, p = <.001$). Productions from Flanders ($M=2.44$) were scored higher than those from the United States ($M=2.04$) and Europe ($M=1.92$), indicating that Flemish productions in the database contain more negative representations than those from America and Europe. Similar scores were evident for the top-listed titles. The American productions *The Post* (1.47) and *Spotlight* (1.38) were scored positively, whereas the Flemish television productions *De Twaalf* (2.78) and *De Dag* (2.90) were perceived more negatively. To illustrate, journalism in both American productions is represented as powerful, necessary, reliable, and exciting. These productions represent journalists as heroes who fight a power system, whether it is the government (*The Post*) or the Church (*Spotlight*). The movies communicate a strong belief in journalistic responsibility to expose the truth and hold institutions of power accountable (Ehrlich, 1997; McNair, 2011b; Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). The journalist characters do so in

difficult environments in which those institutions attempt to silence the press (McNair, 2014). Consequently, the journalists are portrayed as detectives, meeting in secret with sources and attempting to find loopholes. The freedom of the press and the public's right to know are represented as rights that are defended at all costs. This contrasts with the Flemish productions in which the press does not hold other institutions accountable, but rather disturbs their functioning by seeking sensational news. The productions represent journalism as unnecessary, unreliable, and less exciting than the American productions. In *De Dag*, the police are hindered by a press that seeks information and footage of a crime scene, thus endangering negotiations with hostage-takers. In *De Twaalf*, the journalist receives inside information of a trial through a member of the jury, consequently disturbing the trial. The journalists are represented as villains, and in both productions the negatively denoted term "circus" is used to describe the press.

Second, the year of release plays a significant role in how the productions are perceived. A one-way ANOVA ($F(2, 379) = 10,074, p = <.001$) revealed that the mean score of the productions released before 2000 ($M=1.77$) is lower than that of productions between 2001 and 2010 ($M=2.38$) and between 2011 and 2021 ($M=2.08$). Furthermore, the mean score of the productions released between 2001 and 2010 is higher than that of productions in the other categories. This could indicate that the representation of journalism in more recent productions has become more negative, with a spike between 2001 and 2010, which would be in line with the changes in the journalistic climate during the past two decades. Or it could indicate that positive representations are more easily recalled over time and therefore more included in the category before 2000. For the top-listed productions, it is striking that even though they were all released after 2010 the positively scored American productions *The Post* and *Spotlight* are set in the 1970s and early 2000s respectively, whereas the Flemish productions are set in the second decade of the 21st century. This could confirm the premise

that the representation of journalism has become more negative because of changes in the journalistic climate and additionally may point to a trend toward glorifying older forms of journalism in fiction. This is illustrated by the conflict between public, private, and commercial values that occurs in both the American and Flemish top-listed productions. In *The Post*, the newspaper faces the possibility of investors pulling back and a court conviction if it publishes the Pentagon Papers. In *Spotlight*, the main struggle takes place between the public and private interests because the journalists who attempt to expose the abuse in the Church are a part of that religious community and thus personally involved in the events. The commercial interest also plays a role as over half of the readership of the newspaper is Catholic, which can impact its sales if it attacks the Church. In the end, the journalists in both movies put the public interest first and publish the story without profound professional consequences. The movies illustrate a victory of the press over other institutions of power, which is possible as long as they put the public good first. This contrasts with the Flemish productions in which the desire for a scoop makes the press one of the root causes when things go wrong. In *De Dag*, a police officer is shot as a consequence of journalists broadcasting the exterior of the crime scene, which enables the hostage-takers to notice the officers. And in *De Twaalf*, a murderer who was just convicted is able to appeal the ruling because of a press leak on an online news site. As such, new technologies and commercial considerations are represented as enemies of democratic institutions and the public, which contradicts the free press myth and points towards the challenges the press is currently facing. It also illustrates that print journalism is represented as more ethical than digital forms of journalism, which is in line with research of Painter and Ferrucci (2017).

