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Constructing National Identity in Men's *vs* Women's Magazines

A Case Study from the USA

Abstract

National identity plays an important role in defining many people's attitude towards reality. Its representation has remained under the radar within the field of linguistics for decades, while being investigated in a number of different genres, from political speeches to advertisement; in this regard, however, a gap can be found when it comes to magazines.

This study focuses on US national context and seeks to reveal how a range of discursive devices— including lexical, syntactic and metaphorical patterns—are used in the representation of nation and national identity in popular magazines published in the US. The analysis provides a comparison based on the target audience's gender identity.

*A mixed methods approach is applied to two corpora, covering a time span between 2015 and 2020 and comprising a total of approximately 9 million words from popular magazines aimed respectively at a female (*Allure, Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire, Vanity Fair *and* Vogue*) and male audience (*Men's Health, Popular Mechanics, Esquire *and* GQ*). Firstly, we employed corpus-assisted methods to explore the data at a more general level, drawing on concordance and collocation analysis. Secondly, we carried out in-depth, qualitative analysis of relevant words and expressions looking at their wider textual context. Thirdly, we compared the results between corpora. The analysis shows some common patterns—e.g., a strong use of personification of the country, often represented as facing a moment of crisis—as well as differences in how these patterns are articulated in the two corpora.*

Keywords: *corpus-assisted discourse analysis, gender, magazines, national identity, United States of America*

1. Introduction

In our globalized world, national identity remains an essential aspect in defining many people's attitude towards reality (Ariely 2012, 478) and forms part of a complex system of categories defining and affecting people's identity (Hall 1997). This paper focuses on national identity in the United States of America. Characterized by strong feelings of national belonging and unique American identity (Citrin, Wong and Duff 2001, 95), the US still hold relatively high

levels of national pride compared to other countries in the world (McCarthy 2019), although this seems to have reached record lows in 2019 as compared to the previous ten years (Brenan 2019). *Gallup* (Brenan 2019) ascribes this to the "sharply polarized political climate" in the country, heavily affected by former US President Donald J. Trump's support of a specific view of national identity as White (male, heterosexual) working class (Holland and Fermor 2020, 65).

Our study explores the US and US national identity as imagined and constructed (Wodak et al. 2009, 2) through language considering the media landscape as a chief context where such items are portrayed, negotiated and shaped. Studies on media representations of national identity have been based on a range of different sources (see Section 2) but have not, to the best of our knowledge, addressed magazines. Although their circulation figures may be lower than those of mainstream newspapers, popular magazines such as *Vanity Fair* can reach tens of millions of readers in one month throughout the US (Statista 2019), expanding their circulation through their online editions (according to Similarweb 2020, Vogue.com registered about ten million visits per month in the second half of 2020). Moreover, since the discursive construction of national identity changes according to the context of communication and to the groups within which it emerges (Wodak et al. 2009, 3), we argue that the target audience may also play a role in such construction. This prompted us to address another under-explored area by comparing magazines aimed at a female *vs* male audience.

Combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study explores how a range of discursive devices—including lexical, syntactic and metaphorical patterns—are used to represent nation and national identity in magazines published in the US. Moreover, it seeks to describe any emerging similarities and differences in this representation when aimed at different intended audiences.

2. Literature review

Defining the complex concept of identity has been the starting point of a considerable amount of literature (see Llamas and Watt 2010), not only within linguistics. While this is still a debated issue, scholarship agrees on the relational feature of identity defined as "the social positioning of self and other" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 586). Identity can be seen as a set of features, attitudes and traits that one individual has or acquires over time that distinguishes them from others (see, for example, Shoemaker 2006) while at the same time allowing them to identify within a specific group.

In this sense, nationality is a component of identity that is inevitably constructed in relation and in contrast with others. From a cultural perspective, some scholars agree that national

identity can follow geographic boundaries and is determined by the fluctuation of globalization, modernization, cultural and political change (Hall 1996). In sociology, the concept of nation has been theorized as an imagined political community (Anderson 1983; Billig 1995) but also a social construct defined and expressed through discourse (Bourdieu 1994; Hall 1992). Here we refer to the definition provided by one of the foundational works within linguistics on the discursive representation of national identity, where linguistic choices are considered essential in the construction of nationhood. Wodak et al. define national identity as:

> a complex of common or similar *beliefs or opinions* internalised in the course of socialisation [...] and of common or similar *emotional attitudes* [...], as well as common or similar *behavioural dispositions*, including inclusive, solidarity-oriented and exclusive, distinguishing dispositions and also in many cases linguistic dispositions. (2009, 28, italics in the original)

In line with Wodak et al., we also believe that "national identity is shaped by state, political, institutional, media and everyday social practices" (2009, 29), with the latter including discursive practices. Wodak et al. (2009) focus on the lexical units and the syntactic devices used in constructing Austrian national identity through the analysis of commemorative speeches, policy addresses, or declarations and lectures. Among other findings, they observe that national identity is often constructed in relation to a shared political past by recalling significant historical events representing the nation's origin and foundation (Wodak et al. 2009, 83). At the same time, a common political present and future are evoked (Wodak et al. 2009, 97), for example, by evaluating the political and economic situation. These patterns seem to be very common in the way nationhood is constructed, as a review of recent studies shows.

