Looking for Prince Charming: A Diachronic Discourse Analysis of Love and Relationships in Flemish Women's Magazines

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Abstract

The general interest in printed magazines is declining, but women's magazines seem to resist this tendency better than their general news counterparts. Their relevance cannot be underestimated since they contribute to the wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point of time. Furthermore, they help to create both the woman's self-image and that which society has of her. The popularity of these magazines, together with their great impact, warrants an academic interest into the way they have (not) responded to or contributed to contemporary ideas about womanhood and gender, and more in particular, the issue of women's roles in their (partner) relationships.The present paper is part of a larger, historical study of the Flemish women's magazines Het Rijk der Vrouw, Libelle and Flair (1953-2013), in which we want to gain insight into the way these magazines articulate and represent women's roles in partner relationships. This paper presents the results of the first part of the study, namely the linguistic discourse analysis, in which we analysed the textual representation of women, men and their mutual relationships. The research focus is diachronic: we started by analysing the magazines of 1953 and then continued up to 2013. Inspired by the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1999; Van Dijk 1993; Wodak and Meyer 2001; Wodak and Chilton 2005; Machin and Mayr 2012), we have conducted a lexical analysis of the naming practices used to refer to women and men, and consequently, their mutual relationships. The key findings suggest that women's relationships with men, although different, are still integral to the ethos of these magazines. As could be expected, the focus on marriage has declined. At the same time, the number of roles that men can take on in women's lives has increased, and, most notably, the presence of a loving man in women's lives is still a central theme.

Key words: *critical discourse analysis, women's magazines*

1. Introduction

I'm every woman, it's all in me: these lyrics of the famous song of Whitney Houston remind us that there is not one, straightforward definition of what it means to be a woman. Being a woman implies fulfilling different roles, often at the same time: women can be defined as mothers or daughters, as young girls or seniors, as partners, as housewives or career women and so on. These different roles also represent different ways of acting and being; for example, a woman will talk and act differently on the work floor than she will at home, talking to her children. Moreover, when defining what it means to be a woman, women are often put in opposition to men to emphasise the differences between the two sexes. These differences go far beyond the purely physical and biological differences, but refer to the ways in which women and men act, speak and behave differently. As such, we speak of 'gender', referring to the culturally and socially constructed differences between men and women. Gender is an aspect of identity that is key to the way individuals conceptualise themselves and their societies. As gender is not created in a vacuum, but is a historical construct drawing on cultural and social models dominating in particular times and at particular places (del-Teso-Craviotto 2006: 2004), every human being must learn to 'do gender', or in other words, to find their place on the gender continuum. Foucault (1976) has argued that these cultural and social models are not imposed on us from a single source of power, but result from multiple discourses that inform our daily acts and interactions. In Western societies, popular media are nowadays central to the formation and continuation of such discourses (del-Teso-Craviotto 2006: 2004). For women in particular there are diverse, sometimes even competing discourses about femininity available in the media. From television sitcoms and music videos to magazines and movies, the media offer a wealth of messages regarding the expected role of women both in interpersonal relationships and in society broadly (Kim and Ward 2004: 48).

In this paper we will focus on a type of medium whose content is specifically aimed at a female audience, namely women's magazines. Given the fact that language can be used to perform gender (Butler 1990), these media texts can be considered as specifically defining femininity. Our main goal is therefore to examine how language conceptualises gender in these magazines and to gain insight into the way they have contributed to contemporary ideas about womanhood and gender, specifically focussing on the issue of women's (partner) relationships. We focus on three Flemish women's magazines, namely *Het Rijk der Vrouw, Flair* and *Libelle.* We have chosen these weeklies because of their different target groups: *Flair* is aimed at an audience of girls and women between 18 and 34 years old, while *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle* have a similar target group of older women between 25 and 54 years old.

In order to investigate the diachronic evolution of the way women's (partner) relationships are articulated in these Flemish women's magazines, we have conducted a lexical analysis of the naming practices used to refer to women and men, and consequently, their mutual relationships.

The following research questions will be answered: what aspects of the male and female self and their relationships are highlighted and downplayed in the

textual imagery of the magazines? What images of men and relationships do we find in these publications? Is there any evolution in the way women are represented in their relationships with their partner(s)?

2. *The Flemish Magazines* Het Rijk der Vrouw, Libelle *and* Flair

The magazines *Het Rijk der Vrouw, Libelle* and *Flair* were selected because of their popularity, their different target groups and their different years of publication. They can be categorized as 'domestic weeklies' (Hermes 2005: 6) based on the fact that they are published weekly and the women in these magazines are situated in a domestic sphere. This also reflects in a more traditional choice of topics, with an emphasis on true-life stories.