Next, through open coding of the responses of survey participants, we established seven different plot elements focusing on investigative journalism, war correspondence, getting a promotion, scoop journalism, corruption, activism in journalism, and journalists only as

background characters. We found a significant difference according to one-way ANOVA ($F(10, 334) = 22.29, p = <.001$) between the plots about war correspondence ($M=1.40$) and investigative journalism ($M=1.68$) and the plots involving scoop journalism ($M=2.85$), background journalism ($M=2.55$), corruption ($M=3.00$), and getting a promotion ($M=2.36$). Plots concerning war correspondence and investigative journalism were more positively scored by respondents, whereas the other plots received a mixed or negative score. This is also mirrored in the top-listed productions, as respondents classified positively the productions involving investigative journalism and negatively productions with plots about scoop and background journalism. However, journalists in all of the top-listed productions portray unethical behaviour. In *De Dag*, a journalist is reprimanded for broadcasting sensitive information without considering the effect on the hostage situation or the victims. In *De Twaalf*, the journalist pays his source for information on the trial and threatens the source when he is not willing to provide it anymore. In *The Post*, the journalists obtain the Pentagon Papers illegally and in *Spotlight* bribing and blackmailing are used as techniques to get information. The major difference between the productions is that in the American productions this behaviour is justified as journalists do it in defence of the public good, thus presenting the system itself as beyond reproach (Lule, 2001; Ehrlich, 2005, 2006), whereas in the Flemish productions such behaviour is not justified as it hinders the public good.

Finally, we examined how the productions are perceived differently according to respondents' own demographic characteristics. Journalists ($M=1.98, SD=0.64$) scored the productions more positively ($t(347)=2.15, p=<.05$) than the general public ($M=2.15, SD=0.69$), which could indicate they seek out productions with positive representations of journalists, whereas the general public has a better recall of mixed representations. Furthermore, men ($M=2.01, SD=0.65$) scored productions more positively ($t(343)=-2.20, p=<.05$) than women ($M=2.17, SD=0.69$). Next, a one-way ANOVA ($F(4, 344) = 6.076, p = <.001$) pointed out

that respondents between 51 and 60 ($M=1.77$) and older than 60 (1.70) scored productions more positively than people between 18 and 30 ($M=2.22$). Respondents identifying as an ethnic ($M=2.71$) or sexual ($M=2.13$) minority scored productions more negatively than people without a minority identity (2.09). However, this result was not significant, possibly because of the small number of participants with a minority identity included in the sample. These trends are also visible for the top-listed productions and even though this sample is not representative of the Flemish population, these results point to a trend indicating that identity characteristics possibly influence which productions about journalism we recall and how we interpret the representation of journalism in such productions.

Sociocultural Diversity

Regarding sociocultural diversity, we studied the number of journalists represented in the productions, their gender, their role in the production, and whether they had a minority identity. According to the respondents, most productions represent multiple (222 out of 335 or 58.0%) and both male and female (225 out of 335 or 58.7%) journalists. A t-test ($t(332)=5.84$, $p<.001$) uncovered that respondents scored productions more positively when multiple journalists were represented ($M=1.96$, $SD=0.64$) than when only one journalist was represented ($M=2.46$, $SD=0.68$). The American productions more often include multiple journalists (216 out of 259 or 83.4%) than productions from other countries (15 out of 21 or 71.4% for Europe, 24 out of 42 or 57.1% for Flanders and 6 out of 12 or 50.0% for the United Kingdom), which could partly explain the differences among the countries. This is also visible in the top-listed productions as the American productions feature the entire newsroom whereas the Flemish productions only focus on one or a small crew of journalists. This finding can slightly counter the previously discussed negative representations in the Flemish top-listed productions, as this could communicate that this unprofessional and unethical

behaviour is not connected to journalism as a profession but rather to an individual journalist or small crew that goes astray, hence still reinforcing the free press myth. Nevertheless, because the narrative only focuses on these individual journalists without reflecting on the broader systemic practices in journalism that might counter their behaviour, the more pejorative perspective on journalism still stands.

