

‘Representation matters’

*A research on the linguistic representations of women who love women in
Dutch media landscapes*



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Abstract

This thesis aims to examine how women who love women (WLW) are represented in Dutch media landscapes. In the introduction, I elaborate on the work of Dutch media critic Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuizen, who openly shared her critique on heteronormative bias in women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* in 2019. After discussing the key concepts, representation, stereotyping, heteronormativity, and homonormativity, I carry out a critical discourse analysis in combination with queer linguistic approaches to discourses on the women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* and the LGBTI magazine *L'HOMO*, specifically looking at how these magazines represent WLW in their language use. Extrapolating from these findings, I argue that Van den Nieuwenhuizen failed to examine that heteronormativity can similarly be manifested in non-heterosexual media sources such as the magazine *L'HOMO*. The dominant discourses that arise from this analysis is that WLW remain underrepresented in Dutch media due to the heteronormative assumption that women are only attracted to the opposite sex. Likewise, the analysis shows that heterosexual as well as non-heterosexual women are expected to conform to certain gender ideals in order to be accepted in society. By drawing on the stereotypical perceptions of dyke and butch identities, I argue that women with 'feminine' traits are represented as more accepted in comparison to women with 'masculine' traits. I therefore recommend that Dutch media sources need to counter heteronormative and homonormative bias in their texts to increase a non-normative representation of this group.

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Introduction

The Instagram account *Zeikhschrift*, operated by media critic Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuizen, received a lot of publicity in the last year. With more than 32.000 followers on her Instagram account, Van den Nieuwenhuizen reaches a large group in the Netherlands.¹ When I started following the account in February 2018, Van den Nieuwenhuizen dedicated several Instagram posts to address the absence of lesbian sexualities in the women's magazine *Cosmopolitan*. She picked out *Cosmopolitan* as an example of how, in women's magazines, it is assumed that the readers are only attracted to the opposite sex (Instagram, 2018a). For example, on May 18th, 2018, she criticizes *Cosmopolitan* for using the title *Love and Men*, (a monthly recurring section) and pleads that the magazine changes it into *Love and (Wo)men* (Instagram, 2018b).

Van den Nieuwenhuizen's critique on the *Love and Men* section of *Cosmopolitan* caused a lot of commotion in the media, and eventually, it even led to a reaction from the magazine itself. On January 18th, Van den Nieuwenhuizen spoke to the head editor of *Cosmopolitan* to provide her critique on their *Love and Men* sections. In response, the head editor of the magazine promised to change the title *Love and Men* into *Love and Sex*. Moreover, the head editor claimed that they would adopt more neutral personal nouns and pronouns in their texts. For instance, they state that they are using the words 'partner' and 'lover' more often, instead of gendered nouns such as 'boyfriend' (Van den Nieuwenhuizen, 2019).

In feminist and queer studies, these points of critique expressed by Van den Nieuwenhuizen are often covered with the term 'heteronormativity.' The term was developed by Michael Warner (1993) and is understood as the notion that "sexual relations are only normal when they occur between two people of the opposite sex" (Coffey, 2012, p.3). This notion is considered problematic, because it denies the validation of same-sex relationships. Similar to Van den Nieuwenhuizen, several queer academics state that this heteronormative notion has always been key in women's magazines in Western society (Coffey, 2012). I argue that this so-called heteronormative bias² in magazines should be challenged because it limits the

¹ Van den Nieuwenhuizen addresses sexism, bodyshaming, racism, classism and heteronormativity in magazines and other news media. She exposes these 'social wrongs' by publishing screenshots of text fragments from several (online) magazines and newspapers on this account, including her critique on the language use in this text (Van den Nieuwenhuizen, 2019).

² Similar to the concept of heteronormativity, heteronormative bias is "the preconceived opinion that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural form of sexuality" (Manning & Kim-Pietro, 2017).

representation of women who love women (WLW).³ The latter is problematic because heteronormative discourses in the media leads to the underrepresentation and stereotypical presentations of non-heterosexual identities, including WLW (Robinson, 2016). Studies have shown that many WLW feel excluded from society because there is a lack of representations for this group to identify with (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). As a lesbian young woman, I personally understand that the absence of lesbian sexualities in women's magazines can make you feel disregarded, as if your sexual orientation is not valuable enough to mention. Magazines are a form of mass media and have an important role in the representation of ideologies, values and world views (Weggemans, 2016). This means that magazines also impact the construction of female same-sex sexuality in society. Thus, in line with Van den Nieuwenhuizen, I believe that magazines could play a significant societal role in the normalization of different kinds of sexual preferences (Instagram, 2019).

It is often assumed that the Netherlands is a fortified place of tolerance for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals (Hanley, 2014). In her text 'White Nostalgia', Wekker (2016) argues that: "Dutch gay identity does not threaten heteronormativity, but in fact helps shape and reinforce the contours of 'tolerant' and 'liberal' Dutch national culture" (p. 116). In doing so, heteronormativity turns into homonormativity. I argue in this thesis that, while heteronormativity can be understood as practices that consider heterosexuality as well as gender binary roles as the norm, homonormativity similarly denotes these kinds of practices. As I will demonstrate below, homonormativity is a set of practices that privilege certain expressions of homosexual identity over others (Koller, 2013).

In my understanding, *Zeikschrift* has only paid attention to the existence of heteronormativity in magazines targeted at (mainly) heterosexual people. This is problematic, because queer scholars argue that even non-heteronormative contexts are not free of heteronormative influences. Moreover, same-sex identities especially have given rise to normative notions of what gay men and lesbian women should be like. For such same-sex 'normativities', the term homonormativity can be used (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). I therefore believe that homonormative bias can be detected in magazines produced by and for non-heterosexual

³ In this thesis, the term 'women who love women' is used to describe "a (self-identified) woman who identifies as a non-heterosexual and does not identify as asexual" (Julian, 2012, p. 14). I will further elaborate on this term in section 1.1.

people, similar to the way in which heteronormativity manifests itself in heteronormative magazines.

I chose to conduct a comparative analysis of one heterosexually focused magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, and one LGBTI-oriented magazine, *L'HOMO*⁴, to see how these magazines represent WLW in their language use. The goal of this research is to elaborate on and eventually answer the following question: *How are women who love women represented in Dutch media landscapes?* The first chapter of this thesis provides a theoretical framework of the used terminology and explains the methodology I used for my analysis. In the method section, it is explained that this research does not focus solely on the description and explanation of the analyzed texts. Instead, I aim to relate the texts to other social elements, such as power relations, ideologies, institutions and social identities. This type of analysis is often called 'critical discourse analysis' (Fairclough, 2013). Additionally, I use queer linguistic approaches to discourse as a method to "uncover and destabilize normativity through the analysis of text and discourse" (Koller, p. 527). Thus, the methods that I used in this research consist of a combination of queer linguistics (which allowed me to analyze the way language constructs heteronormativity and homonormativity) and critical discourse analysis (which allowed me to connect these findings to broader social contexts).

After having explained the theoretical framework and methods, I conduct a comparative analysis on *Cosmopolitan* and *L'HOMO*. As explained before, the head editor of *Cosmopolitan* claims that they adopted more neutral personal nouns and pronouns in their texts to increase the linguistic representation of WLW (Van den Nieuwenhuizen, 2019). Up to this day, there are no studies available that examined whether the head editor of *Cosmopolitan* has implemented these changes in their content. In order to address this gap, I aim to elaborate on and answer the following sub question: *How are women who love women represented in the Love and Sex sections in Cosmopolitan in 2019?*

In my analysis of *L'HOMO*, I elaborate on and answer the following sub question: *How are women who love women represented in the 2019 edition of L'HOMO?* *L'HOMO* is a non-heterosexual magazine that used to be targeted at homosexual men. However, in 2019, they introduced their first edition of the magazine that supposedly targets the 'whole' LGBTI

⁴ *L'HOMO*. is originally written with a full stop at the end. However, in order to maintain the legibility of the text, I leave out the full stop in the rest of this thesis.

community in the Netherlands. The head editor of L'HOMO claims that this change was necessary: "It is time for more visibility for those who do not belong to a visible majority. Thus we focus on the entire LGBTI- community" (COC, 2019). The reason why I chose to analyze L'HOMO specifically is that, when I browsed the 2019 edition of L'HOMO in a bookstore, I read an article on a lesbian couple that made me question my position of a white, 'feminine'⁵-looking, lesbian woman. What gender ideals are represented in L'HOMO?

Cosmopolitan and L'HOMO have something in common: the head editors of both magazines claimed that their content became more inclusive of non-heterosexual identities in the recent years. Does this mean that Cosmopolitan and L'HOMO have increased the linguistic representation of WLW as well? And, if so, are the texts that are representative of WLW in these magazines free of heteronormative and homonormative bias? In order to answer these questions, I aim to find out how Cosmopolitan and L'HOMO represented WLW in the year 2019.

⁵ I draw on Butler's writing on the construction of gender by arguing that normative conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity are considered heterosexual. Therefore, it can be said that the use of these words should be avoided. The latter is not feasible, because this thesis addresses how such binary gender roles are associated to expressions of WLW identities (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013).

1. Theoretical Framework

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the four main concepts of this thesis - representation, stereotyping, heteronormativity and homonormativity - and illustrate how I relate these concepts to each other. Thus, these concepts form a common thread during my research. In doing so, I also substantiate my motivation to introduce the term ‘women who love women’ (WLW) to describe the focus group in this research instead of the commonly used term ‘lesbian.’

1.1 Women who love women (WLW)

In this thesis, I use the term ‘women who love women’ to describe “a (self-identified) woman who identifies as a non-heterosexual and does not identify as asexual”⁶ (Julian, 2012, p. 14). It should be noted that non-heterosexual women have often been classified as lesbians in research (Julian, 2012). The definition of the term ‘lesbian’ partly overlaps with the description of women who love women. According to Hilton-Morrow & Battles (2013), the term lesbian is used “to refer to women who identify themselves through their attraction to women” (p. 11). It may seem contradictory to refrain from using the term lesbian, because I focus on the representation of women who are attracted to women in this research.

However, this does not mean that all women who love women (WLW) identify themselves through the use of this identity category. In my understanding, there is a variety of ways in which WLW can identify themselves – apart from the identity category ‘lesbian.’ For instance, WLW can identify as bisexual, queer or pansexual. Additionally, some WLW avoid identification with any of these identity categories. According to Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013): “all identity categories are problematic because they are subject to normative attempts at regulation” (p. 523). This means that identity categories such as heterosexual, gay, or lesbian identities tend to be associated with powerful identity discourses, while other non-normative sexualities remain less recognized (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). I therefore believe that the use of the term lesbian regulates and excludes non-heterosexual women who do not conform to the normative requirements adhered to this identity category (Robinson,

⁶ According to The Asexual Visibility & Education Network (AVEN), “an asexual person does not feel or otherwise experience any sexual attraction” (Merriam-Webster, 2020). I chose to exclude asexual women in my use of the term WLW, because in the analysis of the Love and Sex sections in *Cosmopolitan*, it is assumed that WLW have sexual relationships with each other. Therefore, the identities of asexual WLW are not recognized in this thesis.

2016). This tendency contradicts the main purpose of this research, that is, to deconstruct and criticize normativity in any sense in the linguistic representation of WLW (Motschenbacher, 2019).

Another reason for avoiding the use of the term ‘lesbian’ is that non-heterosexual women are often categorized as lesbians in research or they are grouped together with other minorities (such as in LGBTQ+ studies) (Julian, 2012). In line with Julian (2012), I believe that this simplification fails to account for the “unique cultural and political aspects of this population” (p. 22). Yet, I should note that it is in some cases unfeasible to avoid the use of this term, for instance in contexts where power imbalances between heterosexual and lesbian women are discussed (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). Therefore, this term will solely be used in this thesis to refer to previous research in which non-heterosexual women are categorized as lesbian. I will now continue to discuss and relate the main concepts used in this thesis by first providing a definition of ‘representation.’ In doing so, I aim to explain why I chose to analyze the representation of WLW in particular.

1.2 Representation

The concept of representation has been widely theorized by many scholars, especially in the study of culture (Hall, 2013). In this thesis, I adopt the following definition of the term: “representation is the production of meaning through language” (Hall, 2013, p. 14). Representation is said to be an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. The concept of representation connects meaning and languages to culture. There are different theories about how language is used to represent the world. I elaborate on the constructionist approach to representation, that is, the idea that meaning is constructed in and through language, because this is the perspective that has had the most significant impact on cultural studies in recent years. According to this approach, we use signs, organized into languages of different kinds, to communicate meaningfully with others (Hall, 2013). Extrapolating from this description, I use the term ‘representation’ to refer to the way in which language use in media texts portrays or describes WLW and how this is connected to the culture we live in.

The main reason why I want to analyze media representations of WLW, is because they are considered an “important form of social and political recognition” and it is often a “vital source for self-recognition and identity formation” for the LGBTQ+ community (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015, p. 77). Media representations of members of the LGBTQ+

community (including WLW) are even more influential than media representations of other groups. Many people might not know any members of the LGBTQ+ community in their everyday life. This means that the presented media images of WLW have a greater effect in shaping the ideas and expectations individuals have of this group with whom they have no direct interaction or experience (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015). According to Melcher (2017), media representation of lesbians should be addressed more, because “visibility of lesbians was not and is still not always present in meaningful ways” (p. 7). For example, studies have shown that WLW are often subjected to stereotypes in media representations (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015). The next section is devoted to define the term ‘stereotyping’ and elaborate on the ways in which WLW tend to be presented in stereotypical manners in the media.

