Repackaged sob sisters and outsiders within: Reading the female and minority journalists on The Bold Type and The Morning Show

Abstract
Female and minority journalists are confronted with many obstacles to access and act in the journalism profession ranging from the glass ceiling to a gender pay gap. These obstacles translate into unbalanced representations of female journalists in fictional movies and series in which they are underrepresented and often framed as emotional, unstable, inexperienced, and unprofessional. These representations reiterate and preserve existing inequalities in Western newsrooms but also have the potential to subvert and challenge existing structures and imagine more inclusive and equal newsrooms. Therefore, this study proposes a qualitative textual analysis of the representation of female journalists in the American fiction series *The Morning Show* (AppleTV+, 2019) and *The Bold Type* (Freeform, 2017). From a feminist media studies and intersectional perspective, it looks into the gendered power dynamics in newsrooms that are embedded in the series' narratives. We found that *The Bold Type* represents an inclusive work environment aimed at creating equal opportunities but at the same time deals with the obstacles that are still in place for female and minority journalists without critiquing them. This whereas *The Morning Show* offers a direct critique by representing the inability of female and minority journalists to properly deal with these obstacles.

Keywords: Female journalists, popular culture, postfeminism, pariah femininity, intersectionality

Word count: 7978

Introduction

Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein, Charles Kane, and even Superman: What they have in common is that they are all world-famous characters who were featured in a fiction movie or series about journalism. Yet it is not a coincidence that they are all white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender male journalists. Research shows that female journalists are underrepresented and often framed as emotional, unstable, inexperienced, and unprofessional (Ehrlich 1997; Good 1998; Saltzman 2003; McNair 2014; Painter and Ferrucci 2017, 2012, 2015). Though research on (racial and LGBTQ+) minority journalists is more scarce, findings suggest that they are also underrepresented and mostly positioned within an outsider-within framework (Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015; Rossie 2009).

Few professions are as omnipresent in popular culture as journalism (McNair 2011a; Ness 2020). Since many people will never set foot in a newsroom, these representations significantly contribute to the public's opinion on journalism and how the profession positions itself in contemporary society (Saltzman 2005; Hanitzsch and Vos 2017; Painter 2019). From a cultural studies perspective, these unbalanced representations of journalists in fiction reiterate and preserve existing inequalities in Western newsrooms and society more broadly as research shows that female and minority journalists are confronted with many obstacles to access and act in the profession (Van Leuven et al. 2019; Weaver, Willnat, and Wilhoit 2019). However, fiction also has the potential to subvert and challenge existing structures and imagine more inclusive and equal newsrooms (Hall 1982; Lule 2001; Ehrlich 2005, 2006; McNair 2011b). Especially in the wake of recent societal changes such as #MeToo, initiatives such as Black Lives Matter, and in general the increasing awareness of structural inequalities surrounding gender, race, and sexual orientation, it can be expected that such representations have shifted accordingly (Tally 2021; Scarcelli, Krijnen, and Nixon 2021).

Despite the omnipresence of journalism in fiction film and television and its potential to both preserve and challenge existing conditions for female and minority journalists, only a selective body of research has been conducted on this subject. Additionally, the majority of those studies was conducted in the early 2000s and does not provide insights into how fictional representations of female or minority journalists might have changed, especially in relation to the abovementioned societal evolutions. Therefore, this study proposes a qualitative textual analysis of the representation of female journalists in the U.S. American fiction series *The Morning Show* (TMS, AppleTV+, 2019) and *The Bold Type* (TBT, Freeform, 2017). To do so, this study takes a feminist media studies perspective to uncover the gendered power dynamics in newsrooms that are embedded in the series' narratives. Additionally, it also employs intersectionality theory to expose how having a minority identity can function as a double burden in these gendered power dynamics. To do so, we centralize concepts such as postfeminism (Gill 2007), pariah femininity (Schippers 2007), and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1990).

TMS is an American drama television series starring well-known actors including Jennifer Aniston, Reese Witherspoon, and Steve Carell of whom the first two were also executive producers of the series. The narrative is inspired by CNN TV anchor Brian Stelter's non-fiction book '*Top of The Morning: Inside the Cutthroat World of Morning TV'* (2013) which elaborates on his own experiences with morning TV including rivalries over morning television ratings. Similarly, TBT is also inspired by non-fictional journalistic events as it is based on the life and career of *Cosmopolitan magazine*'s former editor-in-chief Joanna Coles who is also the executive producer of the series. In contrast to TMS, TBT can be classified as a comedy-drama television series leaving more room for humoristic portrayals of journalistic characters

and events. As such, the series pose a good subject of study for a comparative analysis with attention to their different generic approach to representing fictional journalism. For *TMS,* we focused on a sample of sequences from the first two seasons as these were the only seasons available at the time of the analysis. For *TBT*, all six seasons were available but because of the high number of episodes, we opted to restrict the analysis to a sample of sequences from the first and last seasons. We chose those seasons to be able to recognize an evolution in the representations. These series were selected because of their relative 'newness', their widespread availability, and their focus on issues that female and minority journalists face in the newsroom including sexual harassment, racism, and public outings. We found that *The Bold Type* attempts to represent an inclusive work environment aimed at creating equal opportunities among journalists but at the same time deals with the obstacles that are still in place for female and minority journalists without critiquing them. This whereas *The Morning Show* offers a direct critique by representing the inability of female and minority journalists to properly deal with these obstacles.