Furthermore, using a one-way ANOVA ($F(2, 332) = 4.699, p = <.05$), we found a significant difference between the perception of journalism when only female journalists are represented ($M=2.33$) and when both male and female journalists are represented ($M=2.01$). Productions with only female journalists were scored more negatively, an effect that was countered when female journalists were represented with male journalists. This is in line with research of Painter and Ferrucci (2012, 2015, 2017) that stated that female journalists are still situated within overarching patriarchal schemes, portraying them as less capable and ethical than male journalists. For the top-listed productions, the more positively scored American productions represented both male and female journalists, whereas the more negatively scored Flemish title *De Dag* focused on one female journalist who behaved unethically. Still, the only production that thematically explores gender is *The Post*, which focuses on the underrepresentation of and discrimination against women. It underlines how women are not taken seriously in all-male environments such as newsrooms and have to stand up against sexist attitudes that stunt their professional growth. However, as the narrative takes place in the 1970s, it is difficult to make further reflections on what this communicates about the lived experiences of female journalists today. .

Next, most journalists, both male and female, were featured as leading characters in the productions. However, respondents reported male journalists less frequently in a leading role (184 out of 349 or 52.7%) than female journalists (181 out of 301 or 60.1%).

Additionally, according to one-way ANOVA ($F(2, 318) = 16.799, p = <.001$) respondents

scored productions with male journalists in leading roles ($M=1.89$) more positively than with male journalists in side roles ($M=2.31$). This was also the case for the top-listed productions, as the American productions with male journalists in leading roles scored more positively than the Flemish productions with male journalists in side or background roles. No such difference was encountered for female journalists.

Regarding journalists with a minority identity, there are a lot of missing values (155 out of 383 or 40,5%), indicating that respondents had trouble recalling whether such journalists were represented. As we did not analyse the productions directly but based our analysis on data provided by respondents, it remains unclear whether there actually were minority characters but the respondents could not recall them, or whether they could not recall any because there were none represented in these productions. For the productions in which respondents could recall whether these characters were present, most reported no minority characters (163 out of 383 or 42,6%). This underlines the underrepresentation of such characters in journalism fiction and could explain why respondents had trouble recalling such characters. Still, some respondents did report the presence of ethnic minority (41 out of 383 or 10.7%), sexual minority (8 out of 383 or 2.1%), and both ethnic and sexual minority journalists (16 out of 383 or 4.2%). Specifically for the top-listed productions, only *De Twaalf* portrayed a (black male) minority journalist. We found no significant differences between how journalism is perceived in productions with journalists with and without a minority identity, possibly because of the small sample of productions that did represent journalists with a minority identity. Still, the only top-listed title that portrayed an (ethnic) minority journalist scored most negative of all four productions and heavily focused on sensationalism and blackmailing in journalism. Regarding the role of minority journalists, respondents indicated that these characters are most often represented in side roles (45 out of 65 or

69.2%). Similarly, the black journalist in *De Twaalf* was also a side character. Again, no significant difference in perception was found.

Discussion

The study revealed that the country of production, the year of release, and the plot significantly influence how respondents perceive the representation of journalism. Journalism in productions produced in Flanders was considered to be represented more negatively than in European and American productions. Similarly, productions released before 2000 were perceived more positively than productions released after 2000 which could indicate that the representation of journalism in recent productions has become more negative, which is in line with the changes in the journalistic climate during the past two decades. Lastly, productions with plots about investigative journalism and war correspondence scored more positively than plots about getting a promotion, scoop journalism, background journalism, and corruption. A more in-depth look at the top-listed Flemish and international productions (of which the latter were both American) revealed that the international productions heavily engage with the free press myth and represent the institution of the press as beyond reproach when journalists go astray. Flemish productions do not reiterate that free press myth, but rather represent the press as having abandoned its responsibility in a democratic society in favor of greater revenues. The productions do so by stressing the struggle among the public, private and commercial interests, with the public interest being put first in the international productions and the private and commercial interests put first in the Flemish productions. Even though both the international and Flemish productions represent unethical behaviour, this is only justified for the international productions, as in those narratives it is done in support of the public good. These results underline the differences between productions from the United States and Flanders and among different plot elements. Additionally, they also point to a difference in

the year in which the narrative is set. The international productions, which are set in the 1970s and early 2000s, glorify the institution of the press as it was before the changes in the journalistic climate in the last two decades, whereas the Flemish productions that are set in the second decade of the 21st-century critique those changes.