1.3 Stereotyping

In this thesis, I adopt Stuart Hall’s definition of stereotyping by arguing that “stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature” (Hall, 2013, p. 247). Strictly speaking, stereotyping tends to generalize and simplify complex information about a person. Everyone creates stereotypes, because we cannot function in the world without them (Hall, 2013). It is a frequently used human way of grouping, labelling or categorizing information, and it is therefore cognitively impossible for humans to avoid stereotyping altogether. Nonetheless, I argue in this thesis that negative stereotypes against WLW can be challenged and replaced with other, positive stereotypes (Chung, 2007).

In media representations, WLW are often distinguished into two groups: ‘masculine’ lesbians (stereotypically presented as ‘butches’ or ‘bull dykes’⁷) and ‘feminine’ lesbians (stereotypically presented as ‘femmes’ or ‘lipstick lesbians’⁸) (Melcher, 2017). Several scholars argue that butch and dyke identities are often associated with inherently negative traits. For example, the results of a study from 2006, that examined stereotypes of lesbians held by college students, shows that butch identities are often associated with negative traits,

⁷ The term ‘bull dyke’ is often used as a derogatory label to describe masculine or butch lesbians. However, some lesbians self-identify with the image of the ‘bull dyke’ (O’Brien, 2009).

⁸ The term ‘lipstick lesbian’ can be described as “a feminine lesbian who desires other feminine women” (O’Brien, p. 492). According to O’Brien (2009): the “lipstick” lesbian has been the most visible lesbian figure in the mainstream media, generally represented from the perspective of the (heterosexual) male gaze” (p. 492).

such as angry, dominating, defensive, humorless. Furthermore, the butch lesbian was also seen as being masculine and unattractive in appearance (Geiger, Harwood, & Hummert, 2016). Similar to stereotypes about butch identities, representations of ‘dykes’ in the media eternalizes “the idea that lesbians are objectively unattractive, man-hating, unfeminine, stoic, and aggressive” (Melcher, 2017, p. 7). On the other hand, ‘feminine’ WLW are stereotypically presented in the media as ‘passing’ for a straight woman, meaning that they act and look the same as straight women, and therefore are not considered as ‘real’ lesbians (Ciasullo, 2001). These stereotypically representations of WLW have also been criticized by queer scholars who argue that the media presents hypersexualized representations of lesbians that often serve to appeal to the heterosexual male (Melcher, 2017).

These kinds of stereotypical portrayals in the media lead to the marginalization and discrimination of WLW in society (Robinson, 2016). This is because popular media sources, such as television and magazines, are considered the dominant means by which people learn about others and acquire and internalize social norms, values and beliefs (Chung, 2007). Accordingly, Chung (2007) states that: “When viewers are [...] consistently exposed to the stereotypical portrayal of lesbian and gay people, they are likely to develop false assumptions and prejudiced attitudes, possibly even discriminatory behavior, toward lesbian and gay people” (p. 99). I believe that this development similarly applies to perceptions of WLW, considering that this group is often portrayed in stereotypical manners.

Based on these findings, I argue that heteronormativity and, in extension, homonormativity are central patterns that lead to the construction of negative stereotypes in the representation of WLW in the media (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). I will further elaborate on this argument in the next sections by focusing on the way in which heteronormativity and homonormativity are manifested in magazines.

1.4 Heteronormativity in magazines

The term heteronormativity was first coined by queer theorist Michael Warner (1991) in his introduction to the anthology *Fear of a Queer Planet.* Warner developed the concept to expose the privileging of heterosexuality in social relations, which degrades sexual minorities to a marginal status position (Robinson, 2016). However, in the early 1990s, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler had previously used terms such as heterosexism and heterosexual matrix. These terms are often considered as the precursors of the term heteronormativity.

Altogether, the term heteronormativity is understood to be established as a theoretical concept in gender, feminist and queer studies in the 1990s (Rosenberg, 2008).

In this thesis, I adopt the term ‘heteronormativity’ to denote how mainstream women’s magazines in general presuppose this universal heterosexuality via a number of linguistic strategies, including the use of gendered pronouns to refer to objects of sexual desire. Heteronormativity therefore promotes the notion that “sexual relations are only normal when they occur between two people of the opposite sex” (Coffey, 2012, p. 3) Strictly speaking, heteronormativity is considered as the belief that heterosexuality is the only ‘normal’ expression of sexuality. As a result, heteronormativity is also committed to the silencing of non-heterosexual practices. It is argued that heteronormativity has always been dominant in women’s magazines, but, according to Gill, this has especially been identified in discourses of sex in women’s magazines since the 1990s (Coffey, 2012).

This means that *Cosmopolitan* is not the only women’s magazine that can be criticized for its heteronormative bias. Accordingly, Van den Nieuwenhuizen claims that almost all Dutch magazines assume that women always have relationships with the other sex. She argues that WLW are practically never represented in magazines in the Dutch media landscape (Van den Nieuwenhuizen, 2019). The expectation that people are always attracted to the opposite sex conforms to the understanding of heteronormativity, that is, the belief that heterosexuality is the norm in society. Similar to many other Western societies, Dutch culture is dominated by heteronormative ideals. Therefore, Van den Nieuwenhuizen believes that, in the Netherlands, very little attention is paid to the pervasiveness of heteronormativity (Van den Nieuwenhuizen, 2019).

Heteronormative discourses are not only found in media sources such as magazines, but they are also manifested in other social institutions. According to Robinson (2016): “heteronormative standards and discourses that legitimate the discrimination of sexual minorities can be found in most social institutions, including religion, the family, education, the media, the law, and the state” (p. 1). However, I chose to focus on the manifestation of heteronormativity in the media specifically, because media plays a major role in representing a certain reality. In this thesis, I analyze how magazines in particular can serve as important tools for representing dominant heteronormative and homonormative ideologies (Weggemans, 2016).

Aside from media representations, heteronormativity is manifested in many other social terrains in society. For instance, heterosexuality and homosexuality are considered binary opposites in Western cultures. Under dominant heteronormative standards, heterosexuality is considered ‘normal’, while homosexuality is ‘abnormal’ (Robinson, 2016). In this context, heterosexuality depends on the exclusion or marginalization of other sexualities for its legitimacy. Therefore, it can be said that heteronormative discourses and standards lead to the marginalization and exclusion of LGBTQ+ people (Jackson, 2006).

Also, heteronormativity sustains the idea that women are expected to be feminine and men are expected to be masculine in order to fit into their ‘normal’ gender roles (Robinson, 2016). In the Netherlands, this heteronormative discourse is similarly adopted by non-heterosexual people who aim to conform to similar normative ideals. Similar to heteronormative standards and discourses, homonormative ideals legitimate the discrimination of sexual minorities who do not conform to these norms. Especially in LGBTQ+ oriented media, homonormativity negatively impacts the representation of this group (Duyvendak & Hekma, 2011). In order to address this issue, the next section elaborates on and defines the term homonormativity.

1.5 Homonormativity in magazines

The previous section shows how, in Western society, women’s magazines (targeted at heterosexuals) have always been influenced by heteronormativity. In this section, I elaborate on and provide a definition of the term ‘homonormativity’ to problematize certain normative practices exposed in text discourses deriving from magazines representing WLW. Motschenbacher & Stegu argue that non-heterosexual identities - especially gays and lesbians - have become more visible in Western society in the recent years, and they are, at least, partly accepted. This development has cultivated the embodiment of norms associated with these identities, consisting of notions of how gay men and lesbian women are supposed to be. In turn, non-heterosexual identities may develop ‘normativities⁹’ of their own. In current language and sexuality studies, these kinds of ‘normativities’ are covered with the term homonormativity (Motschenbacher, 2019).

The term homonormativity was first used in the early 1990s by Stryker to address the marginalization of transgender people within the LGBTQ+ group (Motschenbacher & Stegu,

⁹ ‘Normativities’ is the plural form of ‘normativity,’ a commonly used term in language and sexuality studies (Motschenbacher, 2019).

2013). Nowadays, another meaning of homonormativity is more commonly used by queer scholars, that is defined by Lisa Duggan as ‘new homonormativity.’ According to Duggan, ‘new homonormativity’ is “a politics that does not contest heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising... a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2003, in Koller, 2013, p. 573). By way of explanation, Duggan defines this new kind of homonormativity as an assimilationist practice that reflects heteronormativity and is closely related to neoliberal practices (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). In this thesis, I adopt a definition of homonormativity that slightly differs from the one introduced by Duggan to specifically problematize normative practices among WLW. In doing so, homonormativity is understood as “discursive practices¹⁰ that position same-sex sexualities as a (contextually salient) norm and valorize certain forms of gay male and lesbian sexualities over others as (contextually) normal or preferable” (Motschenbacher, 2019, p. 14). In other words, homonormativity is a set of practices that privilege certain expressions of homosexual identity over others (Koller, 2013).

As explained in the previous section, heteronormativity has always been key in women’s magazines. In non-heterosexual magazines, however, a similar construction of normative bias can be found (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). For example, studies on the linguistic representation of WLW in non-heteronormative magazines have shown that, even within the lesbian community, masculinity in women is often rejected. A study conducted by Livia in 2002 shows that the butch identity has been constructed as undesirable in personal dating advertisements in ‘Lesbia’, a French magazine for lesbian women (Bailey, 2019). This study revealed that readers explicitly excluded ‘masculine’ attributes, such as ‘masculine’ appearances, in their descriptions of their desired others (Bailey, 2019). Similarly, in the American online magazine ‘Autostraddle’, there is a pattern to be found that makes femme women appear more like ‘proper’ objects of desire to its readers, that is, the queer¹¹ female

¹⁰ ‘Discursive practices’ is a term that describes social practices as a form of discourse. According to Hall, the concept of discourse is not only about language, it is also about practices: “Since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect” (Hall, 2013, p. 29). In this context, homonormativity is considered as a set of discursive practices. However, as explained in section 2.1, discourse is in this thesis purely treated as a linguistic concept.

¹¹ In this thesis, I adopt the definition of the term queer developed by Warner (1993): “The word “queer” is used to encompass “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” and “transgender,” but “queer” is also used to challenge clear-cut notions of sexual identity, purposely blurring the boundaries between identity categories” (Sunderland, 2006, p. 131).

audience. According to Bailey, this pattern contributes to the marginalization and undesirability of butch women within queer women's sexual culture (Bailey, 2019). The results deriving from the analysis of the two lesbian magazines described above shows that, within lesbian culture, butch/femme dichotomies still seem to play a role in the way WLW are presented in the media. In order to explain how this butch/femme dichotomy came into being, I will first provide a short description of the terms 'butch' and 'femme.'

1.5.1 Butch and femme

Butch-femme can be described in a generalized way by saying that butches exhibit traditionally 'masculine' traits while femmes embody 'feminine' ones (Theophano, 2015). These terms are often explained by referring to the dress codes by which butch and femme women are identified. Dress codes identify butch women by their adaptations of typically 'masculine' attire and femmes by their traditionally 'feminine' attire (De Lauretis, 1988). According to queer linguists, butch-femme dichotomy is a form of homonormativity that can be characterized as "the construction of same-sex sexualities along normatively heterosexual lines" (Motschenbacher, 2019, p. 15). In other words, the butch-femme pairing has been accused of adapting to heteronormative gender ideals by designating one member of a couple as male (the butch) and the other as female (the femme) (Theophano, 2015).

Yet, however, apart from each other, femme and butch identities can also serve to challenge heteronormative (or homonormative) ideals (Haller, 2009). On the one hand, the representation of the femme identity could serve to challenge the heteronormative assumption that women who look and/or act 'feminine' are always attracted to the opposite sex. This means that, when straight people can no longer predictably identify lesbians, the idea that heterosexuality is a fixed identity prototype becomes contested (Haller, 2009). In section 1.3, I explained how WLW with 'feminine' traits are often stereotypically presented as 'passing as straight.' This stereotypical assumption seems to imply that those 'femmes' assimilate to heteronormative ideals because they consider straight-acting as a compliment. However, it should be noted that there is a distinction between passing as straight and choosing an identity that happens to be read as straight. In that sense, being 'femme' is not always about passing as straight, but rather, femme identity is about challenging negative stereotypes about 'femininity' (Haller, 2009).

On the other hand, the butch identity can also serve to reject heteronormative ideals of 'femininity.' Scholars such as Halberstam (1988) often describe 'butchness' as 'female masculinity' (Jones, 2014). According to Jones (2014), Halberstam's description of female

masculinity “clearly places masculinity as a concept which may be removed from men themselves and embodied by women, and as a relational concept which exists because of its opposition to femininity” (p. 7). In other words, Halberstam suggests that butch identities may produce a specifically lesbian identity instead of a masculine identity, and this definition of ‘non-normative’ gender behavior can therefore be considered as an empowering act (Jones, 2014).

Moreover, WLW with a ‘masculine’ appearance are immediately identified as lesbians in the media. In that sense, representations of butch identities can serve as a cultural signifier for other WLW. According to Jones (2014): “the creation of a ‘distinctly lesbian style’ allows lesbians who are butch or androgynous to define a positive lesbian presence in opposition to heterosexist notions of women as weak, passive, and small” (p. 5). The butch identity can thus be considered as a positive contribution to the authenticity and acceptance among WLW. This means that, while the manifestation of butch-femme dichotomies among WLW can be accused of conforming to heteronormative binary roles, it can also be said that, apart from each other, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ identities of WLW can simultaneously serve to challenge the heteronormative mainstream (Jones, 2014).