Female Journalists in the Fictional Newsroom

Since the beginning of film, journalism fiction provided representations where women could play equal roles to those of men (Good 1998). In contrast to other fictional female characters who have been consistently underrepresented and reduced to a love object or dramatic catalyst often in the form of a housewife character (Lauzen 2018, 2019; Sink and Mastro 2016; Lindner, Lindquist, and Arnold 2015), fictional female journalists have been represented as hard-boiled and hardworking characters constituting a sob sister stereotype. The sob sister comprises a characterization of female reporters as big-hearted, soft-minded, emotionally generous, and intellectually sloppy journalists willing to do the same as their male counterparts to get a story (Good 1998; Saltzman 2003). They are represented as independent journalists who outreport every male journalist creating the perfect battle of the sexes. Some of the most famous early sob sisters are the fast-talking Hildy Johnson (Rosalind Russell) in *His Girl Friday* (1940) and the self-assured Torchy Blane (Glenda Farrell) in the *Torchy Blane series* (1937-1939). However, these representations also have to be nuanced as they simultaneously are represented as contingent on men when they inevitably screw up and succumb to their desire for a man, marriage, and children again pushing women into a one-sided and stereotypical representation (Ehrlich 1997; Good 1998; Saltzman 2003). Female journalists tend to be placed in a double-voiced discourse in which they receive more agency and responsibility than other fictional representations of women but in the end remain subordinate to their male counterparts. The foregrounded plot seems to suggest a liberal attitude towards women's rights and abilities, but the subplot returns women to the world of traditional sex roles (Good 1998).

Further, this is fortified by their sexualization as romantic and sex objects. More specifically, they are typically represented as romantically involved with sources or male colleagues of whom the latter are mostly also their mentors (Saltzman 2003; Valencia et al. 2008). This trope has generated stereotypes of female journalists as 'Super Bitch' and 'Super Whore' (sic) representing them as professionally and personally subservient to men and willing to use sex for their careerist objectives which they seldom effectuate (Saltzman 2003; Painter and Ferrucci 2017). This relates to the frequent infantilization of fictional female journalists in which their professional growth is treated as humorous and stunted by the male-dominated environment in which they work. Consequently, female journalists in contemporary popular fiction content are generally younger than its male journalists and start

to disappear from the age of 35 on. According to Valencia et al. (2008), this gendered ageist representation has reproduced existing gender barriers in three ways, first, the recurring split between professional and personal lives in which women are expected to quit their job to become homemaking figures; second, beauty standards in which women are hired on the basis of physical appearance rather than intelligence and thus more easily disregarded when they age; third, the vertical gender segregation which prevents women from reaching professional maturity and holding senior positions. The very characteristics that qualify women as sob sister, disqualifies them from more 'serious' journalism and professional growth.

This reflects non-fictional newsrooms which are highly gendered (Weaver, Willnat, and Wilhoit 2019; Van Leuven et al. 2019). Historically speaking, women only started to enter the newsroom with the rising popularity of women's pages pigeonholing female journalists in lower-status soft news beats. Even though their numbers kept increasing during the twentieth century, this curve has flattened and female journalists remain confronted by - among other things - the glass ceiling and a pay gap of which the latter is most visible at the editorial level (Obijiofor and Hanusch 2011; De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers 2019). This invokes a revolving door effect in which female journalists are forced to choose between their career and motherhood framed within a neoliberal discourse of personal choice (De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers 2019). The latter can be interpreted through an inherently contradictory postfeminist discourse stressing the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist themes often through its focus on among other things consumer culture, fashion, (sexual) pleasure, and individual choice. Postfeminism articulates capitalist and neoliberal discourses transforming feminist causes into individual rather than political struggles thereby confirming gender inequalities and repudiating feminist goals (Gill 2007; Adriaens and Van Bauwel 2014). However, postfeminist discourse simultaneously mediates between traditional oppositions in feminism such as the feminine versus the feminist by articulating ideas critical of the traditional status quo as such also having the potential to subvert patriarchal notions (Adriaens and Van Bauwel 2014).

The aforementioned dichotomy between the potential of female journalists to succeed and their inevitable failure was coined by Saltzman (2003) in an ongoing dilemma that female journalists face: incorporating masculine traits that characterize 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. This dilemma underscores the relationality between hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity as coined by Schippers (2007). The author builds on the conceptualization of Connell (1995) of hegemonic masculinity to examine an alternative model to identify multiple masculinities and femininities. She defines gender positions as articulated in relation to each other in terms of different but complementary characteristics (e.g., authoritative – compliant) in which the dominance of hegemonic masculinity is enabled by hegemonic femininity. Consequently, women performing traits associated with hegemonic masculinity "enacted by women-desire for the feminine object (lesbian), authority (bitch), being physically violent ('badass' girl) and taking charge and not being compliant (bitch, but also 'cock-teaser' and slut)" are considered contaminating the relationship between masculinity and femininity constituting the term 'pariah femininity' (Schippers 2007, p.95). As previously illustrated, (fictional) female journalists have to balance these masculine and feminine traits which leads them to be embroiled in a discourse that underlines and sanctions their deviance from hegemonic femininity by labeling them as 'bitch' and 'whore' (sic) and by overtly feminizing them.