Regarding diversity in representations of journalism, we found that the number of journalists, their gender, and their role in the title had a significant influence on how journalism was perceived. Productions were perceived more positively if multiple journalists were represented. Similarly, the narratives of the top-listed productions that scored more positively and engaged with the free press myth focused on the entire newsroom, whereas the more negatively scored top-listed productions did not. In addition, productions with only female journalists scored more negatively than productions in which female journalists were represented with male journalists, confirming that female journalists are still situated within overarching patriarchal schemes that portray them as less capable and ethical than men. Next, even though no difference in perception was found for whether female journalists were in a leading or side role, this was the case for male journalists, with the leading roles scored more positively than the side roles. The only top-listed title that focused on a male journalist in a side role scored most negatively of all top-listed productions, most likely because of the focus on sensationalism and blackmailing in the journalistic practices.

Finally, we found that demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and whether a respondent actually practiced journalism influenced how they perceived journalism in fiction. We have concluded that the American model of a free press has become pervasive in fictional representations of journalism but simultaneously is not necessarily reiterated in non-American contexts. This raises questions about how both Flemish and international representations shape the public opinion and journalistic roles (including those of female and minority journalists) in a Flemish media landscape. As this research has some limitations, such as its

descriptive nature, we stress the need for further research into the representations of journalism in non-American fiction, with a special emphasis on how audiences make sense of these representations within their specific media system and political and sociocultural context, while also taking into account their demographic characteristics. Still, this study can be considered a starting point that confirms the need for further research into this topic and will be used as a foundation for our upcoming work, which will include in-depth textual analyses and audience research.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

Funding

This work was supported by Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (grant number FWO.3F0.2021.0021.01)

ORCID

Maxine De Wulf Helskens: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7289-191X>

Frederik Dhaenens: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1497-6592>

Sarah Van Leuven: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1136-0274>

References

De Vuyst, S., & Gober, G. (2019). Gendered online harassment in journalism: a challenge to the right of voice of female journalists. International Association for Media and Communication research annual conference,

- De Vuyst, S., & Raeymaeckers, K. (2015). Genderbreuklijnen in transitie? Een studie naar de gendergerelateerde gevolgen van de veranderende werkomstandigheden in de journalistiek. *Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap*, 43(4), 342-361.
- Ehrlich, M. C. (1997). Journalism in the movies. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 14(3), 267-281.
- Ehrlich, M. C. (2005). Shattered glass, movies, and the free press myth. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 29(2), 103-118.
- Ehrlich, M. C. (2006). Facts, truth and bad journalists in the movies. *Journalism*, 7(4), 501-519.
- Ehrlich, M. C. (2019). Popular Culture: Portrayal of Journalists. *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*, 1-8.
- Ehrlich, M. C., & Saltzman, J. (2015). *Heroes and scoundrels: The image of the journalist in popular culture*. University of Illinois Press.
- Ferrucci, P., & Painter, C. (2017). Print versus digital: How medium matters on House of Cards. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 41(2), 124-139.
- Ghiglione, L., & Saltzman, J. (2005). Fact or Fiction: Hollywood looks at the News. *Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*.
- Good, H. (1998). *Girl reporter: gender, journalism, and the movies*. Scarecrow Press.
- Hanitzsch, T., & Vos, T. P. (2017). Journalistic roles and the struggle over institutional identity: The discursive constitution of journalism. *Communication Theory*, 27(2), 115-135.
- Lule, J. (2001). *Daily news, eternal stories: The mythological role of journalism*. Guilford Press.
- McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. Sage.
- McNair, B. (2011a). Journalism at the movies. *Journalism Practice*, 5(3), 366-375.
- McNair, B. (2011b). Journalists in film: heroes and villains. *Australian Journalism Review*, 33(1), 137-142.