2.1 Het Rijk der Vrouw ('Women's Realm')

Het Rijk der Vrouw came onto the market in 1934 and was intended for both young women and more experienced housewives. The magazine served as a practical guide for housewives and girls, offering contributions on fashion, fancywork and interior design. The articles were often made up as real DIY-guides, with patterns for different garments and advice on which colors and furniture to use in the interior. It also included several readers' letters, often with moralising advice on married and family life (Flour et al. 1995). At the height of its success, it had a circulation rate of 151 000 (Schokkaert 2018: [online].

In 1990, *Het Rijk der Vrouw,* then declared bankrupt, was taken over by *Libelle.* Both magazines had long been competitors: they were aimed at women between 25 and 54 years old, whose concern was to take care of their families.

2.2 Libelle

The origin of *Libelle* in Belgium is to be situated in 1938, when the Dutch magazine (which already existed in The Netherlands since 1934) came onto the Flemish market. During the Second World War, the production of the magazine was stopped, but from November 1945 *Libelle* was published weekly again, this time in a separate Flemish version. With the subtitle 'Weekly for the Flemish woman', the magazine was intended for housewives of the middle class, but from the 1960's it was also oriented towards women who worked outside the home (Flour et al. 1995).

In 1970, *Libelle* merged with another Flemish women's magazine: *Rosita.* Until then, *Libelle*'s profile had been rather conservative. However, as Second Wave Feminism developed itself, social problems came to the fore and women obtained different roles. As times changed, *Libelle/Rosita* was forced to adapt its profile. The magazine paid more attention to pioneers, such as women with exceptional (read: unfeminine) occupations. Labelling these stories as 'exceptional', however, still endorsed the traditional sex roles (Flour et al. 1995: 149).

In 1990, *Libelle* merged again, this time with the bankrupt magazine *Het Rijk der Vrouw*.

With the turn of the century, and the growing importance of the Internet, *Libelle* starts to manifest itself more and more as a brand with activities in different fields. In 2004, it launches its own website with articles about fashion, living and education, recipes, wanted ads and contests (in line with the content of the printed magazine). In the online *Libelle Shop* women can buy 'Libelle products' such as cookery books, books about fancywork and a special Libelle clothing collection. In 2013 *Libelle* launches its very own television channel. Again, the television channel is an extension of the printed magazine with programmes about cooking, interior design, health, beauty and children. In July 2015, however, the channel disappeared off screen and it is now available as a mobile application. In 2015 the print magazine had a weekly circulation rate of 227 274 copies (267 079 in 2007) (CIM 2018: [online]).

2.3 Flair

The magazine *Flair* was founded in 1980 and was created as reaction to the women's magazines that already existed on the Flemish market, which were rather conservative and aimed at the traditional housewife. *Flair*, on the other hand, wanted to reach the young, modern women between 18 and 34 years old and wanted to function as 'a friend with whom you can share all your worries and doubts and who's always ready to give good, non-patronizing advice on the problems that are related to being a woman' (Van den Bossche 1995: 31). The emphasis on young women also reflects in the way this magazine manifests itself, with an emphasis on all that is trendy, hip and fashionable.

From the beginning, *Flair* presented itself as a magazine that had more to offer than culinary recipes and domestic advice. Controversial issues such as abortion, homosexuality and addiction were regularly treated. As a result of this, the magazine knew a difficult start; it was designated as too feminist and pedantic. In reaction to this, the editorial staff realised it needed a more subtle approach and began to pay more attention to readers' letters and advice. This change in content turned out to be very successful and gradually the amount of readers, advertising and pages began to rise (Van den Bossche 1995: 32).

In recent years, the magazine developed new, more interactive ways to communicate with its readership, resulting in a strong online community. In 2000, the *Flair* website was launched. The content of this website is free and is in line with the content of the magazine: articles about fashion, beauty, sexuality and relationships, tests and contests. However, the interest in the paid content of the magazine seems to be in free fall: in 2015, the print magazine had a weekly circulation rate of 84 282 copies (versus 176 215 in 2007) (CIM 2018: [online]).

3. Corpus/Sample

As the research focus of this study is diachronic, the corpus consists of a sample of all three magazines between 1953 and 2013 with an interval of ten years (1953, 1963, 1973 etc.). Each year, 12 issues of each magazine have been