In New Zealand, nationhood was investigated when a Panel was put together to decide whether to choose a new national flag to rebrand national identity (Taylor and Nairn 2018). The authors argue that in the newspapers analyzed, national identity was imagined in multiple ways, emphasizing unity, endorsing an inclusive and unified country and referencing geo-naturalistic culturally bound elements. Most importantly, the construction of a communal past was emphasized and exploited to push forward the idea of a new country, free from the British colonial power and entrenching ideological and social changes.

Bogain (2019) looks at French national identity in the aftermath of the 2015 terrorist attacks. In an effort to reassure and strengthen the nation, President Holland relied on three different arguments: unanimism, where the idea of the Republic is reinforced through culturally specific references, personal pronouns and lexis drawing from a semantic category of caring; exceptionalism, depicting France as a virtuous and glorious country, a beacon of civilization

fighting against an evil invader; and strength, by framing the population as having a shared purpose. These studies exemplify that, despite the local characterization of nationalism, some common discursive traits are used to imagine and construct national identity.

Breeze (2021) analyzed representations of the nation and its people in a corpus of election manifestoes from several British parties by applying a similar corpus-based approach to the one used here. In her study, national identity emerged in different forms and through different discursive choices: thus, ideas of and narratives about the nation, its population, international status, unity, history and future prospects varied according to the political and ideological priorities they were serving.

It has been noted that a popular way of depicting the nation is the use of metaphors. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) people conceive of reality by largely drawing on conventional conceptual metaphors, that is systematic sets of correspondences between a generally concrete source domain and a more abstract target domain. In particular, the metaphor of the NATION-AS-A-PERSON, based on the STATE-IS-A-PERSON universal frame (see Chilton and Lakoff 1995), has been identified in studies on several countries such as the UK (Charteris-Black 2004a, 76), Israel (Musolff 2018), Iran (KhosraviNik 2015) and the US (Charteris-Black 2004b, 174; Lakoff 2004).

The media has been a fruitful source to investigate national identity, from newspapers in the UK (Brookes 1999), US and China (Li 2009), to social media such as Twitter (Yadlin-Segal 2017). However, there seems to be a gap with regards to magazines. While they have been investigated extensively (Balirano 2014; Coffrey-Glover 2019), national identity has not drawn the attention of scholars interested in such genre.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the representation of national identity in magazines and comparing the results based on the gender difference of the intended audiences.

3. Data collection and method

Two corpora, including articles from US magazines specifically aimed at women and men were collected. Some magazines in our study stated the gender of their target readership in the self-descriptions provided on their or their publisher's websites,[1] while others were regarded as

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[1] See https://www.condenast.com/brands/allure/ (*Allure*);
https://www.cosmopolitan.com/about/a26950060/about-us-contact-information-masthead/ (*Cosmopolitan*); https://www.marieclaire.com/about/a394/about-us/ (*Marie Claire*);
https://www.menshealth.com/about/a29134632/about-mens-health/ (*Men's Health*);
https://www.esquire.com/about/a2198/what-is-esquire/ (*Esquire*);
https://www.condenast.com/brands/gq#U.S (*GQ*). All websites last visited on 17/04/2021.

men's or women's magazines based on available readership data indicating that the great majority of readers are men or women.[2] The articles were downloaded from the platform Nexis (available at lexisnexis.com). Our magazine selection criteria were therefore partly affected by magazine's availability on the platform in the time span we intended to analyze—June 2015 to June 2020. This time span captures the transition from Obama's liberal political climate to Trump's conservative presidency; thus, it seemed relevant to the evolution of national identity within the country. Table 1 summarizes the composition of the women's magazine corpus (WomMag) and men's magazine corpus (MenMag).

WomMag	articles	tokens	MenMag	articles	tokens
Allure	311	466,319	*Esquire*	695	1,752,279
Cosmopolitan	386	471,085	*GQ*	538	1,625,955
Marie Claire	516	859,868	*Men's Health*	133	293,476
Vanity Fair	872	2,391,632	*Popular Mechanics*	435	815,185
Vogue	64	1,183,271			
Total	2,749	5,372,175		1,801	4,486,894

Tab. 1: Corpus information

We retrieved the articles using the following search terms: *our country*; *America*; *USA*; *American*; *United States*; *our nation*; *U.S.*[3] Some of the articles collected were not relevant to our study, as they included key terms (e.g., part of email addresses or fashion brand names). For this reason, we manually checked the corpus and used some regular expressions to clean and prepare it to be analyzed using the online software CQPweb (Hardie 2012).