It should be noted, however, that strict butch-femme dichotomies are not considered as important as it used to be for WLW (Ciasullo, 2001). Nonetheless, De Lauretis stated in 1988 that there remains a “historical and political importance of gender roles (e.g., butch-femme) in lesbian self-definition and representation” (De Lauretis, 1988, p. 162). Up to this day, the performance of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ (or butch-femme) still plays an important role in the representation of WLW (Day, 2018). This tendency has been highlighted by the studies on the two Western lesbian magazines, as discussed in section 1.5. Unfortunately, there are no academic sources available that analyze the linguistic representation of WLW in Dutch magazines. In order to address this gap, I conducted the analysis myself by combining critical discourse analysis and queer linguistic approaches to discourse as methods. I will now turn to the method section to explain why the combination of these two methods are considered most suitable for deconstructing and challenging homonormative and heteronormative language use in texts.

2. Method

In this chapter, I explain the methods I used for my analysis: critical discourse analysis combined with queer linguistics. I combine critical discourse analysis and queer linguistics because both approaches possess critical agendas that are compatible with ‘queer-minded’ work (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). Hereby I look specifically at the way in which language use in the analyzed texts constructs non-heterosexual identities. In the last section of this chapter, I explain the method used to conduct a personal interview with Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuizen. My main motive for interviewing Van den Nieuwenhuizen was to elaborate on her viewpoints and incentives that motivated her to address the absence of female same-sex sexualities in Dutch women’s magazines.

2.1 Critical discourse analysis

Before explaining why I chose to adopt critical discourse analysis as a method in this thesis, I first present Foucault’s understanding of the term ‘discourse’, to explain how discourses can be understood as ‘systems of representation’ (Hall, 2013). Foucault describes discourse as “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, 2013, p. 29). In other words, “discourse is about the production of knowledge through language” (Hall, 2013, p. 29). This means that discourse refers to the way in which language contributes to the production of meaning in society (Motschenbacher, 2019).

In order to explain why discourses should be analyzed, I describe how critical discourse analysis perceives discourses as related to other social elements, such as power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth (Fairclough, 2013). According to Fairclough (2013): “the nature of this relationship varies between institutions and organizations and according to time and place, and it needs to be established through analysis” (p. 11). In other words, critical discourse analysis relates the language used in discourses to politically, socially, or cultural contentious issues (Fairclough, 2013).

In my opinion, critical discourse analysis is well equipped for studying the linguistic consequences of heteronormativity as a social issue that affects all issues (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). While critical discourse analysis examines relations between discourse and other social elements, heteronormative discourses can similarly be analyzed in relation to other contexts, given that heteronormativity can be found in most social institutions (Robinson, 2016). In the light of this research, I conduct critical discourse analysis to expose

heteronormative and homonormative bias in text discourses as well as to explain why and how heteronormativity – and in extension homonormativity emerges in the analyzed texts (Fairclough, 2013).

There is no ‘one’ way to conduct critical discourse analysis. However, for the purposes of this study, I adopted Fairclough’s explanation of critical discourse analysis approach. In doing so, I consider textual analysis as an important feature of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013). In order to carry out a textual analysis, I first needed to select texts and points of focus and categories for its analysis and they needed to correspond to my main research object (Fairclough, 2013). In my textual analysis, I address relations between language use in the text discourses from the selected magazines and other contexts, such as power structures between heteronormativity and non-heteronormativity. I analyzed texts deriving from two different magazines: *Cosmopolitan* and *L’HOMO*. I chose to analyze only a small selection of text discourses -all of them produced and published in the same year- because of the limitations of this research.

In the first part of the analysis, I examine the construction of female same-sex desire in *Cosmopolitan*’s Love and Sex columns. In doing so, I analyzed seven articles deriving from the *Cosmopolitan* website. I chose to analyze articles deriving from the website of *Cosmopolitan*, because they were available for free and easier to find in comparison to analyzing texts deriving from the print magazine. The reason why I chose these specific texts is because they all belong to the same discursive formation. This means that the same discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking about sexual identities in the year 2019 in Dutch society, appears across a range of texts (Hall, 2013). In line with the method construction of critical discourse analysis, this analysis aims to identify possibilities for *Cosmopolitan* by moving from negative to positive critique. In other words, I conduct a critical discourse analysis on *Cosmopolitan* to address ways in which the heteronormative discourse in the magazine can be contested and replaced by non-heteronormative discourses (Fairclough, 2013).

In the second part of the analysis, I examine the construction of female same-sex identities in the article ‘*Christina Curry & Shenta Ignacio*’, deriving from the 2019 edition of *L’HOMO* (*L’HOMO*, 2019). I chose to analyze several text discourses from the same article, since other texts discourses deriving from this 2019 edition of the magazine did not represent WLW as explicitly. I analyze this particular text to connect its discourses to the concepts I elaborate on in this thesis, namely homonormativity, stereotyping and representation. In doing so, I

especially pay attention to the way in which expressions of sexual identity are constructed in this text. In line with critical discourse analysis, I tie the text discourses deriving from L'HOMO to the Dutch social and political climate. I hereby argue that media representations reflect the culture and politics of its society.

In order to critically examine how and why these kinds of normative biases emerge in the analyzed texts, I also adopt queer linguistics as a method, because this form of research specifically addresses the construction of sexual normativities in language use (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). In the next section, I explain how I used queer linguistic approaches to discourse in combination with critical discourse analysis as a method, to find out how WLW are represented in the selected Dutch magazines.

2.2 Queer linguistic approaches to discourse

Queer linguistics is considered as a form of research combining queer theory with linguistics. In this research, I adopt Rosenberg's understanding of queer theory as "a mixture of studies that focus critically on heteronormativity" (Rosenberg, 2008, p. 6). Extrapolating from this description, Rosenberg explains that queer theory is based on discussions relating to the dominant and normative position held by heterosexuality in Western society (Rosenberg, 2008). The word 'linguistics' refers to the way in which this approach provides analyses of language data. Queer linguistics is thus a combination of queer theory and language-centred forms of discourse analysis, described as critical heteronormativity research from a linguistic point of view (Motschenbacher, 2019).

The queer linguistic goal of deconstructing heteronormativity does not necessarily mean that discourse specifically about sexual identity can be free of normative influences. As previously discussed, non-heteronormative contexts may show their own internal normativities (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). These normative notions are examined with the term homonormativity. According to Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013):

It is hard to find a context that is completely free of heteronormative influences, even if the majority or all of the participants self-identify as non-heterosexual. Additionally, non-heteronormative contexts may show their own internal normativities, and it is vital that queer linguists also pay critical attention to these. (p. 524)

This means that queer linguistics can be used as a method that addresses normative biases in heteronormative as well as non-heteronormative contexts. In doing so, queer linguistic

research analyses any kind of sexuality-related discourse from a queer theoretical point of view (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013).

Since this research focuses on normativity in a more general sense, that includes heteronormativity as well as homonormativity, I adopt Koller's understanding of queer linguistics, that is "to uncover and destabilize normativity through the analyses of text and discourse" (Koller, 2013, p. 572). In other words, queer linguistics addresses normativity in general, regardless of the sexuality represented in these analyze text discourses. (Motschenbacher, 2019). Normativity, that is, "the notion that certain social practices are perceived as desirable and/or normal", affects the discursive construction of sexuality across cultures and, therefore, it serves as a key concept in queer linguistic approaches (Motschenbacher, 2019, p. 2).

In this thesis, I adopt queer linguistic approaches to analyze discourses descending from *Cosmopolitan* and *L'HOMO* in different manners. In the analysis of *Cosmopolitan's* discourses, I draw upon Butler's contribution to queer linguistics. Butler argues that the use of gendered personal nouns and pronouns sustains heteronormative ideals: "Linguistically speaking, talking about bodies is mostly done by means of personal nouns and pronouns, which have often acquired a gendered materiality (boy – girl, she – he)" (Motschenbacher, 2011, p. 156). In other words, gender identities are often constructed in language with the use of gendered personal nouns and pronouns. This is considered problematic, because "identifying people with gendered personal reference forms also functions as a normative imperative urging people to perform their identities in established ways" (Butler, 1999, in Motschenbacher, 2011, p. 156). This means that language constructing people as female and male also implies the normative assumption that people are only attracted to the opposite gender (Coffey, 2012). Language is thus involved in the discursive construction of sexual identities and desire (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013).

I chose to focus on the way in which *Cosmopolitan* uses personal nouns and pronouns in their *Love and Sex* columns. In the selected articles, personal nouns and pronouns are often used to refer the sexual/and or romantic partner of the reader. I specifically examine to what extent the gendered personal nouns (woman, man, girl, boy) and pronouns (she, he, him, her, his, her) used in these texts are representative of WLW. Additionally, I analyze the use of words, such as partner, boyfriend, and lover to find out how the text producers refer to the sexual and/or romantic partner of the reader. I use the concept of heteronormativity in analyzing these texts by referring to the discursive (and therefore partly linguistic) construction of

(certain forms of) heterosexuality as natural, normal, desirable or preferable to alternative sexualities (Coffey, 2012). Hereby I aim to find out whether the analyzed discourses of *Cosmopolitan* similarly imply that its readers are always attracted to the opposite sex. In the analysis, I argue that non-heteronormative language use, that is, a language that is free of heteronormative bias, works beneficial for the representation of WLW, because it aims at countering heteronormative structures, especially gender and sexual binaries, by offering alternative ways of expression that do not further entrench such traditional discourses (Motschenbacher, 2014).

In the analysis of *L'HOMO*, I draw on a queer linguistic understanding of the term homonormativity to describe how the text relates to normative mechanisms that prescribe what WLW should be like in a particular context (Koller, 2013). By taking a queer linguistic approach, I focus on words that have commonly been representative of the identities of WLW, such as exhibiting specific 'feminine' or 'masculine' traits. In doing so, I focus on the way in which the language use can be related to the way in which butch and femme identities used to be represented in the media. I also focus on the use of the word *dyke* in this text to problematize how the use of this identity category sustains negative stereotypical views towards WLW with a 'masculine' appearance (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). In short, I chose to combine critical discourse analysis with queer linguistic approaches to discourse. Together, these methods serve to critically analyze normative biases in text discourses.

2.3 Semi-structured interviews

In addition to the adopted methods described in the previous sections, I used the results from a telephone interview conducted with Van den Nieuwenhuizen in order to clarify and elaborate on her position in addressing WLW representation in women's magazines. I conducted a semi-structured interview with Van den Nieuwenhuizen on heteronormativity in Dutch magazines. This form of interviewing is semi-structured in the sense that the interview questions have been prepared beforehand, but this interview form also ensures flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant (Longhurst, 2003). This interview has been published on the website of *ZijaanZij*, an online magazine for women who love women. The complete interview can be found in Appendix B. In this thesis, I used several sentences deriving from this interview that were applicable to the points discussed in relation to these matters. I asked Van den Nieuwenhuizen beforehand if it was okay if I recorded the phone call with my phone, so that I would be able to transcribe the text later. Additionally, I asked for her consent on publishing the interview online. We agreed that, before publication, Van

den Nieuwenhuizen was free to make adjustments and to add to the text. In doing so, I gave Van den Nieuwenhuizen control over the piece. Especially the answers to the following questions have been used as inspiration and sources for this thesis: “Could you tell us something about heteronormativity in women’s magazines?” Extrapolating from the answer to this question, together with Van den Nieuwenhuizen’s arguments included with the Zeikschrift Instagram posts, I aimed to explain why her critique on women’s magazines inspired me to explore this issue further.

Considering that Van den Nieuwenhuizen’s perspective on these matters play a large a role in this thesis, it is important to elaborate on her position in this research. Researchers are often considered to produce objective knowledge. However, their production of this knowledge is influenced by their own social identities, such as class, gender, ethnicity, physical ability and age. These intersecting identities influence how researchers perceive certain matters and this makes their knowledge necessarily subjective (Allen, 2010). I therefore aim to reflect on my own position as a researcher as well as Van den Nieuwenhuizen’s positionality in this thesis.

3. Positionality

One of the reasons why I chose to analyze L'HOMO instead of other non-heteronormative magazines available can be explained by my positionality in this research. Especially ZijaanZij, an online magazine by and for WLW, seems to be the perfect source to analyze, considering that this thesis explicitly addresses the representation of this group. However, due to my current position as a freelance editor at ZijaanZij, I believe that my viewpoint on the text discourses would be biased, especially since I wrote a part of the articles on their website myself. Before I received a paid position at this magazine, I did my internship at ZijaanZij as part of the Gender Studies programme. During this internship, I became more aware of the privileges I receive in society.

The exact moment I was the most aware of my privileges, was the day I attended the LGBTQ+ media day in Hilversum, commissioned by ZijaanZij. After the event, I spoke with Dounia Jari, chairperson of queer Muslim platform Maruf. She explained to me how she felt pressurized by white LGBTQ+ organizations to conform to the Western ideal of being 'out and proud.' While I could say I belong to a marginalized group in society because of my lesbian identity, my other identities, being white, able-bodied, secular, cis-gender and middle-class, might potentially narrow my view in taking an intersectional approach in this thesis. According to Robinson (2016): "Those sexual minorities who can or do assimilate into heteronormative structures and to the congruent gender roles often receive more rights and privileges than those who do not or cannot assimilate" (p. 1). For example, Muslim WLW often feel isolated in a Western culture where coming out rhetorics are celebrated, while many of them cannot or do not desire to come out of the closet (Rahman, 2010). Moreover, many transgender WLW are often locked out of LGBTQ+ communities for not conforming to the heteronormative gender roles in society (Robinson, 2016).

With my white, secular and cis-gender identities, I should thus reflect on my own privileges in society in this study (Taylor, Hines, & Casey, 2010). In the course of writing this thesis, I aim to acknowledge that, although WLW have something in common, namely, their non-heterosexual identities, they should not be reduced to this sole identity. All WLW have different subsequent identities that require different approaches.