- McNair, B. (2014). From cinema to TV: Still the same old stories about journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 8(2), 242-244.
- Mercer, K. (1990). Black art and the burden of representation. *Third Text*, 4(10), 61-78.
- Mertens, S., & Standaert, O. (2017). Journalistiek in België: twee landstalen, twee journalistieke culturen? Etmaal van de communicatiewetenschap,
- Nelson, J. L. (2019). The next media regime: The pursuit of 'audience engagement' in journalism. *Journalism*.
- Obijiofor, L., & Hanusch, F. (2011). *Journalism across cultures: An introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan
- Painter, C. (2019). Fictional Representations of Journalism. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*.
- Painter, C., & Ferrucci, P. (2012). Unprofessional, ineffective, and weak: A textual analysis of the portrayal of female journalists on sports night. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 27(4), 248-262.
- Painter, C., & Ferrucci, P. (2015). 'His Women Problem': An Analysis of Gender on 'The Newsroom'. *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Journal*, 6.
- Painter, C., & Ferrucci, P. (2017). Gender games: The portrayal of female journalists on House of Cards. *Journalism Practice*, 11(4), 493-508.
- Peters, C. (2015). Evaluating journalism through popular culture: HBO's The Newsroom and public reflections on the state of the news media. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(4), 602-619.
- Raats, T., Evens, T., & Pauwels, C. (2015). Towards sustainable financing models for television production? Challenges for audiovisual policy support in small media markets. European Communications Policy Research Conference (EuroCPR), Brussels, Belgium.
- Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2020). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020*. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR_2020_FINAL.pdf

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2021). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021*.

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital_News_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2022). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022*.

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital_News-Report_2022.pdf

Saltzman, J. (2003). Sob sisters: The image of the female journalist in popular culture. *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*.

Saltzman, J. (2005). Analyzing the images of the journalist in popular culture: A unique method of studying the public's perception of its journalists and the news media. *Association for Education in Journalism & Communication*.

Schatz, T. (1981). *Hollywood genres: Formulas, filmmaking, and the studio system*. McGraw-Hill.

Schultz, J. (1998). *Reviving the fourth estate: Democracy, accountability and the media*. Cambridge University Press.

Van Leuven, S., Raeymaeckers, K., Libert, M., Le Cam, F., Stroobant, J., Malcorps, S., Jacquet, A., D'heer, J., Heinderyckx, F., & De Vuyst, S. (2019). *Het profiel van de Belgische journalist in 2018*. Academia Press. <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8611443/file/8611447.pdf>

Vaughn, S., & Evensen, B. (1991). Democracy's guardians: Hollywood's portrait of reporters, 1930–1945. *Journalism Quarterly*, 68(4), 829-838.

Willems, G. (2016). Cinema, the Government, and the Popular: Popular and Commercial Aspects of Cultural Film Support in Flanders (Belgium). *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 44(4), 227-235.

Zynda, T. H. (1979). The Hollywood version: Movie portrayals of the press. *Journalism History*, 6(1), 16-32.

Appendix**Tables**

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

Characteristics		(Former) Journalist		Other Profession		Total	
		(N = 26)		(N = 97)		(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

List of productions in database

Production	Number of respondents	Year of Release	Country of	Type
-------------------	------------------------------	------------------------	-------------------	-------------

	that listed the production		productio n*	
13 going on 30	2	2004	U.S.	Movie
A Christmas Prince	1	2017	U.S.	Movie
A Private War	3	2018	U.S.	Movie
A Series of Unfortunate Events	1	2017-2019	U.S.	Series
A Touch of Frost	1	1992-2010	U.K.	Series
After Life	4	2019-2022	U.K.	Series
All the President's Men	22	1976	U.S.	Movie
Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy	3	2004	U.S.	Movie
Aspe	2	2004-2014	Flanders	Series
Babylon Berlin	2	2017-...	Europe	Series
Baron Noir	1	2016-...	Europe	Series
Beautiful Boy	2	2018	U.S.	Movie
Black-out	1	2020-2021	Flanders	Series
Body of Lies	1	2008	U.S.	Movie
Bombshell	2	2019	U.S.	Movie
Borgen	8	2010-2022	Europe	Series
Bridget Jones Diary	2	2001	U.S.	Movie
Citizen Kane	3	1941	U.S.	Movie
The Conjuring 2	1	2016	U.S.	Movie
Contagion	1	2011	U.S.	Movie
Cordon	3	2014-2016	Flanders	Series