Contemporary representations of female journalists still deal with this attempt to reconcile journalism and femininity without being confined to soft news beats. The analyses of Painter and Ferrucci (2017, 2012, 2015) of the series *Sports Night* (ABC, 1998-2000)*, The Newsroom* (HBO, 2012-2014)*,* and *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-2018) confirmed that even though female journalists are increasingly represented in leading roles and management jobs, they are still positioned in existing overarching patriarchal structures. More specifically, they are represented as unprofessional, 'overtly feminine', unethical, and lacking journalistic knowledge. The past decades have brought an increase in number and a change in context of appearance of female journalists pointing to more hopeful and realistic representations that address the unequal treatment of female journalists in the workplace (McNair 2011b, 2014; Painter and Ferrucci 2019). In their analysis of *Good Girls Revolt* (Amazon Prime Video, 2015-2016) for example, Painter and Ferrucci (2019) found that the television series – even though set in the 1970s – counters the dominant images of fictional female journalists as super bitch, super whore, unprofessional, weak, and incompetent by critiquing the demeaning and dehumanizing ways male journalists treat their female co-workers. Even though according to the authors this depiction might be ethically problematic, the series subverts the negative portrayals of female journalists in many other fiction movies and series. Still, for many (non-) fictional female journalists the bittersweet aftertaste of having to give up too much to achieve equality with men is still present (De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers 2019; Obijiofor and Hanusch 2011; Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015).

Minority Journalists in the Fictional Newsroom

Whereas several studies have focused on the fictional representation of female journalists, such insights are mostly lacking regarding racial and LGBTQ+ minority journalists. Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) touched upon the subject stating that the difference narrative that accompanies the representation of journalists and positions them as fundamentally different from 'normal' civilians is even more invigorated for minority journalists. Similar to people of color, journalists of color were largely ignored in popular culture until the 1960s reflecting the large invisibility of racial minority journalists in newsrooms (Mastro and Greenberg 2000; Benshoff and Griffin 2009; Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015). In contemporary representations, such characters still remain underrepresented or framed as 'race-neutral'. Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015) use the term to stress the common practice of rendering race and ethnicity invisible in fiction by not commenting upon the character's race and ethnicity. On the other hand, some representations do stress the character's minority identity but only do so in relation to race-related journalistic topics (e.g., an Asian journalist who is pressured to report on Asian culture and neighborhoods). Specifically for female journalists of color, sexualization, exotification and objectification are common practices. They are often represented as sexual and exotic objects in which they are shown unclothed and willing to engage in sexual relationships with sources. Some narratives have addressed the difficulties minority reporters experience in white-majority newsrooms (Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015; Rossie 2009). These include journalists of color being looked down upon, being valued less than their white counterparts, and being more easily judged and fired. They have to work harder to prove themselves and get away with less in comparison to white reporters. This can be linked to an outsider-within narrative in which journalists of color are positioned within the white male power structure of the newsroom and yet simultaneously find themselves outside of that structure by not being white or male. For female journalists of color, this forms an even bigger challenge due to the specific gender and racial intersectional challenges they face (Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015;

Rossie 2009). Since the 1990s, feminist discourse has been reconfigured by intersectional perspectives to challenge the hegemony of White, middle-class, young, and able-bodied women. Crenshaw's intersectionality theory stresses that women have different intersecting identities that can reinforce each other when faced with oppression and as such can create a double burden. Consequently, how women face oppression is dependent on the context and their different identity axes such as race and sexual orientation which becomes especially relevant when studying a white, heterosexual male-dominated field such as journalism (Crenshaw 1990).

Specifically for LGBTQ+ journalists, the (implicit) portrayal of lesbian and gay journalists dates back to the 1930s. They were stereotypically depicted as a source of derisions or buffoonery translated into stereotypes such as that of the effeminate reporter, the harmless sissy homosexual, or the bitchy columnist (Benshoff and Griffin 2009; Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015). Only in the 1990s did LGBTQ+ journalists start to become more included and accepted in popular culture. Still, their sexual orientation often figured strongly in the plot as their only recognizable characteristic and most often they were supporting characters who did not have romantic relationships which made them non-threatening to heterosexual sensibilities (Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015; Kies 2016). In popular culture targeted at LGBTQ+ audiences and in that made outside of the U.S. more thoughtful depictions have started to appear in which LGBTQ+ journalists are not necessarily represented as afraid or embarrassed about their sexuality. Still, most narratives including LGBTQ+ journalists tend to focus on the struggles that journalists face in the newsroom concerning being out or outed which is related to the frequently reiterated struggle and success trope in which the obstacles that LGBTQ+ people have to face to become comfortable in their own body and social environment are stressed (Dhaenens 2013; Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015). A common theme here is the fear of co-workers that LGBTQ+ journalists will subvert journalism's noble (objective) cause and replace it with a gay agenda (sic) (Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015). The lack of representations of minority journalists and of diversity in those representations brings about a burden of representation in which those representations come to represent a whole community. Consequently, this leads to a chaotic and oversimplified representation of the experiences of minority journalists creating monolithic and undifferentiated identities defined by certain characteristics such as race and sexual orientation (Mercer 1990). Therefore, understanding which narratives the few fictional representations of minority journalists disseminate and how these narratives might have changed can provide critical insights into this subject of study.

