

## CHAPTER 4

# Power Profiles

## Discourse as a Means to Make Profile Interviews Universal<sup>1</sup>

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*The aim of this chapter is to examine profile interviews portraying representatives of Norwegian elite institutions in the country's major business newspaper. Over the last few decades, the ideology and knowledge systems of the international business community have become increasingly important in society. This development is reflected in a general expansion of the business press. The newspaper in question, Dagens Næringsliv, is an example of a newspaper that has extended its readership well beyond the traditional business community, in particular with its end-of-the-week edition. The paper's Saturday profiles reflect this shift in both societal and journalistic power relations. We ask how individuals with power are presented in profile interviews when the purpose is to make the individual interesting to a broad and diverse public, and argue that this is achieved by positioning the profiled persons within certain popular and common discourses. The chapter is based on the study of 136 profile interviews with a time span of ten years, 2005–2006 and 2015–2016. Sixteen profiles are selected for closer scrutiny using critical discourse analysis. Our findings are that the unique individual is made universal through three dominant discourses: a discourse of gender, a discourse of*

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<sup>1</sup> Both authors of this chapters are former journalists in Dagens Næringsliv, Fonn during the beginning of the 1990s, Gjesvik for 14 years from 1994. Gjesvik worked with the features department.

*national identity and a discourse of personal power. Both the profiled person and the journalist use all three discourses frequently.*

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## Introduction

If an interest in individual stories is a sign of the times we live in, the profile interview fits well with this *Zeitgeist*. It is one of the most “individualised” journalistic genres available. The research in advance of the interview often entails consulting several kinds of sources, including people who know the interviewee well, to get an overview of the life and work of this person. When it comes to the final result, there is often only one single open source. The text is all about this individual: his or her history, his or her individuality or personality, his or her likes and dislikes.

But how unique are we, when the press grabs a hold of us? How unique are we when we are trying to communicate who we are in public, with possible reactions from an audience in mind? Our hypothesis is that the problem of making the unique “universal” in the profile interview is solved through the use of a set of recurring discourses. If this is so, it immediately raises another question: Are there dominant discourses, and what, if so, is the connection between the portrayed persons’ different roles and the different discourses?

As Miller (1984) has pointed out, a genre may in fact be defined as serving a social situation, and this goes for the profile interview as well, a popular genre in the press of most countries. The profile allows the media’s audience, often broad and diverse, to become acquainted with the more private sides of a stranger, someone they only know from the news – if at all. Most interviewees have some kind of power in society, but not all are very famous, and there is also not always a very fascinating personality beneath the role.

In the end, there will of course have to be a story. The stories in profiles are about changes – the protagonist has landed a new position, launched a novel, won an election etc., that makes him or her a relevant object for an interview. Still, the core of the genre is about this person and his or her characteristics, not about any breaking news as such. The profile interview offers the

interviewee a chance to transform their life into a positive public image. For the journalist it offers material that will make a fascinating story for the readers.

This article examines the questions above based on a study of profile interviews in one of Norway's leading quality newspapers. Our material consists of all profiles published weekly in *Dagens Næringsliv* during two periods, from January 2005 to March 2006 and from January 2015 to March 2016 – a total of 136 articles. We chose two periods separated by a span of ten years in order to check whether there has been a change over time. After examining the material to get an overview of the characteristics of those interviewed (gender and role), we chose 16 profiles for qualitative analysis. The two authors have analysed all interviews independently before having thorough discussions about any deviant findings.

## Claiming a role

“All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,” William Shakespeare wrote in his play *As You Like It*. The line became a popular saying, and more than 300 years later, the sociologist Erving Goffmann (1959) picked it up when he likened social interaction in everyday life to a theatre, where everybody is an actor on a stage, playing different roles. At the same time, everybody is the audience, reacting to the play and to the roles, and the less familiar we are with our audience, the more concerned we are with playing our roles.

Goffmann called these roles “the face”. The essential question for anyone in a social setting is whether the audience will accept their role. The image of the self that is shown in such interaction with others is not just a presentation of individual qualities, but also a claim to a social position. If the role is not accepted, the person in question will “lose face”. Most social interactions are based on ongoing negotiations about which roles the actors accept for others.

Transferred to the profile interview, this means that the interview situation consists of an ongoing negotiation between the journalist and the interviewee about the role the latter should assume. We will argue that a significant number of the profiles are all negotiations about which position the interviewee should take, a pro or con position within a limited set of collective and broadly used discourses. When it comes to the final description of the

interviewee, considering the use of everything from quotes, setting, his or her background or behaviour, the journalist has a relative degree of freedom – he is responsible for the *coherence* of the profile. He can sew, cut and patch up the protagonist’s story with evaluations and clarifications – and even remove elements that do not fit the plot (Siivonen, 2007, pp. 85, 87).

Following this line of thought, we can see that the journalist plays an important role as playwright. Media audiences are not present in the interview situation, but they are in fact the addressee. The interviewer and the interviewee to a large extent communicate on the basis of the audience’s need for information and experiences, not their own (Svennevig, 2009, p. 122).