chosen randomly (by means of a randomiser). Through these issues, we have analysed all articles which in some way relate to women, men and their mutual relationships. It is important to mention that almost all relationships are heterosexual relationships; homosexuality is a topic which is mainly absent from the corpus. The full corpus contains 467 articles: 139 from *Het Rijk der Vrouw,* 143 from *Libelle* and 185 from *Flair.*
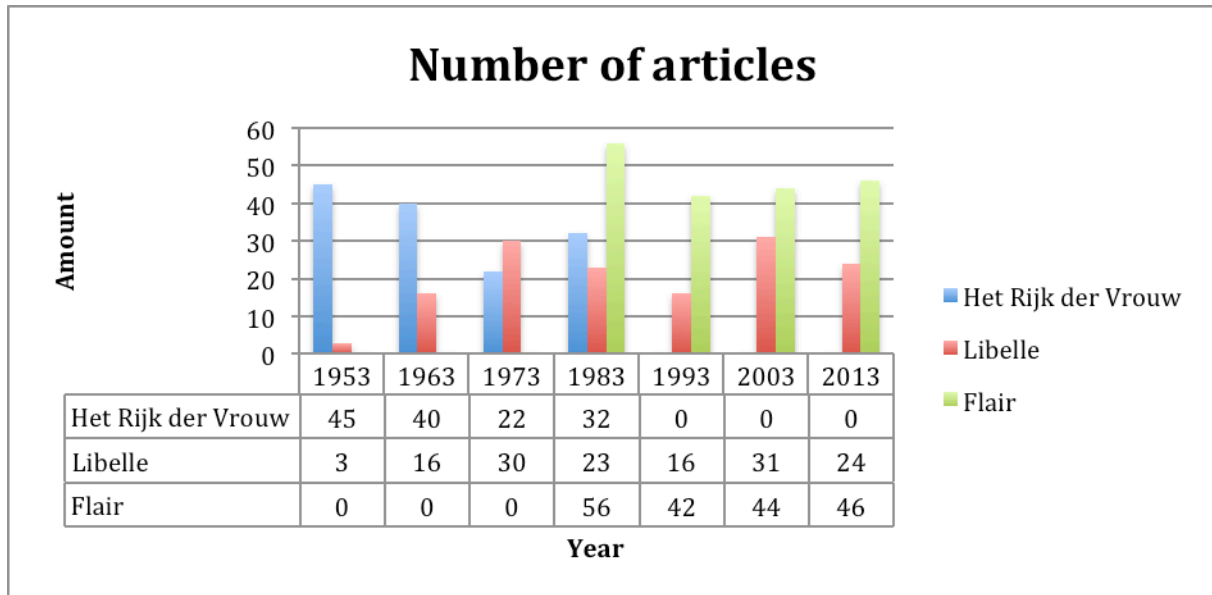

	1953	1963	1973	1983	1993	2003	2013
Het Rijk der Vrouw	45	40	22	32	0	0	0
Libelle	3	16	30	23	16	31	24
Flair	0	0	0	56	42	44	46

Figure 1. Number of articles in the corpus

It is worth noticing here that the corpus contains only four volumes of both *Het Rijk der Vrouw (*1953-1983) and *Flair* (1983-2013). It is therefore the more remarkable that these magazines contain a lot more articles on relationships than *Libelle* does in a time span of 60 years.

However, if we take into account the length of the articles by looking at the number of words, we see a whole different picture (fig. 2). *Flair* clearly pays most attention to women, men and their mutual relationships, while these topics are not that common in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*. This can be explained by the fact that most articles on women and their relationships in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* come from the problem pages section, which are rather short pieces of articles. Moreover, *Het Rijk der Vrouw* mainly served as a practical guide for housewives, with recipes, shopping guides, inspiration on interior design and sewing patterns. Women and their relationships as a topic were mainly absent in the magazine. In *Libelle* and *Flair* on the other hand, relationships, and since the 1980's also sex, receive much more attention in different sections in the magazine.

	Length of the articles	**% of corpus**

Het Rijk der Vrouw	78 708	17,8
Libelle	160 325	36,2
Flair	203 477	46

Figure 2. Length of the articles in the corpus in words

4. Methodological Framework

4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

This study draws on the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis because it uses textual evidence to support certain interpretative conclusions (Jeffries 2007: 10). The tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be found in van Dijk (1993), Fairclough (1999), Wodak and Meyer (2001) and Wodak and Chilton (2005). The framework has often been used to examine representations (Stamou 2001; Pietikäinen 2003; Trioen and Temmerman 2009) and also in the context of women's magazines, a CDA approach has proven to be fruitful (Wadia 1991; Hyde 2000; Gill 2009; Temmerman and Van de Voorde 2015).

According to CDA, language should be considered as discourse, that is a form of social practice (Fairclough 1995: 54-55):

> Viewing language as social practice implies, first, that it is a mode of action [...]. It also implies that language is a socially and historically situated mode of action, in a dialectical relationship with other facets of the social. What I mean by a dialectical relationship is that it is socially shaped, but is also socially shaping – or socially constitutive. Critical discourse analysis explores the tension between these two sides of language use, the socially shaped and socially constitutive, rather than opting one-sidedly for one or the other.

Doing CDA involves analysing choices of words and grammar in a text in order to discover the underlying discourses and ideologies. A reliable discourse analysis should always start from verifiable linguistic phenomena. Therefore, we want to find out which textual and linguistic resources are used to represent women, men and their mutual relationships and how these choices contribute to their representation in general.