We first zoomed in on our key terms, whose use could be an indicator of how the nation and national identity were being discursively constructed. We adopted a mixed method approach

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[2] See https://www.directactionmedia.com/strategic_cat/fashion-style/ (*Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*); http://www.popularmechanicsmediakit.com/r5/home.asp#overview (*Popular Mechanics*).
[3] After manually checking the corpus, we found that *our country* and *our nation* referred to the US in 153 out of 160 (95.62%) and 54 out of 57 (94.74%) cases respectively.

(Greene, Caracelli and Graham 1989), where we sought to clarify results from a corpus-assisted analysis through qualitative investigation of part of the data.

We obtained concordances (Hunston 2002, 39-42) of our key terms. When the number of occurrences for one item was below 100 in the corpus under consideration, we proceeded to analyze single concordances. If the item occurred more than 100 times, we carried out a collocation analysis (Hunston 2002, 68-79). Collocation measures represent the strength of association between words and were here exploited to find out which words and expressions tended to be associated with our key terms. We adopted the Mutual Information (Baker 2006, 101) collocation measure, which we applied to a window of three words before and three after the node, only considering collocations occurring more than 5 times. To select the strongest associations, we focused on collocates whose MI was higher than 3 (Hunston 2002, 71).

We eventually concentrated on *U.S.*; *America*; *our country* and *our nation*; the other key terms did not present relevant patterns which could contribute to the understanding of the representation of nationhood and were therefore excluded. Other potentially relevant words and expressions—such as the adjective *American*—were not considered for space reasons.

At this point, the concordances and collocates selected were manually categorized (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013, 262) according to six thematic areas (henceforth themes) we devised after an exploratory analysis: *Politics & Government* (e.g., institutions, political debates, the military), *Social Issues* (e.g., immigration, racial conflict, social inequality), *Culture & Lifestyle* (e.g., sports, media, entertainment, literature), *Science & Technology*, *Economics*, *Non-relevant* (i.e., collocations not reflecting a consistent pattern of use, not referring to the US or appearing in strings that were not part of the actual articles and escaped corpus cleaning). Not all collocates are discussed in detail, although originally included in the classification, because their use did not substantially contribute to the representation of the nation and national identity.

In-depth analysis, exploring concordances with broader context—from the paragraph to the whole article—provided more detailed insights of how each theme had been developed in the two corpora. At this point, lexical choices and other rhetorical strategies were identified, so as to describe emerging representations of the US and US identity. In the final stage of the analysis, results from the two corpora were compared and contrasted.

4. Analysis

4.1 Men's magazines

U.S. (491 occurrences,) was the first key term to be analyzed. The thematic distribution of its strongest collocates is shown in Table 2.

Theme	Collocates[4]
Politics & Government	Navy (6), Army (14), military (15), forces (6), Department (9), border (5), Force (8), government (10), Air (11), special (6), State (6)
Social Issues	population (6)
Culture & Lifestyle	Sailing (6), Open (10)
Science & Technology	Patent (7)

Tab. 2: Collocates of *U.S.* in MenMag

Most collocates were classified as expressions of the *Politics & Government* theme, showing that *U.S.* is preferred for institutional reference, particularly for national military organizations. Most of these collocates associate the term to the military, where *U.S.* is mainly a premodifier (e.g., *U.S. Navy*, *U.S. Army*, etc.). Some of these collocations can categorize people appearing in the articles, providing information about their professional background and signaling authority, power and/or expertise (1). Some of these articles focus on military organizations as strategic players in an international arena (2). They also feature descriptions of technological objects (vehicles, weapons, gear) employed in these contexts, with an interest in technical aspects—e.g., production and features. Descriptions of the military domain also cover training strategies, how warfare is carried out, innovations in the field, and may include historical accounts and anecdotes on US military forces.

(1) During the battle of Okinawa in World War II, **U.S. Army** medic and conscientious objector Desmond Doss lowered 75 wounded American soldiers to a safe place partway down a 400-foot cliff without ever firing a gun. (*Popular Mechanics*, October 11, 2016)

(2) Unclaimed and rapidly becoming more valuable, the Arctic Circle has become the center of the latest international arms race [...]. Now the **U.S. Navy** is launching a network of

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[4] In all tables, numbers in brackets indicate Observed Collocate Frequency. The collocates are ordered by decreasing MI value.

satellites, the Mobile User Objective System (MUOS), that has more high-power beams and waveforms that can bend around the earth's curves to reach the poles. (*Popular Mechanics*, October 1, 2015)

This type of representation leans towards a positive evaluation—even a celebration—of the nation's achievements, and is predominantly found in *Popular Mechanics*, differentiating this source from the remaining magazines. Concordances expressing a critical attitude towards the US military or highlighting its problematic aspects are much rarer among those analyzed; they form part of the articles whose main focus is not the army, and come from *GQ*.

(3)   In 2013, Gillibrand began waging a lonely battle in the Senate to get the **U.S. military** to treat the problem of sexual assault in its ranks more seriously. (*GQ*, May 2018)

Other collocates from the *Politics & Government* theme are more connected to the domain of governance, with *Department* and *State* largely overlapping in *U.S. Department of State*. In other cases, *Department* refers to other specific departments, mainly in relation to official information, roles covered by people appearing in the articles and emergency response.