Press work however poses a particular problem, because neither the interviewer nor the interviewee know the persons they actually address, the audience. They have, however, some information about their readership’s demographics through surveys. Most large newspapers for example know the level of education, and the distribution of gender and age among their readers. This knowledge is also necessary to create strategies to reach new groups of readers. But statistical facts about gender and age have their limitations, and will not necessarily reveal the tastes and attitudes of the persons behind the figures. Whether a person likes a profile interview or not, will very much be a question of taste and attitudes. This genre appeals as much to emotions as to intellect.

A relatively small newspaper with limited circulation and a clearly defined target group may however also know a lot about their readers’ tastes and attitudes. But when a newspaper is read nationwide and appeals to different social and cultural strata, “reading” the mind of the public becomes more difficult. The Norwegian non-fiction prose scholar Johan Tønnesson has coined public text as a score (Tønnesson 2004), meaning that the potential reactions of the audience (as an imagined community of different so-called “model readers”) are already tentatively *discounted* in the text before publication. There must, in other words, be some kind of resonance with a larger public for the text to function.

## Method and background

The qualitative analysis is based on critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is an approach that combines methods for text analysis with methods for the analysis of social and political thoughts or ideologies. The approach is based on the tradition of Fairclough (1992/2010), and has since developed in different directions, partly dependent on whether the text analysis is linguistic or

primarily an analysis of meaning. One of many, partly overlapping, ways of using the word ‘discourse’ is that it can be said to be a way to construct the world, which again can be associated with a certain view of society – a political ideology, a belief in certain values etc. Examples can be a Marxist view or a neoliberal view of society, various feminist approaches to gender, or the belief that men and women are so different that they should have different roles in society. Different national or ethnic identities can furthermore give rise to corresponding discourses.

Fairclough operates with a three-dimensional model, where the innermost dimension, *the text*, is surrounded by two other dimensions. One is the *discursive practice*, which is primarily about the production, distribution and consumption of texts. The outermost dimension is the *social practice* – the overall social structures, power relations, ideologies etc. (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 73, 86 ff.). These dimensions, however, are not mutually exclusive. Power relations will, for instance, influence production, distribution and consumption heavily, the whole idea behind CDA being that the text is deeply dependent on both its social and discursive practice.

In this book, we take as a point of departure the fact that interest in individual stories is in itself an important part of the the social and discursive practice of the different kinds of public dialogue that we discuss. Social and discursive practice is also, however, often tied to more specific circumstances. Before we start analysing the profile interviews as texts, we will therefore describe what we believe are the social and discursive practices surrounding these texts.

## A pink newspaper

*Dagens Næringsliv* (*The Norwegian Business Daily*, DN) is the fifth largest newspaper in Norway in terms of circulation, and the fourth largest when it comes to readership (Medienorge 2015). It is not only Norway’s largest business newspaper, but also currently the one business paper in the world with the broadest national audience.

Established as a rather marginal newspaper for the shipping community at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it started to broaden its coverage in the 1980s: first by extending its scope to more general business and finance news, and later by reaching out to new audiences. As part of this process, the once rather solemn broadsheet also rid itself of its old mould, went tabloid, assumed a pink colour just like Britain’s *Financial Times* and Sweden’s *Dagens Industri*, and changed

its name from from *Norges Handels- og Sjøfartstidende* (*The Norwegian Journal of Commerce and Shipping*).

The relaunched old shipping paper experienced a tailwind from its very start. This was a result of the new deregulatory era of the 1980s and shortly after coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the decades to come, it quadrupled its circulation. This expansion was no isolated occurrence – during this period business outlets as such also expanded from being niche products to becoming general interest media in a number of countries, according to Kjær and Slaatta (2007).

DN professionalised its journalism and approached new target groups systematically, such as women (most readers were male at the time of the transformation) and civil servants. Slowly, the old shipping and business elites were accompanied by readers from entirely different social spheres. The reason for this success was partly the development of a Saturday edition filled to the brim with well-researched feature stories. These were often feature stories that went outside the realm of business and finance, or they were stories that made business and finance more intelligible and intriguing to the lay person.

At the core of this strategy were the newspaper's profile interviews. And not only for the newspaper, but for the sources as well: to be awarded column space in *Dagens Næringsliv's* Saturday profiles came to be regarded as a great honour. This was the showcase for the most important and most powerful people in the kingdom. And the profile policy also allocated power: a medium-size CEO or an invisible Director General of a ministry could suddenly gain considerable attention as a result of a DN profile, boosted by society's increasing interest in both power and money, and the individuals possessing them.

On the other hand, the expansion of the business press may have brought with it a pronounced set of values that in many respects differs from the values both of large groups of readers and even of society at large. Although the business press has contributed to increased transparency and increased investigation into economic life, it has also been associated with the neoliberal movements that have emerged in Western countries since the 1970s, and a neoliberal set of values (Kjær and Slaatta, 2007). One must assume that this gap in values between the newspaper itself and its extended audience had to be narrowed, otherwise the paper would not be able to attract so many new readers.