Reading the Female Journalists in The Morning Show and The Bold Type

Both *The Morning Show* and *The Bold Type* focus on the representation of journalists in the newsroom and reiterate the sob sister discourse. TMS revolves around the ins and outs of the newsroom of a fictional television broadcast news morning show (The Morning Show) and TBT takes the newsroom of a fictional print and digital women's magazine (Scarlet) as subject. The inciting incident for both series is the arrival of Bradley Jackson in TMS (Reese Witherspoon) and Jane Sloan in TBT (Katie Stevens), who are both new female reporters who have to learn the ropes and aim to get promoted invoking the female cub reporter stereotype (Saltzman 2003; Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015). TBT represents the Scarlet newsroom as a welcoming and safe environment in which cub reporters can learn under the mentorship of a careerist but caring editor-in-chief Jacqueline Carlyle (Melora Hardin). The newsroom is dominated by women and the series immediately claims a postfeminist take on women in journalism. It does so through the colorful feminine wardrobe used by the characters for

power dressing and the aesthetically traditional feminine décor. The Scarlet offices are bathed in light with colorful, mostly pink accents and contain hints of the series' focus on fashion and consumer culture through the presence of clothing racks and an entire 'fashion closet'. These elements in combination with the narrative focus on sexual pleasure, individual choice, humor, and capitalist discourses (cf. infra) further support this postfeminist take. TMS on the other hand moves away from this perspective and provides a more dramatic image of a toxic work environment in which the new cub reporter becomes a pawn in the political power play of mainly male veteran reporters. Its dramatic narrative focus on sexual harassment in the workplace and the use of rather dark decors further reinforce this contrast with TBT. The use of more traditionally feminine clothes, such as dresses and heels, in this case cannot be interpreted from a postfeminist sensibility but is rather used as a visual tool to underline the power structure between male and female reporters in which the latter are represented as subordinate, especially through their continuous sexualization by their male counterparts.

Despite the different (generic) approaches to the representation of female journalists, both series represent female cub reporters who are confronted with similar struggles. They both have to resist a branding as a sob sister as they are expected to focus on soft and sensational news topics stemming from a commercialized view of journalism and in line with horizontal gender segregation in newsrooms. Both Jane and Bradley attempt to claim a more political and hard news voice in a soft news-oriented environment. Jane does so by challenging the hierarchy between soft and hard news and reconciling both in her writing, illustrating how female journalists are still represented as confronted with a dilemma between adopting traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics, even in a more feminine branded news environment. In spite of her attempts, she is often not taken seriously among other more 'serious' journalists especially because of her explicit feminine way of dressing and her association with a women's magazine that stresses the importance of writing from personal experience. Similar to Jane, Bradley attempts to brand herself as a 'serious' journalist. She attempts to do so by using more traditionally masculine ways of dressing and advocating for more hard news on The Morning Show. There is a certain level of success in their attempts to cover more hard news topics. Jane convinces her editor-in-chief to launch a political vertical and Bradley regularly pushes through hard news topics. Still, they do not fully succeed in reconciling the expected traditionally feminine characteristics and being a hard-news journalist. Jane eventually decides to leave Scarlet for a hard news-oriented digital magazine in which the newsroom contrasts with that of Scarlet through its traditionally masculine aesthetic consisting of dark decors with brown hues. Bradley is forced to adopt more traditionally feminine characteristics in exchange for more political coverage on the morning news and loses a job as an anchor for the (harder news-oriented) evening news to her male co-worker. She states:

> "You told me all this singing and dancing and playing along was gonna buy me some freedom around this place. I mean I dyed my hair; I hosted their celebrity bowling show, I did stupid TikTok dances on TV. I did everything short of tattooing UBA on my ass, and for what?" (TMS, S2: E1)

Whereas Bradley does not succeed in breaking through this horizontal gender segregation that still dominates newsrooms, Jane does seem to do so at first glance. However, she is also required to change her wardrobe to fit her new work environment in which fashion is less stressed and quickly realizes that the new magazine is not a fit for her. She decides to return

to Scarlet where she is eventually promoted resulting in her getting her own office and staff, but only after having abandoned her political vertical to start a vertical about feminism. As such, the series continues to stress that being a female journalist and reporting what is traditionally considered 'hard news' are not compatible. Even more, when editor-in-chief Jacqueline retires and asks Jane to take over her position, she declines and quits her job at Scarlet to pursue her new-found dream of being a 'traveling writer'. These representations illustrate how the sob sister stereotype still occurs today, albeit repackaged into contemporary depictions of female journalists in today's newsrooms. They underline how it is still difficult for female journalists to not be pigeonholed in soft news beats and media sectors and how they inevitably fail to reconcile the masculine characteristics associated with good journalism and the feminine characteristics that society expects they embody (Saltzman 2003; Painter and Ferrucci 2017, 2012, 2015).