One of the most basic kinds of linguistic analysis is lexical analysis, which focuses on the words that are used in a text. The motivation for this kind of analysis is based on the assumption that people, or in this particular case the editors, readers and experts in the magazines always have a range of possible choices at their disposal to denominate social actors, actions and feelings. According to Fairclough (1995), these choices are a matter of vocabulary (Fairclough 1995: 109):

> [...] the vocabulary one is familiar with provides sets of preconstructed categories, and representation always involves deciding how to "place" what is being represented within these sets of categories – shall I call the violent death of people at the hands of others "killing", "murder" or "massacre"? It may also be a matter of metaphor: shall I call it a "holocaust' or an 'extermination"?'

Consequently, the choice of words is never free or neutral; different words have different meanings and often also different connotations. In Critical Discourse Analysis, these semantic choices are referred to as 'representational strategies' (Fowler 1991; Van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 2003: 145), indicating that different lexical choices reflect different ways of representing things.

When it comes to representing human beings, the social actor analysis of Van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) is particularly relevant. The naming choices that are made and the predicates these names receive all incorporate connotations, attributed qualities and evaluations. As Machin and Mayr (2013: 360) put it:

> These choices allow us to place people in the social world and highlight certain aspects of their identity which we wish to draw attention to, or background others we may want to conceal. Each choice can have the effect of connoting sets of ideas, values and attitudes that are not necessarily overtly stated.

The use of metaphors for the denotation of human actors is a case in point. Conceptual metaphor theory as founded by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) states that metaphor is a fundamental part of human thought and that we often make use of metaphor to understand the world we live in, but also to convey abstract and complex meanings. Using metaphor to refer to a person can have an influential effect, as the meaning bundle related to it again contains non-explicit values and attributions which a speaker can exploit without having to commit to them.

Machin and Thornborrow (2003, 2006) have applied a critical analysis to the discourses about women found in the different localized versions of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*. They have studied the representations of women's sexual and work practices and they have found them to be very similar. In both, women are fundamentally alone and they have to gain power and independence through their body and sexuality, a model which is represented as a playful fantasy. Still, in order to live this fantasy, the women readers need the products which are advertised in the magazines. This leads the authors to conclude that 'feminism has become intertwined with consumerism, allowing consumerism to become a discourse with which women can and do signify their roles and identities across the globe' (Machin and Thornborrow 2003: 469). Their analyses focus on how women are represented and how they are addressed.

As we have chosen women in their partner relationships as the main topic of our study, we have concentrated on the representation of both women and men in the magazines in our corpus. We have focused on a social actor analysis by studying the nouns and adjectives used. More specifically, we have examined the names used to refer to women and men to find out how they are identified and how their mutual relationships are conceptualised. The names we use to denominate a person will always foreground certain aspects of identity. An analysis of the names used to refer to women and men is therefore the appropriate tool to examine which roles the editors of the magazines attribute to them and how they describe their mutual relationships. The noun 'husband', for example, foregrounds the fact that a woman and a

man are married, while the noun 'lover' refers to an adulterous relationship between two persons.

The naming analysis was conducted with the help of the computer program NVivo. This allowed us to adopt a quantitative as well as a qualitative approach. In a first phase, we used the program to generate a list of words ordered by frequency. We then used this list to manually select all names referring to women and men in the different texts and to investigate how many times these nouns occurred. In addition, we used the Word Tree function to look at the sentence where the particular word appears in the text and in which context. This also allowed us to examine if certain nouns were part of a noun phrase (e.g. *een gezonde man die in bed wordt afgewezen* ('a healthy man who is rejected in bed'). If this was the case, we included the full noun phrase in our database. This allowed us to study the meaning in context of the referring noun.

Additionally, we also did a close reading of all texts to see if there were any names referring to women and men that had been overlooked. Thus, our naming analysis did not solely focus on nouns, but also on proper nouns, personal pronouns and noun phrases. Additionally, the adjectives pre-modifying the head noun were also taken into account, as they obviously change the ideational meaning of the head noun and can evaluate the referent in a positive or negative way.

5. Analysis

5.1 Naming Women and Men in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* (1953-1983)

In general, the majority of the naming practices is 'neutral', in the sense that they refer to the named referent in the most general way: they can be considered as naming practices that do not provide evidence of a certain approach or an evaluation. In this study, we only consider three naming practices as strictly neutral: the personal pronouns *hij* ('he'), *ze/zij* ('she'), *hem/haar* ('him/her') or *ze* ('they') (referring to women or men), the proper names of women and men, and the use of *(de) man(nen)* ('(the) man/men') and *(de) vrouw(en)* ('(the) woman/women') although these nouns can also carry some sort of meaning as men and women, opposed to e.g. boys and girls, can refer to persons of the male or female sex of advanced ages.