Besides explaining my own position, I would also like to elaborate on Van den Nieuwenhuizen's position in this thesis. As previously discussed in section 2.3, I conducted an interview with Van den Nieuwenhuizen on her perspective on the representation of WLW

in the Dutch media. Additionally, I asked her a personal question during the interview: “How do you define your own sexual orientation?” She answered that she identifies as straight, but at the same time, she seems to be critical of these kinds of identity categories altogether:

I have only had relationships with men, and I mostly call myself heterosexual. At the same time, this kind of binary thinking bothers me, it does not feel intuitive for me. Masculinity and femininity are located on a spectrum and are partly social constructs. But in practice I am almost always attracted to people who clearly fall into the social category of ‘male.’ (Van den Nieuwenhuizen, 2019)

The reason why I want to highlight Van den Nieuwenhuizen’s heterosexual identity is that several queer researchers question whether ‘straight’ identified researchers can produce anti-normative research. According to Allen (2010): “the issue of ‘straight’ theorists in queer scholarship is often structured in terms of their right to this field and what contribution if any, they could make” (p. 148). In other words, the credibility of Van den Nieuwenhuizen’s critique on heteronormative bias is debated in the sense that heterosexual identity could potentially attribute to the normative status of heterosexuality (Allen, 2010). Accordingly, it can be said that heteronormativity is implied by heterosexuality.

However, Warner (1993), who developed the term ‘heteronormativity’, contends that queer defines itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual. This means that, according to Warner, ‘normal’ does not equate ‘heterosexual.’ Similar to Warner, Butler argues for the possibility of heterosexual disassociation from heteronormativity. Butler’s theoretical distinction between regulatory systems such as the ‘heterosexual matrix’ and heterosexuality as an identity refuses to relate critically queer activities to specific sexual identities (Allen, 2010). This way, Butler and Warner seem to suggest that straight participation in queer projects can indeed contribute to produce anti-normative knowledge. Based on these findings, I believe that Van den Nieuwenhuizen’s contribution to this thesis can still be considered valuable and trustworthy.

4. Analysis

In this analysis, I conduct a comparative analysis of *Cosmopolitan*, a magazine that is mainly focused on heterosexual women, and *L'HOMO*, a magazine that used to focus mainly on homosexual men, but as of 2019, they claim that they focus on the 'whole' LGBTQ+ community (COC, 2019). In the first part, I analyze articles deriving from the website of *Cosmopolitan*. I chose to analyze *Cosmopolitan* magazine mainly because of its popularity. In the year 2019, *Cosmopolitan* was one of the best-selling magazines in the Netherlands. The online availability of consuming the magazine is very popular as well, given that they had over 11 million page views per month. Moreover, they state they had 2.2 million unique visitors online. Overall, the magazine had a total reach of 2.6 million per month (Hearst Netherlands, 2019). The year 2019 was selected because it was the purpose of this study to provide a view of the current cultural attitudes towards sexuality as portrayed in the magazine, and it was the most recent year for which a complete set of magazines was available at the time for analyzing (Coffey, 2012).

In the second part of the analysis, I address how WLW are represented in the 2019 edition of the LGBTI magazine *L'HOMO*. Similar to *Cosmopolitan*, I chose to analyze *L'HOMO* because of its popularity¹² (LINDA, 2019). *L'HOMO* has been produced yearly since 2009 as a special edition of the women's magazine *LINDA*¹³. The 2019 issue of *L'HOMO* appeared in stores on April 16, 2019 (LINDA, 2019). Before, the magazine focused exclusively on homosexual men, but since 2019, the magazine targets the 'complete' LGBTI community as their audience (Dorrestijn, 2019). The first impetus for the inclusive *L'HOMO* was given in 2017, when there was commotion about a cover of another *LINDA* magazine. The (heterosexual) influencers Anna Nooshin and Monica Geuze could be seen kissing in their underwear, something that felt wrong for many lesbian women. Comedian and actress Yora Rienstra responded that, when 'sexy' heterosexual women imitate real lesbians, they suggest that it is a sort of lifestyle. Moreover, Rienstra says that "as a lesbian, I don't feel at all appealed by this cover. Now it's just a hot picture for straight men" (Van Boven, 2017). For these reasons, Rienstra and others wanted to show everyone how real couples kiss. They

¹² As a part of *LINDA* magazine, *L'HOMO* has been released yearly since 2009. In the year 2019, the magazine has 11.000 subscribers, 51.000 paid circulations and 60.000 print runs in the Netherlands (LINDA, 2019).

¹³ Similar to *L'HOMO*, *LINDA* is originally written with a full stop at the end. However, in order to maintain the legibility of the text, I leave out the full stop in this thesis.

started the hashtag *#doyouwanttotalkaboutitLinda*, which became viral. A short while after that, they were invited to an interview by the editorial staff of L’HOMO, and this conversation led to the publication of the 2019 edition of L’HOMO (Dorrestijn, 2019).

Iebele van der Meulen, head editor of L’HOMO, explains why the yearly edition of L’HOMO has changed compared to previous editions: “With the new edition we want to emphasize that the magazine is not only for gays, but for everyone: the entire LGBTI community and all open-minded people outside” (COC, 2019). According to Van der Meulen: “It is time for more visibility for those who do not belong to a visible majority” (COC, 2019). Extrapolating from these statements, it can be said that the makers of L’HOMO claim want to contribute to tolerance for the ‘entire’ LGBTI community by increasing the visibility of this group in their magazine (COC, 2019). As explained in the introduction, the head editor of *Cosmopolitan* similarly claimed that their magazine content is becoming more inclusive of non-heterosexual identities since the recent year. In the next sections, I conduct a comparative analysis on both magazines to see how they represent WLW in their texts.

4.1 Linguistic representation of WLW in *Cosmopolitan*

The analysis of *Cosmopolitan* magazine is divided into two parts. Section 4.1.1. addresses discourses that contain heteronormative bias, while section 4.1.2 provides an analysis of discourses that are considered free of heteronormative bias and how these discourses serve to represent WLW in a non-normative manner.

4.1.1 Discourses that contain heteronormative bias

In this section, I analyze texts that contain heteronormative bias in their use of gendered pronouns and nouns that refer to a male object of desire of the reader. In doing so, I aim to provide a critical examination of the discursive formation of heteronormativity. The first article I analyzed was published on the Dutch *Cosmopolitan* website on the 21st of May, 2019. On this day, *Cosmopolitan* published an article on their website under the Love and Sex column, titled: “*You should try this: 10 quiet and sensual positions for the best sex. It doesn't always have to go wild*”¹⁴ (Gilmour, 2019). This article was written by Paisley Gilmour, who is described as a sex and relationships editor at *Cosmopolitan* UK, and “covers everything from sex toys, how to masturbate and sex positions, to all things LGBTQ” (Gilmour, 2019).

¹⁴ Translated from Dutch: “Dit moet je proberen: 10 rustige en sensuele standjes voor de beste seks. Het hoeft er niet altijd wild aan toe te gaan.”

Given that the author covers sex and relationship topics in consideration of the LGBTQ community, I would expect that the Dutch translation of the article provides non-heteronormative discourses on these sex positions. However, I noticed that the original article was published on May 17th, 2019, on the web site of Cosmopolitan UK (Cosmopolitan UK, 2019). I find it peculiar that, when clicking on the link to the original article, which refers you to the UK website, there is no reference to the author of the article. Yet however, it seems that the original version of this text is free of heteronormative bias by providing the possibility for the reader to be attracted to other genders besides men (Gilmour, 2019). The Dutch version of the text, however, can still be criticized for its heteronormative bias. For instance, the first sex position, called the ‘bandoleer’, is described as follows:

Do you like sex positions with deep penetration? Then this is one you should definitely try out. Plus, he mainly does the job ;) . You lie on your back with your head on a pillow. Your partner then kneels towards you and you put your feet against his chest. You support your buttocks on his thighs. If this is not comfortable, you can use an extra pillow to support your back. Then he goes inside and you can test together how deep you want to go. Tip: for extra stimulation, your partner can use his hands.¹⁵ (Gilmour, 2019)

In this text discourse, the word ‘partner’ is used instead of the word ‘boyfriend’,¹⁶ namely two times. However, whenever personal nouns and pronouns are used to refer to this partner, the words ‘he’ and ‘his’ are used consistently, namely five times. This text fragment thus shows that Cosmopolitan indeed used the gender-neutral reference word ‘partner’ instead of the gendered reference word ‘boyfriend.’ Nonetheless, the discourse of this text fragment still contains heteronormative bias, considering that the partner is in every instance assumed to be male (Gilmour, 2019).

I would also like to discuss the following article, published on the 25th of April, 2019, to denote how the article still seems to imply that the ‘lover’ is male. The article is titled as

¹⁵ Translated from Dutch: “Houd je van seksstandjes met diepe penetratie? Dan is dit er een die je zeker moet uitproberen. Pluspunt, hij doet vooral het werk ;) Jij ligt op je rug met je hoofd op een kussen. Je partner knielt vervolgens richting jou en jij zet je voeten tegen zijn borst aan. Jij ondersteunt je billen op zijn dijen. Als dit niet comfortabel is, kun je een extra kussen gebruiken om je rug te ondersteunen. Vervolgens gaat hij bij je naar binnen en kunnen jullie samen testen hoe diep jullie willen gaan. Tip: voor extra stimulatie kan je partner zijn handen gebruiken.”

¹⁶ Translated from Dutch: “vriend.”

follows: *Your lover really does these crazy things only with you. Does your lover do this too?*¹⁷ (Terpstra, 2019). However, the title in the URL of the article says: “Weird stuff your boyfriend does to you.”¹⁸ This article exists of a list of ‘8 crazy types of behavior’ that the partner of the reader shows in their relationship (Terpstra, 2019). I noticed that the article mostly refers to he or she to refer to the partner of the (supposedly female) reader, while some parts of the text still only refer to a ‘he’ when the partner of the reader is discussed. (Terpstra, 2019). Altogether, the text shows an inconsistency in the inclusion of female pronouns and nouns in the text. For example, the third point describes the partner who uses the reader as a pillow and continues with: “He doesn’t care if you are sitting comfortably, he/she has found the best place on earth”¹⁹ (Terpstra, 2019). The first part of the sentence describes the ‘lover’ as a he, while the second part of the article refers to a he and a she.

The same tendency occurs in the discourse of the article titled “*This way you ensure that you always cum during sex: this is going to change your (sex)life*”²⁰, that was published on February 22, 2019, by Molly Triffin (Triffin, 2019). In this article, that provides tips to enhance your sex life, the bed partner is often only referred to as a ‘he.’ For instance, the 7th tip is the following: “Two third of the women do not get an orgasm through penetration, because “the deed” in itself does not pay attention to the clitoris. Use your finger or a vibrator for extra stimuli while he is inside you.”²¹ (Triffin, 2019). This sentence seems to imply that the bed partner of the reader is a ‘he’, by suggesting the reader to stimulate herself when ‘he’ is inside her. Tip number 9 is: “Use a pillow. Put a pillow under your back when he lies on top of you. This way, he can enter you deeper, which means more pleasure for you”²² (Triffin, 2019). Again, this sentence suggests that the bed partner of the reader is male by using the word ‘he’ two times.

The following text fragment, ‘tip 11,’ similarly implies that the sexual partner of the reader is male:

¹⁷ Translated from Dutch: “Deze gekke dingen doet je lover echt alleen bij jou. Doet jouw lover dit ook? ;-)

¹⁸ Translated from Dutch: “Rare dingen die je vriend bij je doet.”

¹⁹ Translated from Dutch: “Jou als kussen gebruiken. Of jij lekker zit maakt hem niets uit, hij/zij heeft het beste plekje op aarde gevonden.”

²⁰ Translated from Dutch: Zo zorg je ervoor dat je altijd klaarkomt tijdens de sex. Dit gaat jouw (sex)leven veranderen.

²¹ Translated from Dutch: Tweederde van de vrouwen krijgen geen orgasme door penetratie, doordat 'de daad' alleen geen aandacht besteedt aan de clitoris. Gebruik je vinger of een vibrator voor extra stimulans terwijl hij in je zit

²² Translated from Dutch: “Gebruik een kussen. Leg een kussen onder je rug als hij bovenop je ligt. Zo kan hij dieper bij je naar binnen, wat meer genot betekent voor jou.”

Use all of your body. Remember that your erogenous zones are not only between your legs. Your neck, your ears, maybe even your back or legs can be erogenous zones. So let him pay attention to all of your body.²³ (Triffin, 2019)

In the last sentence of this text fragment, the word ‘him’ is used to refer to the sexual partner of the reader, thus it is assumed that the reader is heterosexual. Tip number 17 contains a text fragment that recommends the reader to do muscle exercises during sex: “Work on your pelvic floor muscles by tensing them and then releasing them. The internet is full of exercises, you can even do them during sex! He thinks that is totally awesome, success guaranteed”²⁴ (Triffin, 2019). Again, the reference word ‘he’ is used in the last sentence.

The aforementioned text excerpts all seem to imply the same thing: the reader of this article is assumed to be only attracted to the opposite sex. Similar to the language use in the other articles, the use of the word ‘he’ to address the bed partner, instead of using the word ‘she’ as well, together with the comparison of the ways in which men and women experience sex implies that the reader is assumed to only have sex with men.