The Role of Feminism in Neoliberal Newsrooms

Both TMS and TBT engage with narratives that expose the highly gendered obstacles and problems that female journalists face in a profession that is still dominated by men, especially in management positions. This structural inequality in which female journalists remain subordinate to men is expressed through the recurring tension between the board of the media company and the editorial team. In TBT this is visualized using the contrasting décor of the plain board rooms consisting of a male-dominated staff and the aesthetically feminine Scarlet newsroom consisting of a female-dominated staff. It is striking that the series positions the magazine as a brand aimed at empowering women both in and outside of the newsroom and simultaneously highlights how this positioning is still embedded within the broader patriarchal and capitalist structures of the company and Western society at large. Consequently, being a feminist first and foremost has to be profitable and editor-in-chief Jacqueline, the only woman who has a sliver of power in those higher echelons, also has to work within that framework. Narratively this tension is expressed in Jacqueline's power moves in which she goes against the wishes of the board – often associated with a slow motion close up of her high colorful heels – which stand in opposition to her acts of molding young reporters into sob sisters to fit the profit-oriented goals of the board. This articulates the inherent relation between neoliberalism and postfeminism in which feminism is deprived of its political significance and used for commercial gain (Gill 2007; Adriaens and Van Bauwel 2014). As such, even though both series seem to address above-mentioned obstacles, TMS does so more effectively than TBT. TBT still represents a fairly 'feminine' work environment where powerful women do not form a direct threat to the hegemonic masculinity that is still present in most newsrooms. The series' postfeminist approach fortifies this premise as its inherent focus on femininity, fashion, and feminism in combination with a soft news outlet further upholds the chasm between female journalists and 'serious' journalism. As such, the 'feminism' that is portrayed is mostly repudiated by capitalist goals.

TMS on the other hand – aided by its generically more dramatic representational conventions - actively deconstructs that chasm by portraying the misogynistic and toxic work culture that infantilizes and sexualizes female journalists to stunt their professional growth. The male board plays a bigger role in the TMS which focuses on the sexist power relations that are present in newsrooms. The board is represented as an old boys' network responsible for covering up multiple cases of sexual abuse of powerful male journalists towards subordinate female journalists creating a toxic work culture that enables the sexualization and objectification of female journalists. This theme is similar to TBT directly related to the heavy

profit-oriented focus of the company in which soft news and sex appeal sell. The female journalists are continuously forced to conform to an image of the female journalist that will sell on television. Being beautiful and sexy is considered more important than intelligence and skill invoking a narrative in which female journalists are easily criticized and scrutinized on the basis of looks and their personal life (Painter and Ferrucci 2017, 2012, 2015; Saltzman 2003; Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015). This has already been illustrated above in the discussion of Bradley who possessed more traditionally masculine qualities but was forced to adopt more feminine qualities in terms of both behavior and dress. However, it also occurs in relation to other female journalists, especially to that of female tv-host Alex Levy (Jennifer Aniston) who is confronted with ageism. She is represented as having become obsolete because of her age, something that her male co-host who is in the same age category does not experience. Even though she eventually succeeds in maintaining the position, it is underlined that when female TV anchors reach a certain age, they are no longer deemed (sexually) desirable by the public and need to be replaced. This echoes the common narrative in which older female journalists are replaced by younger women stressing that they are not hired because of skill and intelligence but because of appearances (Saltzman 2003; Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015; Valencia et al. 2008). Even though, this representation might seem dated, it is powerful because it illustrates that this is still reality for many female journalists.

The Mental Burden of Pariah Female Journalists

TMS offers a critique by demonstrating how female journalists are forced to deal with the obstacles generated by these power relations and how this often pushes them into a 'Super Bitch' and 'Super Whore' (sic) narrative. Both Bradley and Alex who attempt to go against the board are explicitly labeled as too emotional or angry. It exposes the double standard that still exists in which being emotional and angry is tolerated for men but not for women echoing Schippers' (2007) conceptualization of pariah femininity. The narrative explores the different femininities and masculinities that exist simultaneously in which female journalists are encouraged to adopt characteristics associated with hegemonic femininity as these are non-threatening to the dominance of hegemonic masculinity in the newsroom. Women like Bradley who adopt characteristics typically associated with hegemonic masculinity are repudiated by being labeled 'bitch' or 'whore' (sic) and by being denied opportunities to advance their career. Even more, they are molded into adopting typically hegemonic feminine characteristics enforced by the commercial argument that this is what appeals to the audience. Still, these hegemonic feminine qualities do not provide them with more opportunities but rather enforce more sexualization and infantilization towards female journalists.

Additionally, the series narratively explores romantic and sexual relationship of both male and female journalists in the newsroom. It focuses on several workplace relationships also including those related to sexual misconduct. The series illustrates how women are often judged for their relationships with male co-workers of whom the latter do not experience that same scrutiny. This again echoes that women who adopt hegemonic masculine traits such as 'sleeping around' are reprimanded for that behavior by being labeled a 'whore' (sic). This is especially visible in the narrative analysis of TMS producer Mia Jordan (Karen Pittman) who had an affair with Mitch Kessler (Steve Carell), a co-host who was fired because of sexual misconduct. Instead of blaming Mitch's behavior, Mia's co-workers blame her and frame the events as her using sex to get promoted. It reiterates the focus on promotion and professional gain in which female journalists are framed as sleeping their way to the top, regardless of

whether they had the intention to do so and actually benefited from it (Saltzman 2003; Painter and Ferrucci 2017). In episode seven, Mia states:

> "Everybody's got their fucking opinions, and you know what? Have 'em. I just wanna move on with my fucking life. […] We're all human. We all have regrets. […] We are all just people who wanna do our jobs. Do good work. So, that's what I'm gonna focus on. My work. 'Cause I'd like to be known in this world for something other than fucking Mitch Kessler, and I think I deserve that opportunity" *(*TMS, S1:E7).