The personal pronouns *hij* or *ze/zij* ('he' or 'she') and *hem* or *haar* ('him' or 'her') occur most often and function as anaphoric references to men or women who have already been mentioned earlier in the text, e.g. by means of a proper name. Proper nouns are used to refer to specific men and women, such as the persons involved in the real-life stories of the women readers:

(1)   *Na vijfentwintig jaar huwelijk heb ik André, mijn man, verloren.*
       After twenty-five years of marriage, I lost my husband, André.
                                                                    (RdV 1963/38)

The use of the name *een/de/deze/die man* or *vrouw* ('a/the/this/that man' or 'woman') can also be considered as neutral (although we have demonstrated earlier that this name can also carry a certain meaning). Interestingly, these

names are often used in a generic way: instead of referring to one specific man or women, the name refers to 'the man' or 'the woman' in general, as in example (2):

(2) *Wat is een man met een beeldschone vrouw die een slecht karakter heeft?*
      What can a man do with a gorgeous woman who has a bad character?
                                                                    (RdV 1963/9)

In the plural as well, the names *vrouwen* ('women') and *men* ('men') can be used in a general way. The name *vrouwen* ('women') is then often opposed to *mannen* ('mannen') to emphasise the difference between the two sexes:

(3) *Wij vrouwen laten ons te veel door onze gevoelens leiden.*
      We women let our feelings lead too much. (RdV 1953/5)

The use of such general truths is especially characteristic for the advice in the problem pages of 1953, 1963 and 1973, in which the advice is often presented in a moralizing way.

Although neutral names make up the vast majority of the names referring to women and men, there are also many names that foreground a certain characteristic, role or relationship of the person in question and in the context of this study, these names are most valuable.

In the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's many names refer to the fact that the named man or woman is married or is about to get married: *uw man/vrouw, echtgenoot/echtgenote* ('your man/woman' or 'husband/wife'), *verloofde* ('fiancé') or *toekomstige echtgenoot* ('future husband'). In the 1983 issues, we gradually see that men and women can take on other roles in a relationships: names as *partner* ('partner') and *vriend/vriendin* ('boyfriend/girlfriend') refer to a relationship without being married, while *ex-vriendin* ('ex-girlfriend') indicates that the relationship has ended. Other remarkable names are *kantoorvriend* ('office boyfriend'), *stoeivriendje* ('friend to romp around') and *minnares* ('mistress').

Remarkable is the fact that in the corpus of 1983, names referring to homosexual relationships appear for the very first time: *homo* ('gay'), *homoseksuelen* or *homofielen* ('homosexuals'). These names are used in a discussion about sexuality and children, in which the respondents are asked their opinion on homosexuality.

Some names in the editors' texts include an evaluation of the referent. Often, this evaluation is established by the combination of a neutral name with an evaluative (negative or positive) adjective, as in:

(4) *Welja, Lydia, verliefd worden op een knappe jongeman is heel normaal op jouw leeftijd, toch vrees ik dat je deze verliefdheid in de normale perken dient te houden en ook je verbeelding een beetje moet intomen.*

      Yes of course, Lydia, falling in love with a handsome young man is very normal at your age, nevertheless I am afraid that you have to limit this being in love and also restrain your imagination. (RdV 1963 /28)

In the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's, these adjectives refer to either the physical appearance of men and women (*een aantrekkelijke vrouw* ('an attractive woman'), *een knappe jongeman* ('a handsome young man'), or more intrinsic characteristics as sympathetic, good and honest (*een goed echtgenoot* ('a good husband'), *een lieve jongen* ('a sweet boy'). Seriousness, loyalty and honesty are values that are frequently attributed to men and women: *een flinke en trouwe echtgenote* ('a vigorous and loyal wife'), *een ernstige en degelijke echtgenoot en huisvader* ('a serious and reliable husband and father of family') or *een welopgevoede man* ('a well-educated man').

In the 1970's and 1980's, many names refer to the metaphor LOVE IS A FAIRYTALE in which love is represented as something that lasts a lifetime and in which men are presented as princes on their white horses. Examples are *die ene echte liefde* ('that one true love'), *de ideale levenspartner* ('the ideal partner'), *mijn grote liefde* ('my great love') and *de vrouw van mijn dromen* ('the woman of my dreams').

Another metaphor draws on the idea of men as animals, in which men are represented as 'village bulls' [literal translation] and women as their 'prey':

(5)   *Dorpsstieren hebben dit vlug in de gaten en gaan er dan ook op los, want ze weten dat ze hun prooi ooit wel te pakken zullen krijgen.*

   Village bulls [lit. translation]soon realize this and hit out, because they know that, sooner or later, they will lay hold on their prey. (RdV 1973/23)

5.2 Naming Women and Men in *Libelle* (1953-2013)

Also in *Libelle*, neutral names make up the vast majority of the names that could be traced in the texts. As in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*, most names referring to a characteristic, role or relationship are names that refer to the fact that the named referent is married. However, in this magazine as well we noticed an evolution in the number and the type of roles attributed to women and men: while they are primarily fiancés, brides and grooms or spouses in the oldest issues, they can be partners, boyfriends or girlfriends, singles or exes in the issues of 1983 until 2013. Other names referring to remarkable types of relationships are *sekspartner* ('sex partner') (2013), *one night stand, internetcontacten* ('internet contacts') and *wulpse minnares* ('seductive mistress') (2003).