The following article, published on January 21st, 2019, similarly shows how Cosmopolitan still seems to imply that the reader is always attracted to men. The article was written by Bente de Bruin and titled as: “*Subtle flirting? This way you ensure that he or she approaches you*”²⁵ (De Bruin, 2019). However, the title in the URL differs from the title on the web page: “This is how you can flirt in a super subtle way to make men approach you.”²⁶ The article continues as follows: “Here you go: the best ways for subtle flirting. This way you make him or her think that he is taking the first step, while you took the initiative.”²⁷ (De Bruin, 2019). The first part of the title refers to ‘him’ or ‘her’, while the second part of the sentence only refers to ‘he.’ The same goes for the language use in the article itself. For example, this text fragment shows neglect in the use of female nouns alongside male nouns: “Moreover, research has shown that the color red ensures that men and women are easily attracted to a

²³ Translated from Dutch: “Gebruik je héle lichaam. Onthoud dat je erogene zones niet alleen tussen je benen zitten. Je nek, je oren, misschien wel je rug of je benen kunnen erogene zones zijn. Laat hem dus aandacht besteden aan je héle lichaam.”

²⁴ Translated from Dutch: “Werk aan je bekkenbodemspieren door ze aan te spannen en weer los te laten. Internet staat vol met oefeningen, je kan ze zelfs doen tijdens de sex! Dat vindt hij helemaal te gek, wedden?”

²⁵ Translated from Dutch: “Subtiel flirten? Zo zorg je ervoor dat hij of zij op jou afstapt.”

²⁶ Translated from Dutch: “Zo kun je super subtiel flirten zodat mannen op jou afstappen.”

²⁷ Translated from Dutch: “Here you go: de beste manieren voor subtiel flirten. Zo laat je hem of haar denken dat hij de eerste stap zet, terwijl jij het initiatief hebt genomen.”

woman. Men are unaware of this attraction, but from now on, you are!”²⁸ (De Bruin, 2019). Again, the first sentence implies that men *and* women could be attracted to a woman. Yet however, in the adjoining sentence, they only mention that men are unaware of this attraction, completely denying the aforementioned suggestion that women could also be attracted by the color red on women.

Extrapolating from this analysis, Cosmopolitan at first glance seems to use language that is inclusive of WLW in their text discourses on Love and Sex, but when taking a closer look at the texts, the tendency of the text producers to assume that women are always attracted to the opposite sex remains noticeable. However, the next section shows that the magazine has also produced texts that are free of heteronormative bias in the same year. The use of language in these texts implies that the readers can be attracted to men *and* women. In doing so, the existence of female same-sex attractions is recognized and represented in these texts.

4.1.2 Discourses that are free of heteronormative bias

In this section, I analyze text discourses that are considered free from heteronormative bias. In doing so, I analyze the following article, published on January 8, 2019, by Hannah Smothers (Smothers, 2019). I argue that the discourse of this article, that provides dating and love advice for heterosexual and non-heterosexual women, could be used as an example of ways in which the magazine contributes to the representation of WLW. The article, called “*These are the best good intentions in love that you can easily maintain*”²⁹, addresses New Year’s resolutions in love. In the article, the gender-neutral use of the words ‘lover’, ‘crush’ and ‘person’ is maintained (Smothers, 2019). For instance, the following sentence discusses the use of dating apps: “Do you consistently see the same people on your dating apps?”³⁰ (Smothers, 2019). Another sentence states: “Try to adjust your settings to spot new people”³¹ (Smothers, 2019). Again, this sentence shows how the object of attraction of the reader is constructed as gender-neutral by the use of the word ‘person.’ The article also explicitly mentions the possibilities of dating a boy or a girl in the last paragraph, by using the word

²⁸ Translated from Dutch: “Daarnaast is uit onderzoek gebleken dat de kleur rood ervoor zorgt dat mannen en vrouwen zich sneller aangetrokken voelen tot een vrouw. Mannen zijn niet op de hoogte van deze aantrekkingskracht, maar jij vanaf nu wel.”

²⁹ Translated from Dutch: “Dit zijn de leukste goede voornemens in de liefde die je makkelijk kunt volhouden.”

³⁰ Translated from Dutch: “Zie jij telkens dezelfde mensen voorbij komen op je datingapps?”

³¹ Translated from Dutch: “Probeer dan eens je instellingen aan te passen om nieuwe mensen te spotten.”

‘chick’ to refer to a woman. This section has the caption: “Be the first one to approach someone you like,” and contains the following sentence: “Are you sometimes staring at that nice boy at the bar for hours, or can't you keep your eyes off that handsome chick waiting in line in front of you? Get to that person”³² (Smothers, 2019).

This text fragment shows that the reader is provided with the option to be attracted to women by stating the following: “Can’t you keep your eyes off that handsome chick waiting in line in front of you?” This sentence shows how language use can serve to counter heteronormative structures by offering alternative ways of sexual expression. In this text fragment, it is assumed that women could be attracted to men as well as women, meaning that the text is representative of sexual identities that differ from heterosexuality.

As discussed in the previous section, the original UK version of the article, titled “*You should try this: 10 quiet and sensual positions for the best sex. It doesn't always have to go wild,*”³³ seems to be free of heteronormative bias as well (Cosmopolitan UK, 2019). In my opinion, the discourses deriving from the original article do not only represent WLW in its language use, but it also challenges heteronormative structures by offering alternative ways of sexual and gender expression. I recommend that the authors of the Dutch Cosmopolitan adopt the language use in the original version of this article to counter heteronormative bias in their texts in the future.³⁴

I elaborate on the language use in the UK version of the article to claim that it is not impossible for Cosmopolitan, as a popular women’s magazine, to represent a wider range of sexual and gender identities, inclusive of WLW. In line with the method construction of critical discourse analysis, I elaborate on the language use in the UK version of the article to claim that is not impossible for Cosmopolitan, as a popular women’s magazine, to represent a

³² Translated from Dutch: “Stap zelf als eerste af op iemand die je leuk vindt.” [...] “Sta jij soms uren te turen naar die leuke jongen aan de bar, of kan je je ogen niet afhouden van die knappe chick die voor je in de rij staat? Stap eens op die persoon af.”

³³ Even though this analysis only examines linguistic representations of WLW, I find it noteworthy to mention that the illustrations adjoining the texts from the article “*Slow and sensual sex positions from Kama Sutra,*” could be used as examples of ways in which WLW could be visually represented in a non-normative manner. I provided screenshots of these illustrations in Appendix B for further reference.

³⁴ On the basis of these findings, it is not realistic to claim that the UK version of Cosmopolitan is more representative of WLW compared to the Dutch version of the magazine, because I did not conduct an in-depth analysis on other text discourses deriving from the UK version of the magazine. The latter was not feasible due to the time scope and limitations of this research.

wider range of sexual and gender identities. As explained in section 2.1, one of the aims of this analysis is to identify possibilities for Cosmopolitan by moving from negative to positive critique (Fairclough, 2013).

One example of the way in which the UK version of the article is considered free of heteronormative bias is the use of the pronouns ‘they’ and ‘their’, instead of using gendered pronouns (he, him, she, her). By using gender-neutral pronouns, there are no assumptions made about the gender of the person that the reader is supposed to have sex with in this context.³⁵ Additionally, the UK version of the article provides several options for the sex position, depending on the genitals assigned to the bodies of either the reader or the discussed sexual partner in the text. For instance, they recommend using a wand vibrator, a sex toy that can be used for either or both vagina-having partners (Cosmopolitan UK, 2019). In my understanding, the author of the UK version of the article describes the sexual partner of the reader as ‘gender-neutral’ as possible. For example, the author uses the term ‘vagina-having partners’ in several text fragments (Cosmopolitan UK, 2019). In doing so, the author does not assume that the sexual partner always identifies conforming to the gender binary of man or woman or that the gender of the person is assigned to their genitals.

Along these lines, the text counters the gender binary as well as sexual binaries (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). Similar to the article “*These are the best good intentions in love that you can easily maintain,*” this article thus serves as an example of the way in which language use can serve to represent WLW in a non-heteronormative way (Cosmopolitan UK, 2019). In contrast to the first part of the analysis of Cosmopolitan’s Love and Sex columns, which shows that the linguistic use of the gendered personal nouns and pronouns implies that the reader is expected to only be attracted to the opposite sex, the second part of the analysis shows that Cosmopolitan was in some cases able to represent WLW in a non-heteronormative manner by ‘improving’ their language use. In the next section, I aim to compare these findings with the way in which L’HOMO (categorized as a non-heteronormative magazine) has represented WLW in the year 2019.

³⁵ It should be noted that, in my understanding, the gender-neutral pronouns they, them, and their do not exist in the Dutch language (although the possibility of introducing similar gender-neutral pronouns is discussed more often). Up to this day, in the Dutch language, there are only two options, he/him (masculine pronoun) and she/her (feminine pronouns). I therefore argue that, in order to increase a gender-neutral language use, gendered pronouns should be avoided altogether. However, in this thesis, I argue for the addition of the female pronoun next to the male pronoun instead, to plead for an increased linguistic representation of WLW in the Netherlands.

4.2 Linguistic representation of WLW in L'HOMO

In the analysis of the discourse deriving from the article '*Christina Curry & Shenta Ignacio*', I relate the same text fragments to three different themes: stereotypical connotations with the term dyke, butch and femme representations, and the Dutch political climate (L'HOMO, 2019).

4.2.1 Stereotypical connotations with the term dyke

In this section, I analyze how the term dyke is constructed in three text fragments deriving from the article on Ignacio and Curry. The first text fragment derives from the first sentence of the interview: *Christina Curry (28) and her lover Shenta Ignacio (29) own fifty coats, sleep with three bunnies and they are not 'typical dykes'*³⁶ (L'HOMO, 2019, p. 53). The words 'typical dykes' are translated from the word 'potten-potten', as presented in the original Dutch version of the text. 'Potten-potten' derives from the Dutch word 'pot.' In the Netherlands, 'pot' is one of the most well known and also one of the oldest abusive words for a lesbian woman. According to the Dutch lesbian dictionary, the term dyke is the American/English appellation for 'pot' (De Smet, 2009). Considering the supposed similarity between these terms, I chose to translate 'potten-potten' into English by using the term 'typical dykes.'

The second text fragment that refers to the word dyke seems to denote that Ignacio and Curry distance themselves from the word dyke in order to serve as an example for the new generation. This section starts with the sentence: 'But not typical dykes.'³⁷

Shenta: "We would like to be an exemplary couple for the new generation."

Christina: "We are not typical dykes. We dress feminine and we wear make-up."

Shenta: "Actually, we are two hysterical gay men who dress fabulously, smell good, have a good sense of humor and in turn, we are adventurous"³⁸ (L'HOMO, 2019, p. 63).

³⁶ Translated from Dutch: "Christina Curry (28) en haar geliefde Shenta Ignacio (29) bezitten vijftig jassen, slapen met drie konijnen en zijn geen potten-potten."

³⁷ Translated from Dutch: "Maar geen potten-potten."

³⁸ Translated from Dutch: Shenta: "Wij zouden het leuk vinden een voorbeeldkoppel te zijn voor de nieuwe generatie." Christina: "We zijn geen potten-potten. Wij kleden ons vrouwelijk en we dragen make-up." Shenta: "Eigenlijk zijn we twee hysterische homomannen die fabulousof gekleed gaan, lekker ruiken, goeie humor hebben en ook nog eens avontuurlijk zijn."

Extrapolating from this sentence, Curry denies associating with a dyke. Therefore, Curry's words "We dress feminine and we wear make-up" imply that she wants to ensure that Ignacio and herself are not 'typical' dykes, because they dress feminine and wear make-up (L'HOMO, 2019). This statement resonates with the way in which homonormativity manifests itself in the Netherlands. A study by Hekma & Duyvendak states that, in Dutch society, many young lesbians attribute dyke styles like short hair, masculine clothing and behavior to an older generation. In doing so, this group resists strong identities and communities in order to keep their homosexuality as 'normal' as possible (Duyvendak & Hekma, 2011). Considering that, in the Netherlands, many young lesbians associate dyke styles to an 'older' generation, Curry and Ignacio might want to respond to this tendency by presenting a 'new', 'feminine' style for the 'new' generation. The sentence "We would like to be an exemplary couple for the new generation" thus implies that Curry and Ignacio claim to be part of a growing queer movement, but simultaneously, they alienate bodies that do not conform to their ideas of what queerness should be (Jones, 2009).

In the section 'Women's love'³⁹, Curry and Ignacio discuss in what moment in their life they discovered their attraction to women. The following statement, deriving from this section, seems to imply that that dykes have a certain look.

"I've known since I was born. In children's photos I look like a pot, I always played with boys and everyone asked me if I was a boy or a girl. It took sixteen years before I dared to be honest with myself. For a moment I thought I was bi, but once I became romantically involved with a woman, I knew: Shen, you are absolutely gay"⁴⁰
(L'HOMO, 2019)

In the sentence: "In children's photos, I look like a dyke," Shenta seems to imply that dykes have a certain look by claiming that she looks like a dyke in children's photos. The idea that dyke identities can be identified by their appearances can be explained by the stereotypical perception of this identity. As explained in section 1.3, dyke identities are often

³⁹ Translated from Dutch: "Vrouwenliefde."

⁴⁰ Translated from Dutch: Shenta: "Ik weet het sinds mijn geboorte. Op kinderfoto's zie ik eruit als een pot, ik speelde altijd met jongetjes en iedereen vroeg me of ik een jongetje of een meisje was. Het duurde zestien jaar voordat ik eerlijk tegen mezelf durfde te zijn. Heel even dacht ik nog dat ik bi was, maar toen ik eenmaal werk van een vrouw maakte, wist ik: Shen, je bent hartstikke gay."

stereotypically represented as ‘unattractive’ and ‘unfeminine’ in their appearances (Melcher, 2017).