Even more, one of Mitch's victims, Hannah Shoenfeld (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) was promoted by the network's president Fred Micklen (Tom Irwin) in exchange for her keeping quiet resulting in her committing suicide. The narrative explores how the female journalists try to function in a structure that constantly overlooks them as well as punishes them when they try to do something about it and critiques this by illustrating how this imposes a severe mental burden. In contrast to the male journalists, almost all female journalists on TMS are represented as dealing with some form of issue with mental and/or physical health such as anxiety, anger, or depression directly stemming from the pressures they experience at work.

TBT too portrays such struggles and links them to social media and the backlash and criticism female journalists receive through online channels pointing to the disproportionate share of online harassment they are confronted with. It underlines the severe impact such events have on the mental health of female journalists and illustrates how female journalists deal with such struggles. TMS shows that female journalists are forced to individually handle such problems and inevitably succumb to the pressures of the profession resulting in disastrous outcomes including a suicide. TBT on the other hand presents a more positive take on how to tackle these obstacles by relying on fellow female journalists and making each other stronger. Following this take, the series – in contrast to TMS - does not portray women as 'bitch' or 'whore' (sic). This relates to the series' strong focus on women's empowerment from a postfeminist perspective in which women can be feminine, emotional, and sexually active at the same time as being professional. Moreover, it helps female journalists with realizing their professional aspirations as they are encouraged to write about sex and love from a personal perspective. However, this more positive representation of female journalists should be interpreted with caution as it still proposes a very hegemonic feminine take on women in journalism from a rather feminine news environment as such posing no direct threat to the still dominant hegemonic masculine newsrooms.

Minority Journalists as Outsiders-Within

Lastly, TBT and TMS represent a wide spectrum of minority journalists. These include several African-American, Asian, and Latino/a men and women of whom some identify as non-straight. Here again, both series have different approaches to representing minority journalists. TMS explores an outside-within narrative in which the most recurring obstacles minority journalists in TMS are confronted with are being overlooked, used as a token, and pigeonholed in diversity news topics. The series underlines how minority journalists with different intersectional identities have different approaches to dealing which such obstacles. It is apparent that the men with a minority identity try to fight the structures that disadvantage them more explicitly than the women with a minority identity who are more prone to adapt to that structure. Whereas characters such as Daniel Henderson (a Black, gay man played by Desean Terry) are represented as addressing their superiors to talk about racism and

homophobia in the workplace, characters such as Mia Jordan (Black woman) and Stella Bak (Korean woman played by Greta Lee) are less confrontational and try to operate within the structure created by their non-minority counterparts. Especially women in higher-up positions do so to protect their careers and sometimes even play an active role in keeping other minority journalists sidelined. When Stella becomes head of news, she sidelines Daniel by making sure he only gets to cover diversity topics stating he does not have 'the it-factor'. Furthermore, she reprimands Yanko Flores (Latino man played by Néstor Carbonell) because of a culturally insensitive comment he made on television. This stands in contrast to the behavior of other non-minority journalists such as Alex and Mitch who get away with much worse. Alex, for example, disappears for a week without warning the network without any consequences. And Mitch got away with years of sexual misconduct which the network helped covering up. This illustrates that more minority journalists at higher levels do not necessarily create a better work environment for minority journalists.

Whereas TMS has a strong focus on exploring this outside-within narrative from an intersectional perspective, TBT rather focuses on 'intersecting identities' in which such characteristics are narratively mostly ignored or only stressed in relation to specific topics. The only narrative that somewhat engages with the struggles minority journalists face is the one focusing on Kat Edison (Aisha Dee), the digital-savvy head of social media who identifies as a queer black woman. Whereas her identity as a black woman is not explicitly stressed in the analyzed seasons, she realizes that she is attracted to women and adopts a rather 'modern' approach to the struggle and success trope (Dhaenens 2013). She is not confronted with shame and openly explores her sexual orientation without the need to immediately label it. Her 'coming-out' is represented as a process that goes back and forth in which she gets time and space to discover her sexual orientation. This contrasts with TMS which does represent a rather traditional struggle and success trope, albeit not in relation to all LGBTQ+ characters. Whereas the sexual orientation of Daniel is not explicitly stressed, the series does focus on Bradley's coming out as a bisexual woman. Bradley is represented as repressed and ashamed of her sexual orientation, especially in relation to her conservative family. When falling in love with Laura Peterson (Julianna Margulies), a fellow female journalist, she is forced to come to terms with her sexual orientation and is eventually publicly outed. The narrative illustrates how LGBTQ+ people are still seen as deviant and underlines the impact of a public outing. Laura reveals to Bradley that when she came out in the nineties, she was fired because of her sexual orientation which stunted her career and caused her to have troubled relationships with her friends and family. She sympathizes with Bradley who is now going through the same thing but also stresses that times have changed. She states:

> "We're talking about a situation where you being different can work to your advantage now. […] And I don't know. I have to tell you there is something inside me that wants to resent you for not being grateful for this. I see someone who is walking the same path, honestly, a path I helped lay. And it's a little annoying, and I'm envious. That's it. I lost a job for being gay. You should embrace it" (TMS, S2:E4).