(4)   The demand for most trades is strong and getting stronger. The **U.S. Department** of Labor forecasts healthy growth, in the neighborhood of 8 to 9 percent over the next decade. (*Popular Mechanics*, April 2019)

Border strongly collocates with *U.S.*; it only appears five times, across five different texts in the expressions *US border* and *U.S. Customs and Border Protection*, always in reference to the US-Mexico border. Safety, particularly with respect to drug smuggling, is prominent. On the other hand, immigration is almost never mentioned. The last collocate in this theme is *government*, as in U.S. government. In (5) the metaphorical mapping GOVERNMENT-AS-A-PERSON attributes an individual human identity to the government, paralleling NATION-AS-A-PERSON.

(5)   He felt [...] that the **U.S. government**, law enforcement, and prison system had treated him less like a college-age kid who'd fucked up than a legitimate threat to national security. (*GQ*, May 2018)

Overall, the collocates in this theme reflect a representation of the nation as a military and political power. Thus, the achievements, capacities and impact of the military and governmental component of the nation are highlighted, and only rarely called into question.

The thematic classification of the strongest collocates of *America* (1,722 occurrences) is shown in Table 3 below.

Theme	Collocates
Politics & Government	United (25), States (24), again (38), great (46)
Social Issues	middle (15), soul (5)
Culture & Lifestyle	Pod (5), Captain (43), finest (6), cup (21), Restaurants (20), Bars (14), greatest (16), cities (5), race (13), 2020 (7), Save (8), best (46)
Economics	Spaceport (7), corporate (5)

Tab. 3: Collocates of *America* in MenMag

Most collocates fall within the *Culture & Lifestyle* theme, partly because *America* forms part of popular entertainment product names. An example is *Pod Save America*, a podcast with a liberal political stance, defined in a *GQ* article as "the voice of the Resistance" (March 2018) against Republican and Trumpist political forces then in power. The podcast is contrasted with right-wing, conservative radio shows, pointing to ideological conflicts affecting the nation. The title, a play on "God Save America," constructs the nation as an entity which must be saved from dangerous or sinful situations, and uses hyperbole in hinting at the savior's role played by the podcast itself.

Another group of collocates falls within the *Politics &Government* theme. *United* and *States* overlap in *United States of America*: in 21 out of its 23 occurrences, the co-text appears formal in tone and/or refers to official and institutional aspects and personalities, as well as episodes or issues considered important for the life of the country.

(6)   [...] he committed an act so heinous that he became the first person sentenced to die for a federal hate crime in the entire history of the **United States of America**. (*GQ*, September 2017)

Again and *great* partly overlap in the political slogan "make America great again," made popular by Trump in his 2016 campaign. There are 22 occurrences of the exact slogan in the corpus, but the frequencies of these two collocations are higher. Apart from the cases where *great* and *again* are used in completely different expressions (1 out of 46 for *great*, 4 out of 38 for *again*), numerous variations on this slogan can be observed. This testifies to the impact of the Trump

campaign and presidency on the perception of the country, but at the same time, it shows how the media negotiated and possibly challenged that message.

(7)   And you know what? We are never going to build a wall. We can't even agree to build a highway these days. [...] So tear it down, Mr. Trump, and stop trying to make **America** hate **again**. (*GQ*, October 2015)

Within the *Social Issues* theme, the *America/soul* collocation occurs 5 times in the corpus, in expressions such as "the soul of America" or "America's soul." This points to a metaphorical mapping used to conceptualize the nation as an animate being, whereby *soul* refers to its structural and defining attributes, which makes this collocation relevant—although infrequent—to the representation of national identity. In line with previous observations, this collocation is used to depict a crisis scenario, sometimes explicitly judging the country itself—through a metaphorical personification—as immoral.

(8)   [...] I came to the conclusion that this may be the price that I have to pay to a people and our movement to move this nation closer to a society based on justice that values the dignity and the worth of every human being. We had to do what we could to redeem **the soul of America**. (*Men's Health*, May 2020)

Overall, *America* emerged as more frequently associated with popular cultural aspects than with institutional ones. Compared to *U.S.*, it is more easily used in sentences expressing a critical attitude towards political and social situations, with most of the criticism levelled against Trump's presidency. The country is thus represented as facing a crisis from which it needs to recover.

The key terms *our country* and *our nation* occurred 71 and 24 times, respectively, which allowed us to directly analyze and categorize all their concordance lines[5]. *Social Issues* was the theme under which most of the concordances of *our country* (35 out of 71) were classified. These concordances were characterized by an assessment of the situation of the country concerning a range of issues, including human rights, climate change and immigration. On occasion, the country is metaphorically represented as an object physically built by its people (9). To convey the idea of a national crisis, the object used as a source domain may appear physically damaged or threatened (10).

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[5] Of the total occurrences of these two terms, only those regarded as relevant to our research topic will be analyzed.