The text excerpts describe the way in which WLW are still influenced by negative stereotypical perceptions of the term dyke: “actually, we are two hysterical gay men who dress fabulously, smell good, have a good sense of humor and in turn, we are adventurous.” It seems as if the latter serves as contrasting to the dyke identity. To put it bluntly, dykes are considered to not dress fabulously, to not smell good, not have a good sense of humor and they are perceived as not adventurous. This assumption fits the stereotypical idea that dykes are “unattractive, man-hating, unfeminine, stoic, and aggressive” (Melcher, 2017, p. 7). This is considered problematic, because the use of these kinds of identity categories tends to simplify and generalize the way in which WLW with a ‘masculine’ appearance are perceived in Dutch society (Ciasullo, 2001).

Even though the analyzed text shows that the term dyke is used in a negative stereotypical manner, this does not mean that the use of the term should be avoided altogether. It should be noted that the meaning of the word dyke has been reclaimed as positive in the late 20th and early 21st century. In 2004, the lesbian motorcycle group *Dykes on Bikes* in San Francisco were denied a trademark by the United States Patent and Trademark Organization, on the basis that the word dyke was too offensive for lesbians. In response, the *Dykes on Bikes* explained that the word dyke is re-appropriated by the lesbian community and is now an expression of pride rather than disparagement. This response included numerous statements by linguistics and sociologists about the positive use of dyke in the lesbian community. In accordance, Alison Bechdel, author of comic strip ‘*Dykes to Watch Out for*’, said that the use of the word dyke is a form of ‘linguistic activism’ (Malone, 2015).

Based on these findings, the use of the word dyke is not necessarily negative. However, in the analyzed discourse it becomes clear that the term dyke is associated with negative traits. Therefore, I do not assert that the word dyke should be avoided altogether in the linguistic representation of WLW, but rather, I am critical of the way in which this identity category is diminished altogether and constructed as negative. Extrapolating from these findings, I argue that the use of the term dyke can only be used in a non-stereotypical or harmful manner if those who use this term identify themselves as dykes, similar to the way in which *the Dykes on Bikes* and Alison Bechdel served to reclaim the term. In my understanding, Curry and Ignacio failed to do so by dismissing the dyke identity altogether.

4.2.2 Butch and femme representations

I will now turn to discuss how Curry's declaration of "dressing feminine and wearing make-up" can be related to butch/femme dichotomies that reflect negative stereotypical representations of 'masculine' WLW. Similar to the previous section, I analyze the following sentence "We are not typical dykes. We dress feminine and we wear make-up" (L'HOMO, 2019). This sentence seems to imply that Ignacio and Curry want to be considered as feminine in order to be accepted. On the one hand, Curry and Ignacio's implied aversion from dykes is problematic, because they adhere certain traits to this identity that are considered as negative stereotypical associations with 'butch' identity. I contend that these negative stereotypes sustain the exclusion and marginalization of butch WLW in the media. As explained in section 1.5, WLW who can or do assimilate to heteronormative structures by conforming to binary gender roles are said to receive more rights and privileges than those who do not or cannot assimilate (Robinson, 2016).

This might also be the reason why Curry and Ignacio want to avoid identification with dykes, because they seem to associate 'typical dykes' with the same characteristics as 'butch lesbians'⁴¹. Curry and Ignacio seem to imply that characteristics traditionally adhered to 'femininity', such as dressing feminine and wearing make-up are not associated as traits adhered to 'typical dykes.' Extrapolating from the latter, I claim that Ignacio and Curry understand lesbian identities in two categories: 'typical dykes' ('masculine' WLW) or WLW who dress feminine and wear make-up ('feminine' WLW). However, it should be acknowledged that, in reality, not all WLW fall into either of these categories, and many exist somewhere in between (Day, 2018).

The discourses coming forward from the text on Curry and Ignacio seems to reflect how, in the Netherlands, we are still trapped within the binary frameworks that condition how we understand expressions of same-sex sexualities (Jones, 2009). Indeed, a study by Hekma & Duyvendak on gays and lesbians in the Netherlands states that, in Dutch society, both gay men and lesbian women often aim to conform to gender binary norms in order to behave like straight people (Duyvendak & Hekma, 2011). According to Hekma & Duyvendak (2011), this occurrence can be explained as follows: "Heteronormativity thus becomes homonormativity

⁴¹ According to Hekma, the term 'masculine dykes' used in the Dutch language has the same meaning as 'butch' in the American language (Hekma, 2015).

as well, compelling both gay men and lesbian women to behave like straight people, making them afraid of showing any ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ signs, and prompting them to criticize others for behaving too much like sissies or dykes” (p. 629). In other words, it can be said that, in Dutch society, WLW often want to look ‘feminine’ in order to conform to heteronormative gender roles.

On the other hand, I believe that it is not necessarily negative that Curry and Ignacio identify as ‘feminine.’ In my understanding, this declaration is similar to the way in which femmes are generally described, that is, exhibiting traditionally ‘feminine’ traits. Wearing make-up is an example of expressing traditional notions of femininity (Ciasullo, 2001). I hereby generalize Curry and Ignacio’s identity construction as ‘femme lesbians’. As explained in section 1.5.1, femmes are often stereotyped as ‘passing’ for heterosexual women, but femme identities can also be reclaimed as challenging negative stereotypes about ‘femininity’. In addition, femme identities can serve to deconstruct the heteronormative assumption that ‘feminine’-looking women are always attracted to the opposite sex (Haller, 2009). In that sense, it can be considered positive that Curry and Ignacio explicitly manifest their ‘feminine’ traits in the analyzed discourse.

In the consideration that representations in the media serve as a meaningful source for the self-recognition and identity formation of non-heterosexual individuals, Curry and Ignacio’s aim to serve as an exemplary couple for the next generation can serve as a source for self-recognition and identity formation of feminine WLW (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015). From my position as a lesbian, ‘feminine’-looking woman, I find it positive that Curry and Ignacio represent themselves as WLW who have a ‘feminine’ identity in the analyzed text. Because of our matching identities, I personally consider Curry and Ignacio as role models that positively influence my self-recognition and identity formation (Giuliano & Gomillion, 2011).

Despite the stereotypical notion that femmes benefit from ‘passing as straight’ and are therefore more accepted in a heteronormative society, this does not mean that femme lesbians never face any risks or dangers (Galewski, 2008). According to Galewski (2008): “The varied risks and physical dangers that feminine-identified queer women contend with in this oftentimes sexist, misogynistic, and male chauvinistic culture might be different from those that butches confront, but they are not insubstantial and should not be forgotten” (p. 281). In other words, femme women can experience the same drawbacks to being a ‘feminine’ female as heterosexual women.

4.2.3 Dutch political climate

This section indicates how the language use in the analyzed text discourses reflects a Dutch political climate in which homosexual men are more visible than lesbian women. In the text *Homo Nostalgia* by Gloria Wekker, it is explained how Dutch national culture is characterized as ‘tolerant’ and ‘liberal.’ This perspective is similarly manifested in the representation of LGBTQ+ people in Dutch media (Wekker, 2016). According to Wekker: “Dutch gay identity does not threaten heteronormativity, but in fact helps shape and reinforce the contours of ‘tolerant’ and ‘liberal’ Dutch national culture” (Wekker, 2016, p. 116). In other words, Wekker states that heteronormative discourse has similarly been adopted by gay and lesbian people in the Netherlands and is closely tied to the Dutch understanding of tolerance and liberal thinking (Wekker, 2016).

Based on Wekker’s description of Dutch culture, I analyze the following statement made by Ignacio: “actually, we are two hysterical gay men who dress fabulously, smell good, have a good sense of humor and in turn, we are adventurous” (L’HOMO, 2019, p. 63). This statement implies that the identities of ‘potten-potten’ are the opposite of hysterical homosexual men. Dressing fabulously, smelling good, having a good sense of humor and being adventurous are all considered to be traits that belong to the image of a ‘hysterical homosexual man (L’HOMO, 2019). Therefore, it almost seems as if dykes are the opposite of ‘hysterical homosexual men’, implying that potten or dykes do not dress fabulously, they do not smell good, they have a bad sense of humor and they are not adventurous. As explained in section 1.3, this assumption corresponds with the stereotypical traits “angry, dominating, defensive and humorless” that are often associated with ‘masculine’ WLW (Geiger, Harwood, & Hummert, 2016, p. 8). Moreover, dykes are considered as masculine and unattractive in their appearance. Accordingly, Curry and Ignacio seem to imply that, instead of ‘dressing fabulously’ and ‘having a good sense of humor,’ ‘typical dykes’ are instead perceived as ‘unattractive,’ ‘defensive’ and ‘humorless’ (Geiger, Harwood, & Hummert, 2016).

The reason why Ignacio seems to be more comfortable to identify as ‘hysterical homosexual men’ instead of associating with ‘typical dykes’ might be explained by the understanding that, in the Netherlands, homosexual men overtly represented in the media. Wekker says that, in Dutch society, there is a dominant representation of white gay men of a certain type, such as entertainers, tv-personalities, businessmen and politicians. Because of this dominant representation of ‘white gay men of a certain type’, other sexual identities that do not fit this category, including white and black, migrant and refugee lesbians, are virtually invisible in

the Dutch media landscape. Thus, white gay men that conform to certain norms are the most visible in the public domain, and this is mostly sustained through media content (Wekker, 2016).

In section 1.2, I explained that media representations are an “important form of social and political recognition” and it is often a “vital source for self-recognition and identity formation” (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015, p. 77). As explained in section 1.3, media sources are the dominant means by which people learn about others and acquire and internalize social norms, values and beliefs. Thus, when these ‘white gay men of a certain type’ seem to be at the forefront in the Dutch media, non-heterosexual viewers may internalize the social characteristics adhered to this dominant media image of ‘being gay.’ Considering that lesbian identities remain virtually invisible in the Dutch media landscape, WLW might assimilate to this image of ‘white gay men’ in the media in their own identity formation.

Moreover, the reason why Curry and Ignacio seem eager to conform to the ‘normal’ could potentially be caused by the Dutch political landscape. In my opinion, the campaign slogan of VVD⁴², “Act. Normal,”⁴³ could be used as an example of the Dutch idealization of ‘acting normal’ in a more general sense. Considering that, under the policy by VVD, all Dutch citizens are supposed to ‘act normal,’ Dutch citizens who belong to the LGBTQ+ community are similarly expected to conform to what is considered ‘normal’ in Dutch society. Thus, in order to be ‘tolerated’ and to construct a ‘liberal self’ inside *and* outside of the LGBTQ+ community, members of this community must adhere to a normative expression of their sexual identities. Considering that Ignacio and Curry seem to make a contrast between homosexual men of a certain type (who dress well, smell good, etc) and ‘typical dykes,’ it can be said that the latter is associated with characteristics considered as ‘abnormal.’ Apparently, for Curry and Ignacio, this means that they should identify as homosexual men in order to be considered ‘normal’ in society.

⁴² The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (abbreviated: VVD) is a Dutch political party with a liberal signature. The VVD is currently the leading party in the Dutch House of Representatives.

⁴³ Translated from Dutch: “Gewoon. Doen.”

4.3 Conclusion

By comparing the analyzed discourses from *Cosmopolitan* and *L'HOMO*, I found that, in some cases, non-heteronormative texts could contain even more normative bias compared to heteronormative texts. In section 4.1.2, it is shown how WLW can be linguistically represented by the use of a language that is free of heteronormative bias. The analyzed text excerpt, deriving from the article titled "*These are the best good intentions in love that you can easily maintain,*" shows that the reader is provided with the option to be attracted to men *and* women. In this text fragment, it is assumed that women could be attracted to men as well as women, meaning that the text presents same-sex sexuality next to heterosexuality. In doing so, I argue that the sexual identities of WLW are recognized and normalized in this article.

The text discourses deriving from the article titled "*You should try this: 10 quiet and sensual positions for the best sex. It doesn't always have to go wild,*" counters sexual binaries by avoiding heteronormative bias as well as gender binaries by using the words 'they' and 'their' instead of gendered pronouns and nouns such as 'he' and 'she.' Based on these findings, I believe that, in section 4.1.2, it is shown that the discourse of *Cosmopolitan* in some cases was able to represent WLW without implying that this group has to meet certain heteronormative expectations to be accepted in society.

It can thus be said that section 4.1.2 shows that *Cosmopolitan* achieved their aim to represent WLW by avoiding the use of heteronormative bias in their texts. This is not the case in the discourse from *L'HOMO*. The linguistic representation of WLW deriving from the text on Curry and Ignacio seems to reflect how, in the Netherlands, many people are still trapped within the binary structures that determine how they perceive same-sex sexualities. The discourse deriving from the analyzed text represents a gender ideal that is closely related to the gender binary ideals under heteronormativity. Accordingly, the text seems to reflect how, in the Netherlands, this heteronormative discourse is adopted by non-heterosexual people who aim to conform to similar normative ideals.

Moreover, I argue that Curry and Ignacio's desire to identify themselves as 'two hysterical gay men' is caused by the specific way in which homonormativity is manifested in Dutch society. As described in section 4.2.3, homosexual men are overtly represented in the media, while lesbian identities remain virtually invisible. In short, the discourse deriving from the 2019 edition of *L'HOMO* seems to represent homonormative practices of privileging certain expressions of homosexuality over others. Extrapolating from these findings, it becomes clear

that, even in non-heteronormative contexts, there are still normative biases to be found. Indeed, the analysis has shown that, in the year 2019, L'HOMO continued to portray WLW in a homonormative manner.