It is stressed that being an LGBTQ+ journalist can create many obstacles for one's career and personal life but can also be used to one's advantage. Laura even encourages Bradley to use her identity strategically to get more journalistic assignments as this is something that was not possible yet when she was just starting out. This trope is entirely not present in TBT as Kat never attempts to use her minority identity to advance her career and is also not portrayed as

needing to do so. She gets promoted solely on the basis of the quality of her work and even becomes editor-in-chief of the magazine. This underlines again the different take of both series on the representation of minority journalists in which TMS addresses the obstacles that minority journalists experience by narratively positioning them in an outsider-within framework whereas TBT represents a more idealistic vision of journalism in which minority journalists are not necessarily confronted with such obstacles and do not consider themselves as outsiders in a white heterosexual newsroom.

Conclusion

We found that both in the representation of female and minority journalists, *The Bold Type* attempts to represent an inclusive work environment aimed at creating equal opportunities among journalists but at the same time deals with the obstacles that are still in place for female and minority journalists without critiquing them. This whereas *The Morning Show* offers a direct critique of such obstacles by representing the inability of female and minority journalists to properly deal with these obstacles. First, regarding the representation of female journalists, the results show that older stereotypes such that of the sob sister, super bitch, and super whore still persist albeit repackaged into newer stereotypes such as that of the veteran female tv reporter and the unexperienced female cub reporter. This underlines how modern representations of female journalists are still confronted with a dilemma in reconciling the traditionally masculine world of journalism and the feminine expectations society has set for them. In both series, this crystalized in the opposition between being a hard news or soft news reporter underlining the continuous gendered division of news beats and news media.

Despite, the recurring stereotypes, the series both apply their own distinct perspective to the gendering of journalism. *The Bold Type* does so from a postfeminist perspective in which embodying traditional feminine characteristics and being a good (female) journalist are not mutually exclusive representing an idealized view of what a newsroom could or should look like. However, by doing so, it also fails to critique the repackaged stereotypes of female journalists it still reiterates especially as it provides an image of a women's magazine newsroom where powerful women do not pose a real threat to the male hegemony that still dominates most newsrooms. In contrast, *The Morning Show* provides a more direct and effective critique of how the current organization of newsrooms disadvantages women. It does so through a more generically dramatic approach that highlights the obstacles female journalists still face including sexual harassment, sexualization, and ageism. This is closely related to the commercialization of journalism which is also highly gendered. Both series address the unequal power relations between male-dominated media ownership and the female editorial staff of the newsroom but only *The Morning Show* underlines how highly profit-oriented news businesses bring about and preserve the sexualization and objectivation of female journalists. By representing the impact of those practices on the mental health of female journalists, the series addresses and critiques the double burden female journalists have to carry.

Second, both series also represent racial and LGBTQ+ female minority journalists, and similar to their representation of non-minority female journalists, approach these from distinctly different perspectives. *The Bold Type* attempts to represent an inclusive newsroom in which minority journalists are not considered different or deviant. The series does so by not stressing the identity characteristics that differentiate minority journalists from their non-minority counterparts and by representing a newsroom in which those minority journalists

are not confronted with obstacles regarding their minority identity. However, again it does so in the context of a newsroom where such intersecting identities are no threat to hegemonic masculinity as such failing to critique the still very white and heterosexual newsrooms. *The Morning Show* on the other hand uses an outsider-within framework to illustrate how minority journalists are still considered deviant in such newsrooms and consequently confronted with obstacles that stunt their professional growth because of their intersectional rather than intersecting identities. It also represents a striking difference between how male and female minority journalists deal with these obstacles in which the first tend to address them and the latter tend to ignore them to fit in again stressing the above-mentioned double burden of female minority journalists. Lastly, the series also underlines the very different and complex experiences of minority journalists in which their identity can function both as an obstacle and in their favor.

As such TMS illustrates how fiction can have the potential to subvert and challenge existing structures. However, the series does not present an alternative for what a more inclusive and equal newsroom could look like. The latter is done more effectively by TBT, however, because of the context in which the narrative is set, the series paradoxically fails in subverting and challenging existing structures. Nevertheless, both series indicate that journalism fiction has become more sensitive to the obstacles that female journalists face whether they succeed in effectively critiquing those or not. Therefore, how the above-mentioned recurring stereotypes might be repackaged to subvert and challenge the hegemonic masculinity in newsrooms from an intersectional perspective merits further investigation. Furthermore, audience research is scarce regarding this topic of study. Little is known about how these representations can contribute to restructuring non-fictional newsrooms by challenging the obstacles that are still in place for female and minority journalists. By expanding existing knowledge, especially in relation to female and minority journalists, in this paper, we hope to have highlighted the importance of studying the fictional representation of journalism and have sparked interest in how it can aid in changing the lived circumstances of female and minority journalists worldwide.

Disclosure Statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author

Funding
This work was supported by Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen

References

Adriaens, Fien, and Sofie Van Bauwel. 2014. "Sex and the City: a postfeminist point of view? Or how popular culture functions as a channel for feminist discourses." *Journal of Popular Culture* 47 (1): 174-195.

Benshoff, Harry M, and Sean Griffin. 2009. *America on film: Representing race, class, gender, and sexuality at the movies*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Connell, Robert W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1990. "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color." *Stan. L. Rev.* 43: 1241-1299.