(9) "I believe in our national security to the core, but I don't believe in a 'ban' that bans immigrants. I believe in inclusion. **Our country** was built on that, and it continues to be made strong by that." (*GQ*, June 2017)

(10) [...] if you can't disagree without thinking someone else is bad or evil, then you start pulling apart the seams of **our country**, and we have to be very careful about that. (*Men's Health*, February 22, 2020)

Within *Politics & Government* (23/71 occurrences), debated political issues are related to national identity. For instance, in (11), Republican senator Marco Rubio dismisses a climate of conflict as inconsequential and external to the country's innermost identity, through a metaphor, visible in the use of the pronoun *who* as referred to *our country*, instantiating the NATION-AS-A-PERSON mapping.

(11) Esquire: Do you worry that the passions that Trump has aroused might be hard to control?

Rubio: No, I think at the end of the day, in a pluralistic society such as ours, with a republic, with political participation, these things will eventually work themselves out. I don't think that's who **our country** is. (*Esquire*, February 1, 2016)

The *Science & Technology* theme occurs once, associating the nation with NASA: in (12), the two are the subject of a forward movement, used as the source domain to metaphorically represent scientific and technological progress, here celebrated as an American endeavor.

(12) NASA, and **our country**, moved on by reaching even deeper into outer space. (*Popular Mechanics*, February 1, 2016)

The last key term analyzed is *our nation*. In 21 out of 24 occurrences, it is followed by a Saxon genitive and a nominal phrase, whereby a specific individual, category of people, activity or quality is attributed, in a generalizing way, to the whole nation.

9 out of 24 occurrences were classified under the *Culture & Lifestyle* theme, dealing with catering and cuisine, sport, fashion and cultural products, such as books and TV series. In most cases, the tone is somewhat playful and entertaining. However, a more serious message is sometimes conveyed, as shown below, where dining is taken to represent culture, and eating is framed as a political act, portraying immigrants as essential in building the national culture. At the same time, its diversity is presented as "indisputable" against rampant Post-Truth attitudes.

(13)   It's hard to say that eating tacos is a political act—not to mention all too convenient. [...] in a moment of profound truth destabilization, it felt good to be reminded of some basic, indisputable facts: That **our nation**'s dining—and, by extension, our national culture—is indivisible at every level from the lives and labor, sweat and striving, inspiration and creativity of immigrants and their children. (*GQ*, May 2017)

The *Social Issues* and *Politics & Government* themes were present in 7 and 6 out of 24 concordances, respectively, mostly expressing concerns for the current situation, where social justice and democracy are perceived to be at risk. (14) is another example of the above-mentioned metaphorical mapping used to represent the nation as a person. In this case, a psychological element is added to the mapping, as long-standing political and ideological issues conceptualized as a mental disorder, of which the results of the 2016 election are taken to be a symptom.

(14)   For those of us who woke up on November 9, 2016, wondering, Has America gone crazy? Andersen is here to tell you that **our nation**'s relationship with reality has been dysfunctional from the start. (*Esquire*, September 2017)

Our country and *our nation* emerged as mainly employed in critical considerations of the country, represented through its problematic past and present, and of national identity, which needs to be politically, psychologically and socially recovered.

Overall, results from men's magazines do not seem to be homogeneous in their political and social attitudes. This mainly appears to be determined by *Popular Mechanics* articles, incorporating an idea of the nation as a military power. The same applies to the representation of the nation as a place of technological power and innovation, even in relation to military issues. In other magazines, we found a representation of the nation as facing a crisis, comprising social justice, inclusiveness, migration and diversity matters, where Trump and his supporters are accused of exacerbating the crisis. Thus, the *status quo* of the country calls for some sort of remedy. No trace of gender issues, as connected to the nation or national identity, emerged.

4.2 Women's magazines

The collocates analyzed for the key term *U.S.* (1,294 occurrences) in the WomMag corpus are summarized in Table 4.

Theme	Collocates
Politics & Government	Embassy (14), Citizenship (5), Patrol (9), Army (31), attorney (43), Senate (25), border (18), Corps (6), Supreme (17), ambassador (9), presidents (5), Bureau (5), military (19), Marine (5), agencies (5), government (34), Department (23), Court (26), intelligence (10), task (5), District (8), election (18), presidential (12), population (5), soldiers (6), Senator (8), Committee (5), officials (5), Congress (7), Drug (8), candidate (5), services (5), France (7), force (7), agent (5), assistant (5)
Social Issues	Census (5), citizen (7), percentage (5), entering (5)
Culture & Lifestyle	Soccer (15), Olympic (8), Canada (8), Europe (10), education (9), Open (24), National (20), across (17), debut (6), Grand (5), team (15)
Economics	airlines (6), performed (5), alone (8)

Tab. 4: Collocates of *U.S.* in WomMag

In line with the MenMag corpus, *U.S.* is mainly used regarding official/governmental issues. More than 60% of the collocates considered (36/57) belong to the *Politics & Government* theme. As Coffey-Glover notes, women's magazines "are described as gatekeepers of advice for women on fashion and beauty, sexual relationships with men and careers" (2019, 35). Such a strong presence of *official/political* conversations was therefore surprising. This theme includes a variety of sub-themes, namely politics, the government, military and safety issues.