However, the first part of the analysis of the texts published in 2019 on the website of Cosmopolitan can be criticized for its heteronormative bias, due the inconsistency in the use of pronouns that refer to both men and women. As explained in section 4.1.1, the dominant discourses deriving from the analysis of these articles shows that the authors of the texts published in the Love and Sex sections often 'forget' to include the pronouns 'she' and 'her' when referring to the romantic/sexual partner of the reader. In that sense, Cosmopolitan often renders the existence of female same-sex sexualities invisible in their language use in their Love and Sex sections, which corresponds to the way in which heteronormativity is manifested in Dutch society. In contrast to Cosmopolitan, the 2019 edition of L'HOMO explicitly represented and acknowledged female same-sex relationships, albeit in a stereotypical and homonormative manner. In short, the analysis shows heteronormative bias in Cosmopolitan's Love and Sex sections in 2019, while the analysis of the article deriving from L'HOMO shows homonormative discourses. In the analyzed media sources, these kinds of sexual norms led to the underrepresentation of WLW altogether or, instead, certain gender ideals of WLW were presented as the norm.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have demonstrated how WLW are represented in Dutch media landscapes by deconstructing heteronormativity and homonormativity in media texts. By means of conducting a critical discourse analysis – with the aid of the method of queer linguistic approaches to discourse – on the women’s magazine *Cosmopolitan* and the LGBTI magazine *L’HOMO*, I examined how the language use in the analyzed texts is involved in the discursive construction of sexual identities and desire and I related these findings to other contexts. By critically examining the language use in the text discourses, and connecting this to existing theories and ideas within the fields of queer theory, critical discourse studies and media studies, I have been able to answer my research question: *How are women who love women represented in Dutch media landscapes?*

In the theoretical framework, I explained why I chose to adopt the term ‘women who love women’ (WLW) instead of the commonly used term ‘lesbian’. I discussed that the identity category lesbian is problematic because it regulates and excludes WLW who do not conform to the norms associated with this identity category. The term ‘women who love women’ is therefore more representative of the variety of identities among this group. Furthermore, I elaborated on the way in which heteronormativity and homonormativity are manifested in media representations of WLW. It is important to address this, because media representations have a large impact on the self-recognition and identity formation of this group.

In the textual analysis of *Cosmopolitan*, I specifically examined the construction of the words used to refer to the assumed sexual or romantic partner of the reader in the texts. I hereby drew on the queer linguistic understanding that gender identities are often constructed in text discourses with the use of gendered personal nouns and pronouns. In doing so, I aimed to answer the following sub question: *How are women who love women represented in the Love and Sex sections in Cosmopolitan in 2019?* The analysis shows that, in the year 2019, WLW were underrepresented in the Love and Sex sections of *Cosmopolitan*, due to the dominant tendency of the use of the masculine pronouns ‘he’, ‘him’, and ‘his’ to refer to the sexual or romantic partner of the reader. In doing so, *Cosmopolitan*’s language use in these texts can be accused of heteronormative bias, that is, the preconceived idea that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural form of sexuality. Due to the heteronormative bias in these texts, the existence of female same-sex (sexual or romantic) relationships is concealed.

As explained in the introduction, Van den Nieuwenhuizen failed to acknowledge and address that normative bias can similarly be found in non-heteronormative magazines. Accordingly, the analyzed discourses deriving from L'HOMO exemplify that even non-heterosexual contexts are not free of heteronormative influences. This is problematic, because homonormative bias in non-heteronormative magazines such as L'HOMO leads to the exclusion and marginalization of sexual minorities in a similar manner as shown in the discourse analysis of Cosmopolitan's Love and Sex sections.

The dominant discourse that came forward in the analysis of L'HOMO is the homonormative assumption that WLW should be 'feminine' in order to be accepted in Dutch society. This can be explained by the way in which heteronormativity sustains the idea that women are expected to be feminine and men are expected to be masculine in order to fit into their 'normal' gender roles. The analyzed text discourses show that these heteronormative discourses are similarly adopted by non-heterosexual people. Based on these findings, I was able to answer the sub question: *'How are WLW represented in the 2019 edition of L'HOMO?'* Thus, in my understanding, L'HOMO represented WLW in a homonormative manner, considering that the analyzed article shows an aversion from 'masculinity' in WLW. 'Masculine' WLW are often stereotypically presented in the media as 'butch lesbians' or 'dykes', and the characteristics attributed to these identity categories are mostly negative. This is problematic, because some self-identified butches consider their identities as powerful and positive.

I thus contend that L'HOMO's representation of WLW contributes to the marginalization and undesirability of butch women within queer women's sexual culture. On the other hand, 'feminine' WLW are often presented stereotypically as 'lipstick lesbians' or 'femme lesbians,' but similar to the butch identity, 'femme' identities have been reclaimed as powerful identities that seek to challenge the heteronormative mainstream. In that sense, it can be said that WLW who present themselves as 'feminine' should not always be criticized for conforming to homonormative ideals of 'what a lesbian should look like.' From my own position as a 'feminine' looking lesbian woman, I appreciate that L'HOMO represents a lesbian couple that I can identify with because of our matching identities. Nonetheless, I recommend that, in non-heterosexual media contexts, WLW should not be represented as either 'feminine' or 'masculine', but rather, a variety of identities of this group should be represented, so that all WLW can find someone they can identify with.


In contrast to L'HOMO, a magazine that is specifically targeted at non-heterosexuals (namely, the LGBTI community), I believe that popular women's magazines such as Cosmopolitan could benefit from a different approach, in the sense that female same-sex sexualities are supposed to be represented next to other sexual orientations (especially heterosexuality) in these types of magazines. As explained in the introduction, I agree to Van den Nieuwenhuizen's claim that magazines could play a significant societal role in the normalization of different kinds of sexual preferences. In my understanding, female same-sex sexualities can only be normalized in magazines when this group is linguistically represented in a non-normative manner. As explained in section 4.3, the text discourses deriving from the UK version of a Cosmopolitan article on 'sex positions' exemplify how female same-sex sexualities can be represented next to other sexualities in a non-normative manner. I thus recommend that Dutch heteronormative media sources, such as the popular women's magazine Cosmopolitan, should adopt this kind of non-heteronormative language in order to counter sexual and gender binaries in their language use.

As explained in the introduction, the Netherlands continues to present itself as a fortified place of tolerance for LGBTQ+ individuals. However, this thesis shows that heteronormative and homonormative discourses in Dutch media landscapes continue to relegate WLW representations to a marginalized position. In my opinion, the importance of representing female same-sex sexualities in meaningful ways should be addressed more, especially in a Dutch media landscape in which heterosexuality is still considered the norm and non-heterosexual people are overtly represented by male homosexuals. As explained before, Van den Nieuwenhuizen's critique on these matters was insufficient in addressing homonormative bias in media texts, and there are no academic sources available that examine the representation of WLW in the Netherlands through textual analysis. This thesis aimed to address these gaps by showing that textual analysis can be an effective tool to criticize the dominant means in which WLW are represented in Dutch media landscapes.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview excerpt Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuizen (*Zeikschrift*)

Maak kennis met Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuizen a.k.a. *Zeikschrift*:

Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuizen (27) is mediacriticus op instagram onder de naam @zeikschrift en werkt als columnist bij Vogue magazine. Zeikschrift werd in Juli 2016 opgericht en geeft kritiek op seksisme, bodyshaming, racisme, klassisme en heteronormativiteit* in tijdschriften en andere nieuwsmedia. Inmiddels heeft haar account al meer dan 19.000 volgers! Wij gingen met haar in gesprek over het tegengaan van heteronormativiteit in de bladenindustrie, stereotyperingen van LGBTQ+ vrouwen en progressie in de vorm van ‘inclusieve stripjes.’

Bezoek @zeikschrift hier! <https://www.instagram.com/zeikschrift/?hl=nl>

Kun je ons iets vertellen over heteronormativiteit in de bladenindustrie?

In Nederland wordt heel weinig aandacht gegeven aan heteronormativiteit. Doordat Nederland het eerste land ter wereld was waar het homohuwelijk was gelegaliseerd, denken veel mensen: ‘wij zijn er al.’ Ik vind media een hele fijne manier om te laten zien op welke manieren heteronormativiteit zich manifesteert. Zo wordt er in veel tijdschriften vanuit gegaan dat de lezers vallen op het andere geslacht.

Er zijn dan wel bladen die met goede bedoelingen een ‘special issue’ maken over een bepaalde minderheidsgroep. Maar als je mensen uit minderheidsgroepen zo laat zien in bladen, wordt het daarmee tegelijkertijd ook extra benadrukt dat het meer een uitzondering is. Ik heb nog nooit een special issue gezien over lesbische seksualiteit, maar dat sfeertje hangt er wel een beetje rond dat soort thema’s.

De afwezigheid van LGBTQ+ vrouwen in bladen

Afgezien daarvan staan er dan ook geen artikelen in die erover praten als iets normaals. Het is vooral ook die afwezigheid van de normalisatie van lesbische seksualiteiten. Er zijn wel honderden artikels die gaan over ‘de manieren waarop je hém kan pleasen tussen de lakens.’ Waarom kan het dan in godsnaam niet over vrouwen gaan?

Seksuele diversiteit binnen het lezerspubliek

Ik kan me voorstellen dat bladen die bijvoorbeeld veel over seks en liefde gaan misschien minder gelezen worden door LGBTQIA+ mensen, waardoor deze bladen zich focussen

op de meerderheid aan heteroseksuele lezers. Dit brengt interessante ethische vragen met zich mee. Want ik snap dat je als blad een bepaald lezerspubliek wil aanspreken. In hoeverre ligt de verantwoordelijkheid bij de redacties om diversiteit te implementeren onafhankelijk van het lezerspubliek? En in welke mate mogen seksualiteit of diversiteit meewegen in hoeveel aandacht je daaraan besteedt? Dit zijn belangrijke vragen, want er is een hele disproportionele kloof tussen minderheden en de dominante groepen in de samenleving.

Denk je dat er meer behoefte is aan tijdschriften speciaal voor LGBTQ+ vrouwen?

Ik denk dat die behoefte er zeker is, vooral omdat je verder zo weinig jezelf anders terugziet in bladen. Het is altijd heel mooi als zeker minderheden in de maatschappij een eigen plek hebben om naartoe te kunnen. Het fijne aan bladen die specifiek zijn toegewijd aan minderheidsissues, zoals de ZijaanZij, is dat er meer ruimte is om dieper op het onderwerp in te gaan. En dat het geschreven wordt door mensen die weten waar ze het over hebben.

Hoe definieer jij je seksuele geaardheid?

Ik heb zelf alleen nog maar relaties met mannen gehad. Maar stel dat ik was opgegroeid in een maatschappij die helemaal openstaat voor diversiteit in seksuele geaardheden, dan zou ik me best voor kunnen stellen dat ik een ander liefdesleven had gehad. Dit heeft volgens mij ook te maken met deze heteronormatieve samenleving. Zelfs als je praktisch gezien handelt als een heteroseksuele vrouw, dan is het alsnog vaak de omgeving die je in dat hokje plaatst. Ik ben überhaupt niet geïnteresseerd in een puur binaire benadering van seksualiteit en gender. Daarom zou ik mezelf eerder als queer identificeren. Tegelijkertijd denk ik dat als je bijvoorbeeld alleen maar altijd op vrouwen valt, dat je dan kunt zeggen: 'Ik ben lesbisch, punt.' En dat is net zo legitiem.

'Twee soorten' lesbische vrouwen in de media

Ik kom uit 1992 en ben dus opgegroeid in de jaren '90. In Nederlandse en Engelstalige series en films werden lesbiennes toentertijd vrijwel altijd stereotyperend afgebeeld. Butch, kort haar, dubbel denim, mannelijk, en dat niet alleen. Daar is uiteraard niks mis mee, maar het werd vervolgens ook nog eens als enige beeld gepresenteerd, en het werd gestereotypeerd als een - op verschillende manieren - onaantrekkelijk beeld. Het is goed om iemand af te beelden die er zo uitziet en hen vervolgens op een respectvolle manier neer te zetten. Maar én een hele seksualiteit representeren als een bepaald type, én dat vaak doen op een hele lacherige,

disrespectvolle manier, is dat niet. De laatste manier is waar ik mee ben opgegroeid. Je kunt niet verwachten dat dat geen impact heeft.

Dit heeft te maken met het feit dat de filmindustrie heel lang door mannen werd beheerd, dus de 'male gaze' speelt hierin ook een rol. Hierdoor werden vrouwen die seks hadden met vrouwen ofwel geportretteerd als 'butch en onaantrekkelijk' of geseksualiseerd als 'lust voor de man', op een bijna pornografische manier. Gelukkig is hier de afgelopen jaren verandering in gekomen, voornamelijk doordat er nu meer mooie films en series worden gemaakt door vrouwen en een meer vrouwelijk narratief laten zien.

Inclusievere stripjes in de Cosmopolitan

Toch zie je in de de bladenindustrie de afgelopen vijf jaar in Nederland wel degelijk verbeteringen. Zo had ik laatst de hoofddirectrice van de Cosmopolitan gesproken op de radio over hun rubriek 'love and men.' Ze zei: "Goed dat je dit aankaart van die heteronormativiteit, daar willen we wat aan gaan doen." Inmiddels is Cosmopolitan op de goede weg met veel inclusievere stripjes of illustraties bij artikelen. En in hun rubrieken over seks en liefde gaat het weleens over lesbische of niet-heteronormatieve seks. Maar dat is heel recent. Het is gewoon iets wat heel lang niet in de mainstream media is gebeurd.