De Vuyst, Sara, and Karin Raeymaeckers. 2019. "Gender as a multi-layered issue in journalism: A multi-method approach to studying barriers sustaining gender

inequality in Belgian newsrooms." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 26 (1): 23-38. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506817729856.
Dhaenens, Frederik. 2013. "Teenage queerness: Negotiating heteronormativity in the representation of gay teenagers in Glee." *Journal of Youth Studies* 16 (3): 304-317.
Ehrlich, Matthew C. 1997. "Journalism in the movies." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 14 (3): 267-281.
---. 2005. "Shattered glass, movies, and the free press myth." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 29 (2): 103-118.
---. 2006. "Facts, truth and bad journalists in the movies." *Journalism* 7 (4): 501-519.
Ehrlich, Matthew C, and Joe Saltzman. 2015. *Heroes and scoundrels: The image of the journalist in popular culture*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.
Gill, Rosalind. 2007. "Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility." *European journal of cultural studies* 10 (2): 147-166.
Good, Howard. 1998. *Girl reporter: gender, journalism, and the movies*. Scarecrow Press.
Hall, Stuart. 1982. "The rediscovery of ideology: Return of the repressed in media studies." *Cultural theory and popular culture: A reader*: 111-141.
Hanitzsch, Thomas, and Tim P Vos. 2017. "Journalistic roles and the struggle over institutional identity: The discursive constitution of journalism." *Communication Theory* 27 (2): 115-135.
Kies, Bridget. 2016. "First comes love, then comes marriage:(Homo) normalizing romance on American television." *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 5 (2).
Lauzen, Martha M. 2018. *Boxed in 2017-18: Women on screen and behind the scenes in television.*
---. 2019. *Boxed in 2018–19: Women on screen and behind the scenes in television.*
Lindner, Andrew M., Melissa Lindquist, and Julie Arnold. 2015. "Million Dollar Maybe? The Effect of Female Presence in Movies on Box Office Returns." *Sociological Inquiry* 85 (3): 407-428. https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12081.
Lule, Jack. 2001. *Daily news, eternal stories: The mythological role of journalism*. London & New York, NY: Guilford Press.
Mastro, Dana E, and Bradley S Greenberg. 2000. "The portrayal of racial minorities on prime time television." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 44 (4): 690-703.
McNair, Brian. 2011a. "Journalism at the movies." *Journalism Practice* 5 (3): 366-375.
---. 2011b. "Journalists in film: heroes and villains." *Australian Journalism Review* 33 (1): 137-142.
---. 2014. "From cinema to TV: Still the same old stories about journalism." *Journalism Practice* 8 (2): 242-244.
Mercer, Kobena. 1990. "Black art and the burden of representation." *Third Text* 4 (10): 61-78.
Ness, Richard. 2020. *Encyclopedia of journalists on film*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
Obijiofor, Levi, and Folker Hanusch. 2011. *Journalism across cultures: An introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan
Painter, Chad. 2019. "Fictional Representations of Journalism." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*.
Painter, Chad, and Patrick Ferrucci. 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.

---. 2015. "'His Women Problem': An Analysis of Gender on 'The Newsroom'." *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Journal* 6.
---. 2017. "Gender games: The portrayal of female journalists on House of Cards." *Journalism Practice* 11 (4): 493-508.
---. 2019. "Taking the White Gloves Off: The Portrayal of Female Journalists on Good Girls Revolt." *Journal of Magazine Media* 19 (2): 50-71.
Rossie, Amanda. 2009. "Looking to the Margins: The "Outsider Within" Journalistic Fiction." *IJPC: The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture* 1: 105-137.
Saltzman, Joe. 2003. "Sob sisters: The image of the female journalist in popular culture." *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture.*
---. 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*.
Scarcelli, Cosimo Marco, Tonny Krijnen, and Paul Nixon. 2021. "Sexuality, gender, media. Identity articulations in the contemporary media landscape." 24 (8): 1063-1072.
Schippers, Mimi. 2007. "Recovering the feminine other: Masculinity, femininity, and gender hegemony." *Theory and society* 36 (1): 85-102.
Sink, Alexander, and Dana Mastro. 2016. "Depictions of Gender on Primetime Television: A Quantitative Content Analysis." *Mass Communication and Society* 20 (1): 3-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2016.1212243.
Tally, Margaret. 2021. *The Limits of# MeToo in Hollywood: Gender and Power in the Entertainment Industry*. McFarland.
Valencia, Ofa Bezunartea, María José Cantalapiedra, César Coca García, Aingeru Genaut Arratibel, Simón Peña Fernández, and Jesús Ángel Pérez Dasilva. 2008. "... So What? She's A Newspaperman and She's Pretty. Women Journalists in the Cinema." *Zer: Revista De Estudios De Comunicacion* 13 (25).
Van Leuven, Sarah, Karin Raeymaeckers, Manon Libert, Florence Le Cam, Joyce Stroobant, Sylvain Malcorps, Antoine Jacquet, Joke D'heer, François Heinderyckx, and Sara De Vuyst. 2019. *Het profiel van de Belgische journalist in 2018*. Gent: Academia Press.
Weaver, David H, Lars Willnat, and G Cleveland Wilhoit. 2019. "The American journalist in the digital age: Another look at US news people." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 96 (1): 101-130.