In terms of national identity representation, *U.S.* stands to represent the more official part of the country. The most recurrent references are associated with elections, US institutions like the Senate and Congress, and security and military issues, such as border patrol or commitments of the army or the Marine Force. The context around these collocates highlights that these magazines associate a rather critical view of the administration at the time of publication with the idea of the nation carried by *U.S.* A specific feeling of disagreement towards decisions taken at a governmental level, framing the country in a negative light, emerges from the concordance analysis. In addition, violent behavior and outrage are reported in articles featuring the collocates *patrol* and *border*; (15) is representative of this pattern.

(15) The **U.S. Border Patrol** took an innocent life, and justice must be served. (*Marie Claire*, May 2019)

Various collocates in this category refer to the thorny issue of border control in the US, and the concordance analysis reveals similar patterns across them. *Crisis* frequently appears here,

suggesting that times are critical, and the country is not united in this matter.

The *Social Issues* theme includes only four collocates. The discourse emerging, in this case, is related to the representation of an inclusive and racially/ethnically diverse country. Focusing on the term *census*, four out of five concordances indicate that the issues being discussed are related to the composition of the US population. The magazines try to make a point about the U.S. population being extremely varied by using data from the census bureau, highlighting that this fact cannot continue to be ignored, and the cosmetic industry should adjust to this. The discussion is linked to a topic that might seem trivial—the production of beauty products, but the articles discuss a timely issue, i.e., racially-inclusive representations of beauty. The other collocates in this theme are similar to the previous ones in the type of discourse that they put forward, referring to US "citizen" and "population" as having diverse backgrounds, and to immigration more specifically, with the collocate *entering*. In these articles, the authors criticize Trump's political views regarding the prevention or ban of people entering the country.

The second key term on which we focused is *America* (1,762 occurrences); the analyzed collocates are reported in Table 5.

Theme	Collocates
Politics & Government	Federation (7), divided (5), promise (5), Worst (7), Parenthood (5), Again (26), wars (5)
Social Issues	means (5), gun (12)
Culture & Lifestyle	Ferrera (5), sweetheart (17), Angels (33), BBC (15), Singles (11), Mistress (9), Captain (22), Self-Made (5), Plot (10), Feeding (5), North (44), Miss (30), Survey (11), Designers (19), Bank (14), Civil (9), spy (5), slave (5), Mrs. (8), Talent (14), Morning (30), largest (6), Connected (5), soul (5), Association (5), Race (10), greatest (7), SAVE (5), Awards (6)
Economics	corporate (9)

Tab. 5: Collocates of *America* in WomMag

The collocates here are completely different from *U.S.*, as the theme including most results is *Culture & Lifestyle*. They relate to titles of novels, or films, or American celebrities and popular events. For the purpose of this research, these terms do not contribute much to the understanding of the representation of national identity. However, the few collocates which fit the other themes are interesting for our discussion of 'Americanness.' Within *Social Issues,* we find the collocates *means* and *gun.* The former, as in the verb *to mean*, appears five times, all in

the same article: "Immigration Nation," published in *Marie Claire* in September 2018. (16) and (17) feature two excerpts where the collocate appears:

(16) "To me, **America means** 'The land of opportunity.' The country where I've always been able to dream big and fail even bigger."

(17) "I'm here on a visa," says Chopra, 36. "[America] has engulfed me in the best, warmest, biggest hug. I have tremendous love for America, being my host country for so many years. To me, **America means** Freedom. It's really the land of opportunity and a melting pot of the world."

The article reports on five testimonies of immigrant women describing what the US has been for them. They present a peculiar narrative about the country, depicting the US as a welcoming mother, a caring and loving nurturer hugging its children and making them feel safe, but most importantly, as a symbol of freedom and the land of opportunity. In other words, the US is the place where people can have a better future and where everyone is welcomed, recalling the American Dream, popular during the major immigration waves of the past. When this article was published, the political situation in the US was very different from the one described in it; thus, the question of whether the article aims to be a beacon of hope for the future or a nostalgic memory of the past is very relevant. Nonetheless, these examples recall similar patterns to those identified for *U.S.*: the US is a country in crisis.

The second collocate in this theme is *gun*. The twelve concordances in which this collocate is present tackle the sensitive and timely topic of gun control. All the examples are included in articles which, more or less explicitly, argue in favor of gun control, thus against the political leaning of the White House at that moment. Once again, a stance against the government and the current political situation in the country is taken.