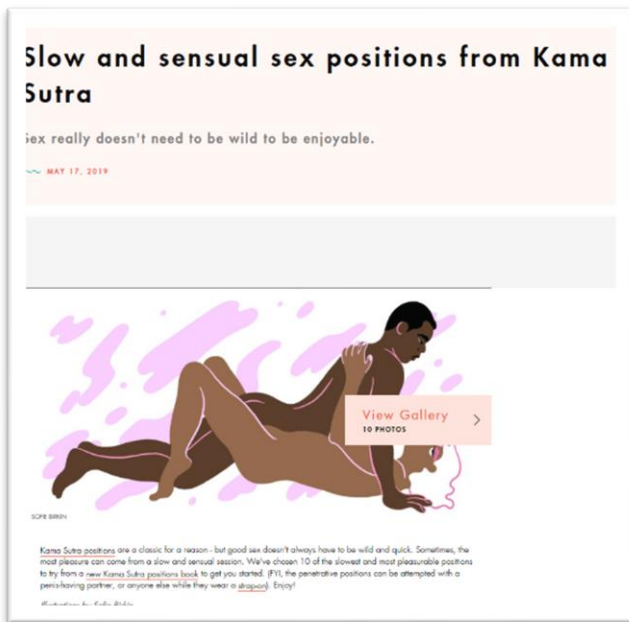
Kunnen wij zelf iets doen om heteronormativiteit tegen te gaan in de media?

De afgelopen 2,5 jaar heb ik gemerkt dat veel mensen de media zien als een ‘ondoordringbaar blok.’ Maar ook in de media werken individuen en ‘gewoon mensen.’ Dus als jij bijvoorbeeld tijdens het lezen van een blad denkt van: jezus, alweer een rubriek met alleen maar heteroseksuelen. Gewoon mailen. Ze lezen bijna altijd alles en ze reageren ook op bijna alles. Als die vraag naar verandering groter wordt, bevordert dit ook de zichtbaarheid van minderheden. En als je kritiek krijgt, blijft dat hangen. Dit geldt voor iedereen. Je kunt er in ieder geval zeker van zijn dat diegene er over nadenkt. En soms is alleen dat al revolutionair.

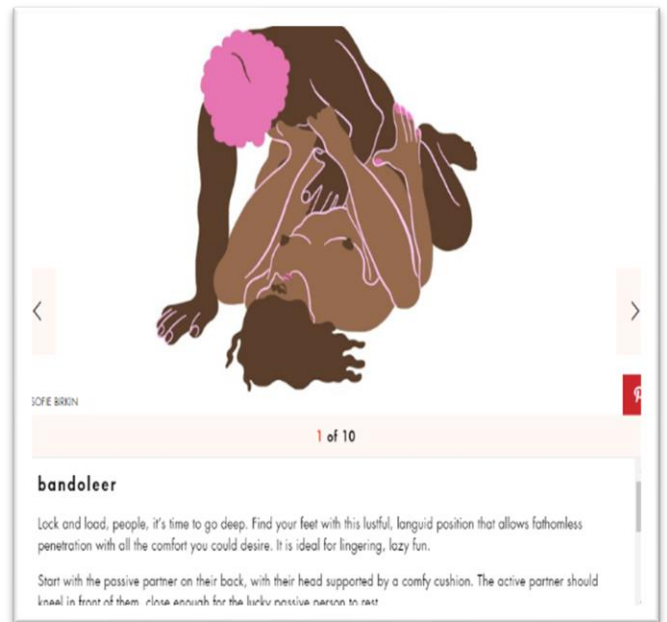
Source

Van Heezik, D. (2019, August 5). @Zeikschrift. Retrieved May 12, 2020, from [zijaanzij.nl: https://www.zijaanzij.nl/nieuws/5379/Zeikschrift.html](https://www.zijaanzij.nl/nieuws/5379/Zeikschrift.html)

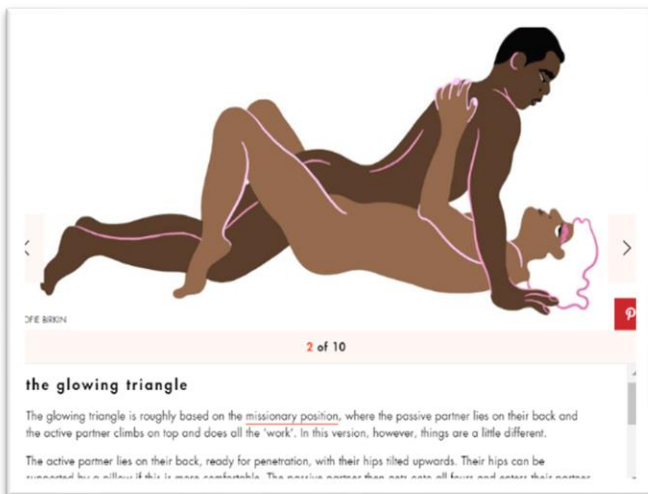
Appendix B: Illustrations from the UK Cosmopolitan article



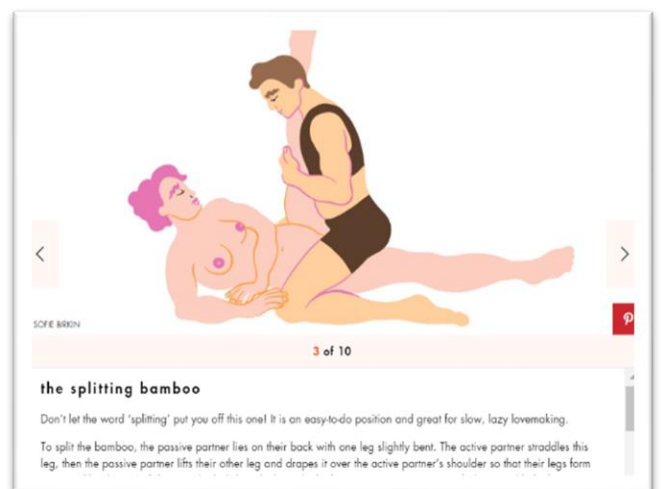
Screenshot 1: Kama Sutra positions



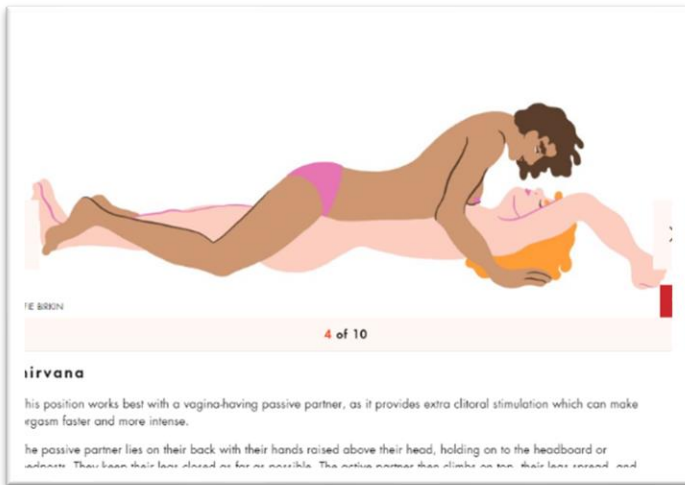
Screenshot 2: bandoleer



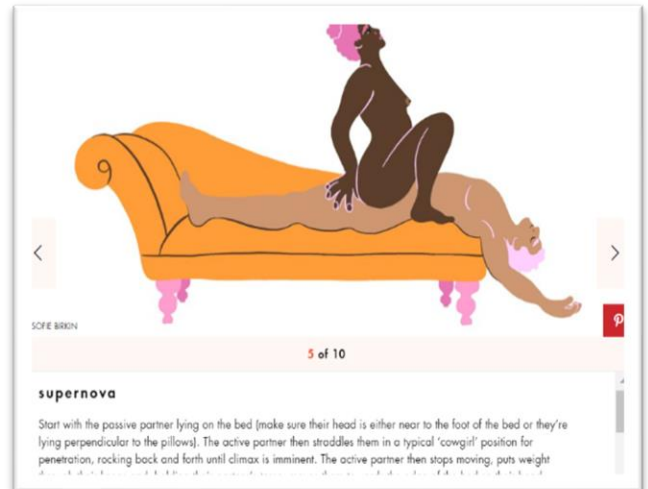
Screenshot 3: the glowing triangle



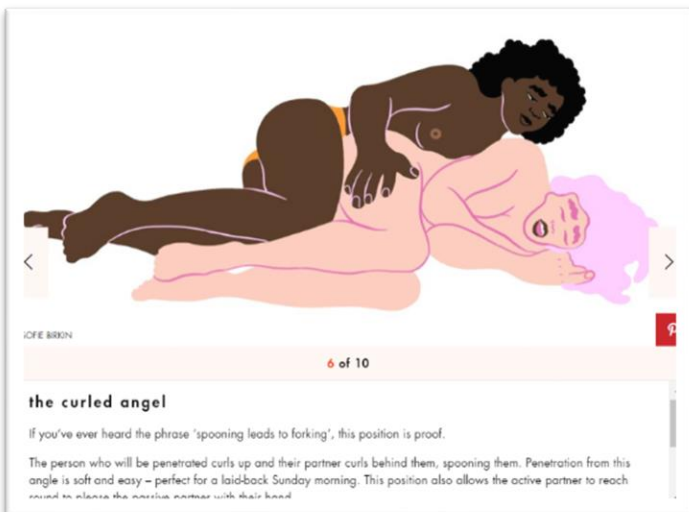
Screenshot 4: the splitting bamboo



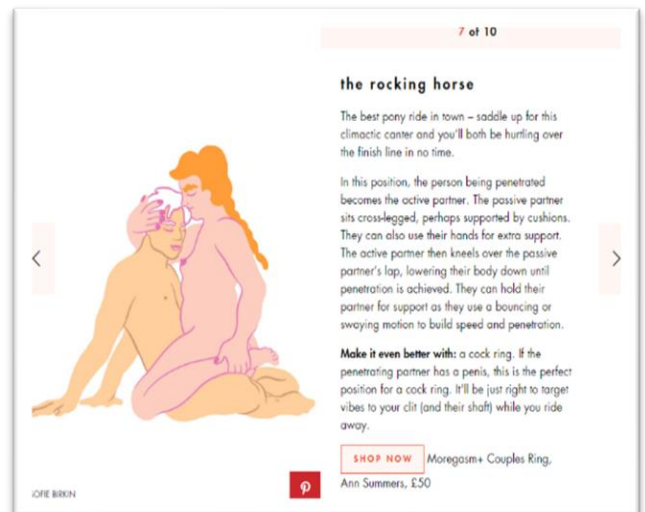
Screenshot 5: nirvana



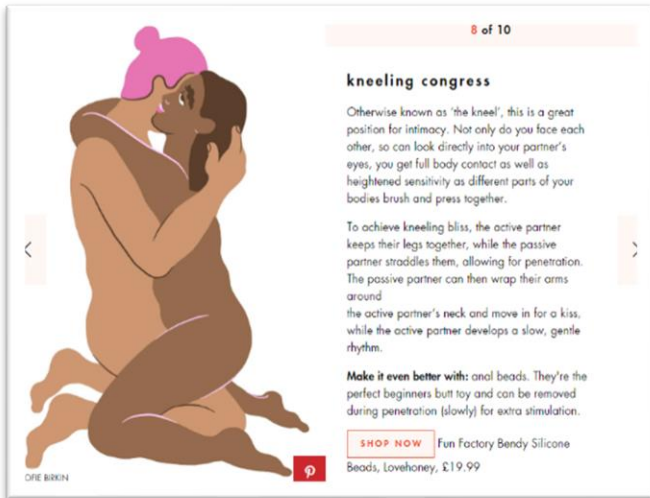
Screenshot 6: supernova



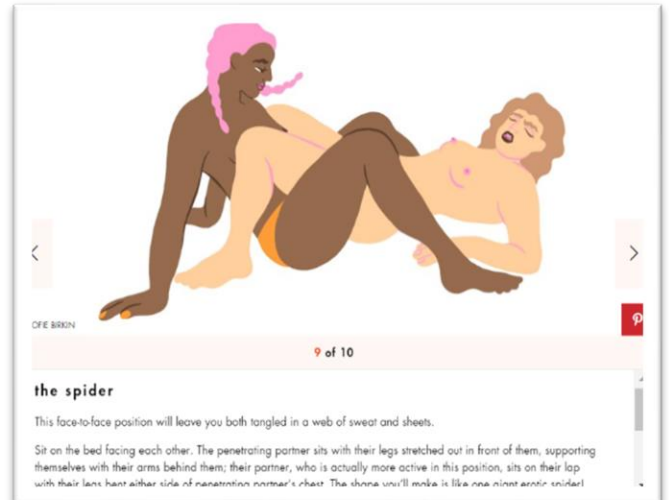
Screenshot 7: the curled angel



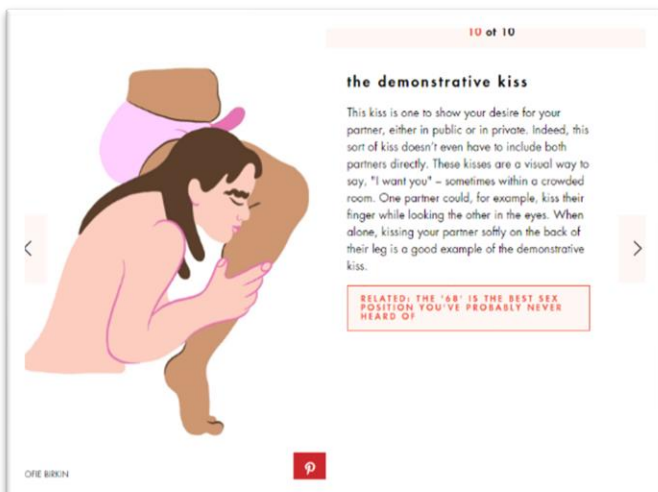
Screenshot 8: the rocking horse



Screenshot 9: kneeling congress



Screenshot 10: the spider



Screenshot 11: the demonstrative kiss

Source:

Cosmopolitan UK. (2019, May 17). *Slow and sensual sex positions from Kama Sutra.*

Retrieved May 12, 2020, from cosmopolitan.com/uk:

<https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/love-sex/sex/g19752376/slow-sex-positions-kama-sutra/>