Remarkable is the fact that we have to wait until 2003 to find an article with references to homosexual relationships in the problem pages of the magazine. Moreover, this is just a small article with information on an evening talk about homosexual or bisexual youngsters. The names used here are *homo* ('gay'), *lesbienne* ('lesbian') and *bi* ('bi(sexual)').

When we take a closer look at the adjectives premodifying the (neutral) nouns, we see that women and men are, as in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*, primarily characterised as young people in the earlier issues with names as *jongeman* ('young man'), *een jong meisje* ('a young girl') and *een jonge vooruitstrevende vrouw* ('a young progressive woman'). In the issues of 2003 and 2013, on the other hand, we see that men in particular are often characterised by their physical appearance: *die knappe man aan de toog* ('that attractive man at the

bar'), *een aantrekkelijke man* ('an appealing man') and *een man die naar eigen zeggen de looks heeft van een Griekse god* ('a man who, in his own words, has the looks of a Greek god').

A recurring theme in the *Libelle* corpus is the idea of one true love and men as princes on their white horses: *sprookjesprins* ('fairy-tale prince'), *toverprins* ('fairy prince') (1953), *de-ridder-op-het-witte-paard-die-ons-gelukkig-maakt-en-voor-wie-wij-de-enige-zijn* ('the knight on his white horse who makes us happy and for whom we are the only one') (1993), *Prins op het Witte Paard* ('Prince Charming'), *de ware* ('the one'), *de Ware Jacob* ('Mr. Right') , *de liefde van uw leven* ('the love of your life') (2003) and *ware liefde* ('true love') (2013).

However, in contrast to the positive representations of men as everlasting loves, we also encounter also a small number of naming practices which refer to the negative attitudes and behaviour of men. In the following example, the metaphorical noun 'monster' draws on the metaphor MEN ARE ANIMALS. The example is from a story in which a woman testifies about her husband sexually abusing children. In news discourse, and particularly in articles on male sexual violence, denoting men as monsters or beasts is a frequently used practice for dehumanising the male antagonists (see Clark 1992; Naylor 2001; Soothill and Walby 1991). In this example as well, referring to the male referent as a monster is used to dehumanise the offender.

> (6) *Met wat voor een monster was ik eenentwintig jaar lang getrouwd geweest?*
> With what kind of monster was I married for twenty-one years?
>
> <div align="right">(Lib 2003/38)</div>

5.3 Naming Women and Men in *Flair* (1983-2013)

The magazine *Flair,* then, which was invented as a reaction to the more traditional women's magazines on the Flemish market, was in some ways indeed ground-breaking.

From its early years in the 1980's, *Flair* assigned different relational roles to men: names as *partner, vakantieliefje* ('holiday lover'), *minnaar* ('lover') (1983), *avontuurtje* ('an affair') and *vrijgezel* ('bachelor') (1993) all refer to different kinds of relationships. Remarkable as well is the fact that sex and sexuality are omnipresent in the magazine since the beginning, not only in the choice of topics and articles, but also in the way women and men are categorised: *vrouwen die hun seksuele behoeftes hebben leren kennen via zelfbevrediging* ('women who came to know their sexual needs through masturbation') (1983), *vrouwen die geen orgasme krijgen* ('women who do not reach an orgasm'), *vrouwen die moeilijk klaarkomen* ('women who have difficulties to reach an orgasm') (1993), *sekspartner* ('sex partner'), *bedpartner* ('bed partner'), *maagd* ('virgin'), (2003) and *het meisje dat niet kan vrijen* ('the girl who cannot have sex') (2013).

Remarkable in the volumes of 2003 and 2013 is the frequent use of English terms. This is a way for the magazine to present itself as young, hip and trendy in order to appeal to the younger target group of *Flair.* Examples are *naughty girl, safety girl, loverman, glamour queen, toy boy* (2003), *hot chick, Prince*

Charming, Miss Perfect, happy high school sweethearts, Mister Perfect, babe and *Mr. Charming* (2013).

Men and women can be evaluated in a positive or in a negative way. Positive evaluations are *bink* ('clever fellow'), *de liefste man die ik ooit ontmoet heb* ('the sweetest man I have ever met'), *een schat* ('sweetheart') (1983), *prachtjongen* ('beautiful boy') and *supervrouw* ('super woman') (2003). As in the other magazines, the idea of one true love and references to the ideal man as a prince are omnipresent in *Flair*. Examples are *de Ware Jacob* ('Mr. Right'), *de man van je leven* ('the man of your dreams') (1983), *droomprins* ('fairytale prince'), *de ware* ('the one') (1993), *soulmate, de man van je dromen* ('the man of your dreams') (2003), *de man op het witte paard* ('the man on the white horse'), *dé grote liefde* ('*the* big love') and *Mr. Charming* (2013).