Politics & Government also includes three relevant collocates: *divided*, *worst* and *promise*. *Divided* is found five times; (18) illustrates the pattern:

(18) Why is **America** so **divided** by class and economic status? Who seeks to gain from a lack of action on labor and tax laws and climate change? (*Vanity Fair*, February 2016)

The concordances under scrutiny highlight a deep concern for a country that seems to have reached the point of no return. Perhaps these cues should not have been underestimated, given the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 by Trump supporters contesting his electoral defeat. The country is depicted as profoundly divided, and some articles attribute the fault to

Trump by defining America as his property. The situation is linked to politics in another example, where the author questions the reader on the power of candidate Clinton to possibly heal this divide. (18) points out that the divide is well rooted in American society and based on class and financial status. The concordances also underline an effort to fill in this divide culturally through the revival of shows that played a significant role in shaping society from a cultural and social perspective.

The second collocate in this theme is *worst*. Five out of its seven occurrences appear in the same article, published in December 2018 in *Vanity Fair*, reported in (19). The article is about the Obamas and reiterates the concept that the couple were faced with the worst America possible.

(19)   President Barack Obama, visibly tired from dodging but rarely swinging back at the **worst** of **America,** [...] I'd been a black American long enough to know that informed sincerity-and public soulfulness-in the mouth and body of a hyper-aware black woman from Chicago would be seen as more than a threat to the **worst** of **America**. And the **worst** of **America** would make sure tomorrow hurt. [...] Michelle Obama withstood the **worst** of **America** while consistently being expected to conjure the "best" of herself. [...] With every sincere and soulful assemblage of words, every knowing smirk, my family believed, Michelle Obama wanted to reckon with what the **worst** of **America** was doing to our country, our communities, and our selves.

The article addresses both the former president and first lady, who had to fight extra hard during their time at the White House because the country was already in bad shape, both socially and politically. The country is again depicted as in a critical condition. This type of representation is strong in the WomMag corpus, as we find the same semantic pattern in reference to a number of different collocates and key terms.

The collocate *promise* occurs 5 times, of which we will consider 3, all occurring within the same article (20):

(20)   The Confederacy sought to maintain slavery at all costs, and the states that joined it went so far as to secede from the United States, because their allegiance to racism and division was stronger than their allegiance to the **promise** of what **America** could be for everyone. [...] The protests and counter demonstrations of the past few months represent the **promise** of an **America** that is not yet born, but could come sooner if each one of us recommitted to not taking it for granted. [...] We did not turn away. We showed them that we represent the **promise** of an **America** where everyone belongs, where we take care of one another and respect our differences, because our differences do, in fact, make us stronger. (*Marie Claire*, November 2017)

This article features a reference to specific events of the past, for example, the secession war, when the country could not see "the promise of what America could be for everyone," or more recent Black Lives Matter protests that represent a "promise of an America that is not yet born," "of an America where everyone belongs." The article contributes to the presentation of a country in deep crisis, overturned by violence and hatred, but also expresses hope for a better future. The memory of past achievements is a testament to what the country can become/be again.

The last two key terms analyzed in this section produced fewer occurrences, allowing us to analyze their concordances directly. The 32 concordances of *our nation* were grouped into three different themes: *Politics & Government* (19/32), *Social Issues* (4/32) and *Culture & Lifestyle* (6/32).

Politics & Government presents the majority of occurrences. The discourse of crisis and criticism towards the government is strong here as well. The analysis shows that the magazines are fault-finding of the government and ex-president Trump. They depict a nation that is broken and violated through expressions such as "a shook conscience," "parts that have been abused," "the basest impulses," "pressing questions," and "sensitive secrets." This metaphorical personification of the country, that could be associated to the mapping NATION-AS-A-VICTIM, is a common strategy used to frame the nation. The evaluation of the *status quo* is entirely negative: the nation is described as a "cruel" place, facing tragedies, where the population is divided, and suffering; peace is frequently mentioned as a way out of the crisis. The country is still suffering from the wounds of the past (like the Vietnam war) and is struggling to recover from those the government keeps inflicting. Some hope for the future is represented through an endorsement of female power, pointing to the increasing number of women now involved in politics.

A smaller number of concordances is related to the *Social Issues* theme. The nation represented through this theme is the same as above, with personification used with reference to a country that "is doing a bad job" at educating its population, where Black men are being killed by the police, and people do not feel safe. (21) illustrates a description of the US population:

(21) Pundits [...] have become our priests, doling out their polar-opposite interpretations of **our nation** to the impassioned, eager, hungry, and quintessentially divided masses. (*Vanity Fair*, December 2018)

This feeling is mirrored in the last theme for this key term, *Culture & Lifestyle*. Even when talking about sports' events or books, the magazines seem to refer to a catastrophic vision of a

country that struggles for equality and where people believe the government is working "not in **our nation**'s best interest" (*Vanity Fair*, August 2017).

The last term discussed in detail is *our country* (88 occurrences). The concordances were grouped in the following themes: *Culture & Lifestyle* (21/88), *Politics & Government* (47/88) and *Social Issues* (13/88).