Crime Diaries: The Candidate (Historia de un Crimen: Colosio)	1	2019	Mexico	Series
Daens	2	1992	Flanders	Movie
Daredevil	2	2015-2018	U.S.	Series
De 16	1	2016	Flanders	Series
De Dag	6	2018	Flanders	Series
De Ridder	1	2013-2016	Flanders	Series
De Ronde	1	2011	Flanders	Series
De Twaalf	8	2019-2020	Flanders	Series
De Vijfhoek	1	2012	Flanders	Series
Deadline 14/10 & 25/5	5	2012-2014	Flanders	Series
Dear White People	1	2017-2021	U.S.	Series
Dicte	2	2013-2016	Europe	Series
Dynasty	1	2017-2022	U.S.	Series
Endeavour	1	2012-2023	U.K.	Series
Familie	1	1991-...	Flanders	Series
FC De Kampioenen	2	1990-2011	Flanders	Series
Fifty Shades of Grey	2	2015	U.S.	Movie
Follow the money (Bedrag)	1	2016-2019	Europe	Series
Frost/Nixon	1	2008	U.S.	Movie
Gilmore Girls	5	2000-2007	U.S.	Series
Girls of the Sun (Les filles du soleil)	1	2018	Europe	Movie
God Friendened Me	1	2018-2020	U.S.	Series

Good Night, and Good Luck	6	2005	U.S.	Movie
Good Sam	1	2022	U.S.	Movie
Gossip Girl	1	2007-2012	U.S.	Series
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	1	2005	U.S.	Movie
House of Cards	9	2013-2018	U.S.	Series
How I Met Your Mother	3	2005-2014	U.S.	Series
How to Lose a Guy in 10 days	6	2003	U.S.	Movie
In De Gloria	1	2000-2001	Flanders	Series
Inspector Morse	1	1987-2000	U.K.	Series
Kill the Messenger	1	2014	U.S.	Movie
Letters to Juliet	2	2010	U.S.	Movie
Los	1	2008	Flanders	Movie
LouisLouise	1	2008-2009	Flanders	Series
Love Wedding Repeat	1	2020	U.K.	Movie
Lupin	3	2021-2023	Europe	Series
Mad Men	1	2007-2015	U.S.	Series
Manhunt (Unabomber)	1	2017-2020	U.S.	Series
Marley & Me	2	2008	U.S.	Movie
Midsomer Murders	1	1997-...	U.K.	Series
Millennium Trilogy: The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	10	2009	U.S.	Movie
Montalbano (il commissario Montalbano)	1	1999-2021	Europe	Series
Mr. Jones	1	2019	U.K.	Movie

Narcos	1	2015	U.S.	Series
Network	3	1976	U.S.	Movie
Niet Schieten	1	2018	Flanders	Movie
Niet Voor Publikatie	4	1994-1995	Flanders	Series
Nightcrawler	4	2014	U.S.	Movie
Over Water	2	2018-2020	Flanders	Series
Parks and Recreation	1	2009-2015	U.S.	Series
Polisse	1	2011	Europe	Movie
Postbus X	4	1989-1994	Flanders	Series
Press	1	2018	U.K.	Series
Prodigal Son	1	2019-2021	U.S.	Series
Rome In Love	1	2019	U.S.	Movie
Sara	1	2007-2008	Flanders	Series
Scandal	1	2012-2018	U.S.	Series
Sedes en Belli	1	2002-2004	Flanders	Series
Serendipity	2	2001	U.S.	Movie
Sex and the City	1	1998-2004	U.S.	Series
Sharp Objects	6	2018	U.S.	Series
Shattered Glass	2	2003	U.S.	Movie
Sherlock Holmes	1	2009	U.S.	Movie
Sisters 1968 (Systrar 1968)	1	2018	Europe	Series
Special Correspondents	1	2016	U.S.	Movie
Spider-man Franchise	7	2002-2021	U.S.	Movie
Spotlight	33	2015	U.S.	Movie