(7) *Natuurlijk dromen we allemaal van de prins op het witte paard met wie we nog lang en gelukkig leven.*
Of course we all dream of Prince Charming, with whom we will live happily ever after. (Flair 2013/4)

Here, 'prince' is a reference to the well-known fictional character in many fairy tales. By referring to this figure, the reader must rely on his/her knowledge of fairy tales to interpret 'prince' as referring to a highly desirable, attractive young man.

At the same time, the magazine draws on the metaphor LOVE IS A FAIRYTALE: love and relationships are represented as a fairy tale, suggesting that love strikes unexpectedly when a prince on a white horse passes by. Moreover, it implies a happy ending.

Negative terms are *verfomfaaide vogelverschrikker* ('wrinkled scarecrow') (1993), *hoer* ('whore') (2003), *eikel* ('loaf') and *hufter* ('lout'). These naming practices indicate that men are not always represented as ideal partners, but that negative experiences in relationships with men are also present in the magazine.

(8) *De boosheid is wat gaan liggen, maar ik vind hem nog steeds een eikel. Nooit gedacht dat ik iemand zo zou haten.*
My anger has declined, but I still think he's a loaf. I never thought I would hate someone that much. (Flair 2013/19)

6. General Conclusions

In order to discover how three Flemish women's magazines wrote about women, men and their mutual relationships from 1953 until 2013, we made use of a lexical (naming) analysis to examine the naming practices used to refer to both sexes.

Contrary to the findings of Machin and Thornborrow (2003, 2006), consumerism is not the most important motive in the representation of women and their relationships in these Flemish magazines. *Flair* resembles *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* most, but all three Flemish magazines address

the readers' identities and their partner relationships as such, without introducing commercial products as the solution to possible shortcomings.

Our analysis has enabled us to expose some general tendencies:

1) The importance of men and relationships as a topic in women's magazines has increased

Whereas in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle* of 1953 and 1963, the problem pages mainly addressed the topic of men and relationships, different text types do this in the issues of 1973 and 1983. In *Libelle*, the number of articles devoted to this topic stabilizes in the subsequent years. *Flair* pays most attention to women, men and their mutual relationships ever since its launch in the eighties. However, in contrast with *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle*, not only the problem pages make up a large proportion of the corpus, but also in other sections, this magazine writes about the different aspects of women and their relationships with their partners.

2) Marriage is central in the lives of women in the fifties, sixties and seventies

As the language in both *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle* illustrates, marriage is a central and crucial factor in the lives of women in the fifties, sixties and seventies. The naming analysis has shown that women and men are almost always represented as being married or about to get married. Looking at the advice in the problem pages, we see that the oldest magazines consider marriage to be a 'holy bond' that cannot be broken. Women are not allowed to have adulterous feelings. When they do have them, they are sternly reprimanded to 'expel those forbidden thoughts out of their minds'. Often, this advice is formulated in a moralizing way by the use of the nouns *men* and *women* in a generalizing way to present it as a general truth. Love and commitment to husband and children are considered to be the highest goods. This is connected to the identities of women that emerge. From the fifties until the seventies, women were advised to adapt and to 'give in' in a relationship. The magazines laugh off the complaints of women about the fact that their husbands are going out too much or the fact that they are way too much interested in other women, by saying that it's an inborn characteristic of men and that women themselves are to blame: they have to create a cosy home space, look after their appearance and be cheerful and happy, so that men are not tempted to leave the house. This idea of 'pleasing men' is something that recurs in many pieces of advice: 'talk little and know how to listen' is presented as a magic recipe to attract a man.

3) Since the eighties, the importance of marriage is declining.

The number of different names to refer to women and men in all three magazines increases and reflects the different roles they can take on in their relationships: they can be partners, boy- or girlfriends, (adulterous) lovers, exes or even sex partners. When comparing the different magazines, we notice that *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle* use the names 'husband' and 'wives' more often, in contrast to *Flair,* where partners are defined more often in terms of boyfriends and girlfriends. This difference reflects the difference in target groups: the reader of *Flair* tends to be younger than that of *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle,* and therefore also more unmarried.

This is connected to the different identities of women that emerge. Women are now free to decide what kind of relationship they want to have with their partner(s) and divorce is no longer considered a last resort, but a deliberate choice. The central concept of marriage has now made room for the concept of independence in which a relationship with a man does not necessarily have to lead to a marriage. Instead, the emphasis is on love, in any possible form. Women nowadays are advised to stand up for their rights, to respect their own feelings and needs, to leave a man who does not respect them and to enjoy life, love and sex. Contemporary readers are portrayed as independent women, who earn their own income, who still see a long-term relationship with a man as a main goal, but who expect a relationship based on equality.