An interesting pattern is observed within *Culture & Lifestyle*, where many of the concordances are connected to racial issues, approached through cultural products (films, novels, fashion). The discussion about gender equality and race seems to play an important role in American society as well as in women's magazines in the time span analyzed, possibly as a response to the pervasive discriminatory climate that characterized it. Several examples in this theme express worry for the future of the country and its people. This is reinforced by the concordances that are categorized under *Politics & Government*. The articles explicitly criticize the Trump administration and the Republican Party, expressing worries about the decisions made under this presidency that can harm not only the well-being of Americans but the country as a whole. A link between the past and the future is also suggested in some articles, in the hope that the past (specifically, 9/11, WWII and the Vietnam war) could serve as a reminder of which path to follow. Lastly, the *Social Issues* theme features climate change and the destruction of the planet, in addition to the topics of race and gender equality, as causes for concerns about the future.

Worries and criticisms expressed in women's magazines about the past and the current political and social situation are relatively widespread, contributing to a representation of the country and national identity as somehow broken and facing a crisis that would call for an intervention. Most of the concordances analyzed take a stance against Trump's government and its supporters. Moreover, they constantly connect their representation of the nation and national identity to topical issues, such as immigration, race and gun control. In several cases, they refer to the national past and its great challenges to recall national values of diversity and tolerance and, despite representing current times as dark and national cohesion and identity as at risk, they also make room for some hope in a better future, where women in power may play a crucial role.

5. Conclusion

Wodak et al. (2009, 3) noted that the discursive construction of national identity is adjusted to the context of communication within which it emerges. They also suggested that national identity is often constructed by emphasizing commonalities, for instance a shared political past and present, and a hopeful future. This idea has been reinforced by more recent studies as well

(see Breeze 2021). Our study, based on a different media context, highlighted a multifaceted problematization of national identity, where the above-mentioned commonalities are mixed with political and social critique and a feeling of national crisis.

Citrin, Wong and Duff (2001, 76) conducted surveys on the perception of national identity and suggested that "commitment to the national 'creed' of democracy and individualism is what makes one an American." Additionally, the liberal concept of national identity in the US should not be undermined by an individual's religious faith or ethnic heritage (Citrin, Wong and Duff 2001, 78). Their surveys also suggested that a strong sense of patriotism does not mean believing that the country is perfect, and most importantly, that ethnic conflict is still a possibility despite the strong national attachment.

Nationhood is a complex concept. Anderson (1991) contextualizes its inception within the rise of capitalism, associating it to the notion of an "imagined community" that shares a sense of collectivity, common history, beliefs, and attitudes. Billig (1995) defines nationalism as "banal," a set of features in which citizens of a given country routinely identify themselves and which "provides a continual background for […] political discourses, for cultural products, and even for the structuring of newspapers" (1995, 8). Our analysis highlights that national identity in US magazines is marked by conflict, social issues, and a crisis of liberal and democratic values. In both corpora, different key terms were associated with different domains and used with different functions. In particular, *U.S.*, being the abbreviation of the country's official name, tended to be associated with official expressions in institutional contexts. *America*, which carries a more general meaning, was related to cultural aspects and, partly, social issues. *Our nation* and *our country*, common nouns determined by a possessive that connects the country with the speakers, who identify as its citizens, were mainly used to express people's worries and critical aspects related to the country and national identity.

Both corpora portray the nation as going through hard times, sometimes not managing to overcome a problematic past. As a consequence of this crisis, national identity is not seen as a unifying force but rather as an object of assessment and discussion. These aspects are articulated differently in the two corpora: while women's magazines appear more homogenous in their critique towards the *status quo*, men's magazines are split between this critique and a feeling of national pride based on the US military and technological power. In this regard, it is clear that the context of communication (Wodak et al. 2009) significantly influenced the portrayal of nationhood. In fact, these results need to be contextualized based on their target audience, not only from the point of view of gender but also of factors, such as social class, political leanings, cultural background, and education level. This calls for further research

comparing our results to demographic information on each magazine's readership, not addressed here for space limitations. Magazines aim at conveying information while entertaining, but also (and especially) at creating profit. Therefore, content selection partly derives from the need to make readers identify themselves with the perspectives and representations in the articles—in this case, specific ideas of the US and US identity.

Metaphorical mappings, commonly exploited to represent the nation, also emerged here. Most mappings could be connected to the STATE-IS-A-PERSON universal frame (Chilton and Lakoff 1995).

Our results mirror those suggested by Citrin, Wong and Duff's (2001) sociological study, in that national pride emerges from our analysis as well, in patriotic descriptions of the country's military power found in MenMag corpus but also the message of hope found in WomMag corpus. References to a shared past resemble patterns found in previous studies on the discursive representation of national identity (see Section 2 above). In this case, though, as pointed out in the analysis, this shared past does not always function as unifying rhetoric and can be instrumental in creating a divide. Whether pitched towards the hope of a better future or as a symptom of an insurmountable and troubled present, the profound crisis expressed in the articles seems to be the predominant feeling when thinking about the nation.

Note: The authors have jointly discussed and conceived this paper. Nevertheless, individual contributions in writing this paper are identified as follows: Angela Zottola is responsible for Sections 2, 4.2, 5. Virginia Zorzi is responsible for Sections 1, 3, 4.1.

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