State of Play	3	2009	U.S.	Movie
Suits	1	2011-2019	U.S.	Series
Supergirl	1	2015-2021	U.S.	Series
Superman Franchise	12	1948-...	U.S.	Movie
Tabula Rasa	1	2017	Flanders	Series
The Adventures of Tintin	3	2011	U.S.	Movie
The Bold Type	4	2017-2021	U.S.	Series
The Crown	1	2016-2023	U.K.	Series
The Devil Wears Prada	5	2006	U.S.	Movie
The Expanse	1	2015-2022	U.S.	Series
The Fifth Estate	2	2013	U.S.	Movie
The Flash	3	2014-2023	U.S.	Series
The Greatest Showman	1	2017	U.S.	Movie
The Help	1	2011	U.S.	Movie
The Holiday	2	2006	U.S.	Movie
The Investigation	1	2020	Europe	Series
The Loudest Voice	4	2019	U.S.	Series
The Morning Show	5	2019-...	U.S.	Series
The Newsroom	20	2012-2014	U.S.	Series
The Office	1	2005-2013	U.S.	Series
The Paper	2	1994	U.S.	Movie
The Pelican Brief	4	1993	U.S.	Movie
The Post	28	2017	U.S.	Movie
The Queen's Gambit	2	2020	U.S.	Series

The Rum Diary	1	2011	U.S.	Movie
The Secret Life of Walter Mitty	1	2013	U.S.	Movie
The Simpsons	2	1989-...	U.S.	Series
The Thick of it	1	2005-2012	U.K.	Series
The Wire	6	2002-2008	U.S.	Series
Treme	1	2010-2013	U.S.	Series
True Story	3	2015	U.S.	Movie
Veronica Mars	1	2004-2019	U.S.	Series
Walk of Shame	1	2014	U.S.	Movie
You	1	2018-...	U.S.	Series
Zodiac	8	2007	U.S.	Movie

**For U.S. or U.K. this can be a title produced in full by the U.S. or U.K or in co-production with these respective countries*

Survey

This survey consists of twelve blocks and was conducted in Dutch. For the purpose of the article, the questions have been translated to English. 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 have included 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

Q1.0 We would like to know which fiction films/series that represent journalists you know and consider important. You will first get the chance to list titles of international fiction movies and/or series and then to list Flemish fiction movies and/or series. **Attention: We are looking for fiction movies and series released in or after 2000 that you have watched yourself.*

Q1.1 How many international* fiction films and/or series featuring journalists as characters do you know? *Here we are looking for films/series that were not made in Flanders **FR**

Possible answers: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / More than 5 (only 1 answer possible)

Q1.1.0 List below the titles of international fiction movies and/or series featuring journalists as characters. **If you do not remember the title of the film/series, you may enter a keyword. You will later have the opportunity to fill in a description based on which we can try to figure out which film or series you are referring to.*

Q1.1.1 What is the title of your first international fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: Open text box (see 'title case' block 2-11)

(Show if Q1.1 = 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or More than 5)

Q1.1.2 What is the title of your second international fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: Open text box

(Show if Q1.1 = 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or More than 5)

Q1.1.3 What is the title of your third international fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: Open text box

(Show if Q1.1 = 3 or 4 or 5 or More than 5)

Q1.1.4 What is the title of your fourth international fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: [Open text box](#)

(Show if Q1.1 = 4 or 5 or More than 5)

Q1.1.5 What is the title of your fifth international fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: [Open text box](#)

(Show if Q1.1 = 5 or More than 5)

Q1.2 How many Flemish* fiction films and/or series featuring journalists as characters do you know? *Here we are looking for films/series made in Flanders **FR**

Possible answers: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / More than 5 (only 1 answer possible)

Q1.2.1 What is the title of your first Flemish fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: [Open text box](#)

(Show if Q1.2 = 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or More than 5)