4) Relationships are mainly heterosexual

Homosexuality is mentioned for the first time in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* of 1983 in a discussion about sexuality and having children. The magazine asks the respondents if they find homosexuality normal or abnormal and if they would prefer a heterosexual or homosexual child, which proves that heterosexual relationships are still not openly accepted.

In *Libelle,* we have to wait until 2003 to find a short article about an evening talk on queer people, where they can discuss their sexual orientation. The corpus does not contain any other reference to homosexuality.

In the problem pages of *Flair* of 1993 and 2003, two woman readers talk about their feelings for another woman and how to cope with it. In both cases, the magazine recommends not to fight against those feelings. Furthermore, in 2013, there are two more articles that shed light on homosexuality. The first one is an anonymous testimonial by a Flemish celebrity who's a lesbian, but does not want this 'secret' to be revealed. The other article is a roundtable conversation with six lesbians in which they answer all kinds of questions people 'do not dare to ask'. Both articles may break a taboo at first sight, but what they actually do is reproduce it by representing a homosexual relationship as something that is not yet accepted in society or by representing lesbians as a different species of people who are not approachable.

5) *Flair* is the sex-iest magazine

In *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle* of 1953 and 1963, sex is absent. There are no articles about sex or sexuality and the questions in the problem pages are all situated around the desire to find the ideal partner and to have a happy marriage with him. Women complain about their husband's problematic behavior (such as drinking or their fulsome attention to other women) (e.g. *een man die drinkt* ('a man who drinks')), they have doubts about their current relationship or marriage, they fall in love with somebody outside their marriage (*een andere man* ('another man')) or they need help in showing their interest to men. During all these years, there are no explicit questions about sex or sexuality.

This changes gradually in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* of 1973, when some of the women readers begin to ask questions about contraception and sexual education. Today, these questions might seem a bit silly: one reader wants to know if cancer can be transmitted by having sex and another one wonders if you can get pregnant by a kiss. At the same time, these questions indicate the

ignorance of some women readers of that time when it comes to sexual education.

In 1983 then, only three years after its launch, we see that the magazine *Flair* on the opposite does make room for sex and sexuality and in the following years as well, sex remains a major topic in *Flair*. This is not only reflected in the choice of topics of the articles, but also in the way women and men are categorised with names as *vrouwen die hun seksuele behoeftes hebben leren kennen via zelfbevrediging* ('women who came to know their sexual needs through masturbation') (1983), *vrouwen die geen orgasme krijgen* ('women who do not reach an orgasm'), *vrouwen die moeilijk klaarkomen* ('women who have difficulties to reach an orgasm') (1993), *sekspartner* ('sex partner'), *bedpartner* ('bed partner'), *maagd* ('virgin'), *geil kereltje* ('horny fellow') (2003), *het meisje dat niet kan vrijen* ('the girl who cannot have sex') and *seksgodin* ('sex goddess') (2013).

In *Libelle,* on the contrary, sex is mainly absent.

6) Seriousness versus attractiveness

When we take a look at the adjectives pre-modifying the nouns and the evaluative names, we see that women and men are characterised differently throughout the years. In the fifties, sixties and seventies, intrinsic characteristics like sympathetic, good and honest are frequently attributed to women and men, indicating that these are values that need to be pursued. In the more recent magazines, on the other hand, we see that men in particular are often characterised on the basis of their physical appearance (*knap* ('appealing', *mooi* ('beautiful'), *aantrekkelijk* ('attractive')). The adjectives *lief* ('sweet') and *aardig* ('kind') are also frequently attributed to men. Women, on the other hand, are more characterised on the basis of their character or intelligence (*intelligent* ('intelligent'), *boeiend* ('fascinating'), *avontuurlijk* ('adventurous'), *verleidelijk* ('seductive'). In the oldest magazines, they were often referred to as 'housewives', while the more recent magazines also talk about 'career women' and, in contrast, about 'housemen'.

7) Love is a fairy tale

Metaphorical language is used to represent men in two different ways. On the one hand, the negative attitudes of men in relationships are often discussed in the text of the corpus with names which refer to the metaphor 'men are animals'. Examples are *dorpsstier* ('village bull'), *alfamannetje* ('alpha male') and *monster*.

One the other hand, the fairy-tale figure of Prince Charming is ubiquitous in the corpus. This metaphor refers to an idealised form of masculinity and represents men as attractive and highly desirable. At the same time, love is presented as a fairy tale, which implies a happy end. This is connected to the idealised (hypothetical) picture of relationships which is being kept alive with names such as *de ware (Jacob)* ('the one/Mr. Right'), *de liefde van je leven* ('the love of your life') and *mijn grote liefde* ('my great love'). This projection of an ideal, long-term heterosexual relationship has not changed through the years.

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