Q1.2.2 What is the title of your second Flemish fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: [Open text box](#)

(Show if Q1.2 = 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or More than 5)

Q1.2.3 What is the title of your third Flemish fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: [Open text box](#)

(Show if Q1.2 = 3 or 4 or 5 or More than 5)

Q1.2.4 What is the title of your fourth Flemish fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: [Open text box](#)

(Show if Q1.2 = 4 or 5 or More than 5)

Q1.2.5 What is the title of your fifth Flemish fiction film/series? **FR**

Possible answers: [Open text box](#)

(Show if Q1.2 = 5 or More than 5)

Block 2 - 11:

I1.0 Now for 'title case' answer the questions below.

I1.1 Is 'title case' a movie or series? **FR**

Possible answers: movie / series / I don't know (only 1 answer possible)

I1.2 Where does the story of "title case" take place? **FR**

Possible answers: in Belgium / in a European country other than Belgium (specify) / in the United States / in an international country other than the United States / I don't know (only 1 answer possible)

I1.3 Briefly describe the storyline of "title case" and specify what role journalists play in it.

FR

Possible answers: **Open text box**

I1.4 On the scale below, indicate how you think journalism is represented in "title case"? **FR**

**Example: Journalism is represented as: very powerful - moderately powerful - moderately powerless - very powerless.*

Possible answers: powerful-powerless/necessary-unnecessary/exciting-boring/ethical-unethical/reliable-unreliable/commercial interests first-public interest first (scale of 1 to 4)

I1.5 How many journalists are represented in 'title case'? **FR**

Possible answers: 1 / 2 / More than 2 / I don't know (only 1 answer possible)

I1.6 Are there female journalists in 'title case'? **FR**

Possible answers: Only male journalists / Only female journalists / Both male and female journalists **(Show if I1.5 = 2 or More than 2)** / I don't know (only 1 answer possible)

I1.7 Are there any journalists in 'title case' who belong to a minority group (ethnicity, sexual orientation...)? **FR** *LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

Possible answers: No / Yes, ethnic minority / Yes, LGBT* minority / Yes, other (specify) / I don't know (multiple responses possible)

I1.8 What role do male journalists have in 'title case'? **FR**

Possible answers: Main role (indicate if at least 1 journalist has a main role) / Minor role / I

don't know (only 1 answer possible)

(Show if I1.6 = Male journalists only or Both male and female journalists)

I1.9 What role do female journalists have in 'title case'? **FR**

Possible answers: Main role (indicate if minimum 1 journalist has a main role) / Supporting role / I don't know (only 1 answer possible)

(Show if I1.6 = Only female journalists or Both male and female journalists)

I1.10 What role do journalists belonging to a minority group have in "title case"? **FR**

Possible answers: Main role (indicate if minimum 1 journalist has a main role) / Side role / I don't know (only 1 answer possible)

(Show if I1.7 = Yes, ethnic minority or Yes, LGBT minority or Yes, other)

I1.11 Would you like to add anything about the way journalists are represented in "title case"?

Possible answers: **Open text box**

Block 12

Q2.0.0 If you thought of any other fiction films and series with journalists as characters while completing the questionnaire, please note them below.

Possible answers: **Open text box**

Q2.0 You are almost at the end of the questionnaire. The last questions concern your personal information. The answers are processed anonymously.

Q2.1 Are you a (former) journalist? **FR**

Possible answers: Yes, I am a (former) journalist / No, other profession (specify) / No, student (only 1 answer possible)

Q2.2 What is your gender? **FR**

Possible answers: Male / Female / X (only 1 answer possible)

Q2.3 What is your age? **FR**

Possible answers: 18-30 / 31-40 / 41-50 / 51-60 / 60+ (only 1 answer possible)

Q2.4 Do you belong to a minority group? **FR**

Possible answers: No / Yes, ethnic minority / Yes, LGBT minority / Yes, other (clarify)

(multiple responses possible)

Q2.5 If you would like to participate in a follow-up study of this study, please note your email address below (this is not required).

Response options: **Open text box**

End of Survey