## Equality, nature, political consensus

Norway is rather young as an independent country, and probably shaped by that. Following four hundred years under Danish and Swedish kings, the country finally gained full independence in 1905. The national romanticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century struck a particularly strong chord in a country whose background included being a Danish province, but which also has a long history of freeholding peasants, almost no feudalism – and a lot of spectacular scenery. At the same time, Norway was becoming a parliamentary democracy with a constitution strongly inspired by the French and American constitutions. The rural, often rough life became a symbol of freedom, and not least, what we can call “Norwegian-ness” – a common identity marker. These sentiments still play an important part in Norwegian political and public life. A recent attempt by the government to reduce the number of municipalities (around 400, many of them with no more than 5000 inhabitants) collided with the ideals of both the small community and relative autonomy, and has sparked heavy controversy and opposition as this is being written. The various aspects of this Norwegian “soul” have been discussed at length by the Polish-born, now Oslo-based, anthropologist Nina Witoszek. She argues that this entails a belief that “ordinary people are wonderful” (Witoszek, 2009, p. 9), and that the good life is in rural areas. Witoszek also argues that there is a strong consensus in Norway to avoid insulting anyone. This leads to a self-imposed self-censorship where debates “repeat all the benign mantras like dialogue, pluralism, reconciliation and equality” (ibid., p. 91).

On the other hand, there is also strong individualism. Witoszek (2009, p. 25) illustrates this by the fairytale about The Ash Lad, the youngest brother of three whom nobody believes in. He goes his own way, refuses to let others decide the rules, and wins in the end. An unusual combination of collective and individual values is probably an all-Scandinavian trait: The Swedish historian Lars Trägårdh (2007) has coined the notion “state individualism” to cover societies where collective arrangements, equality *and* individual freedom have been important.

After World War II Norway created a considerable welfare state with a high level of redistribution, but the state has also played an important role in facilitating business and an exceedingly free market, especially after the

fall of the Berlin Wall. The Labour Party has been the dominant party with approximately 50 of the last 70 years in power, but there has also been a relatively strong degree of consensus among the political factions, and the welfare state has strong popular support. One important difference today is that the conservative parties are more open to cutting taxes and privatising public services than the left, but they all claim they want to keep the welfare state.

Norway is also one of the most equal countries in the world when it comes to gender. Two out of three women work, they outnumber men in higher education, and chores at home are increasingly shared between the genders. The choice of profession, however, follows more traditional gender roles than in most Western countries. A clear majority of nurses are women and a clear majority of engineers are men. Norwegians prefer quality of life above their professional career: Half of the population in Europe agree that career is vital for a good life, while only 14 percent agree on this in Norway. There is a likely connection between egalitarian values and less competitiveness, and the large amount of women in the workforce may thus contribute to another set of values (Kjølsrød and Frønes, 2010, p. 144 ff.).

Political parties on both sides have played a role in promoting gender equality, but nevertheless the strongest commitment has been on the left. A number of important reforms have been implemented during recent decades, from extended maternity leave and large-scale development of kindergartens, to same sex marriage legislation. In 2016, the Norwegian parliament passed with an overwhelming majority a law that gives people the right to change their legal gender without changing it biologically.

In sum, we can see strong support for the welfare state, which indicates belief in an egalitarian society; strong support for a liberal economy, which indicates belief in individual freedom but not in unfettered markets; and strong support for gender equality. The political choices made over the last few decades have made a certain degree of both social equality *and* individual freedom possible, and Norway's oil wealth has clearly contributed to this result. On the other hand, the strong degree of gender equality and women's workforce participation during the last 40 years have probably meant as much for the country's economic prosperity as oil has (Koren 2012).



## The interviewees

Before we embark on a presentation of the kind of people featured in these interviews, we will say a few words about the difference between a role and a discourse, and then present our overall findings. We use discourse and role as two separate categories, but a role might as well be seen as a discourse. We expect a businessman to be daring and concerned with moneymaking while we expect a politician to be wise and concerned with public values. Both gender and professional roles can be seen as culturally given discourses as part of the identity of the person representing them. However, there are differences between the two categories role and discourse. A role can be defined as a conventional figure connected to a certain type of activity (Svennevig, 2009, p. 109). A minister will find it hard to be accepted if he or she claims to be a minister just to a certain degree. It is an either/or scenario. A role implies formalised rights and obligations, like certain types of power and certain rules for how this power might be exercised. This limits the interpretation of the role. The minister's gender is more open to claiming different positions. It is part of the discourse of gender, but in contemporary society gender is less connected to certain activities and is therefore open to many different interpretations. This gives the interviewee a much larger space to position herself or himself in. We realise that the distinctions between role and discourse are more complicated than our limited space allows us to discuss here.

The profile interviews we have examined mostly – and not surprisingly – feature the top leaders of various institutions in society. In a business paper one expects these institutions to be mainly business corporations, but an increasing number turn out to be part of the political sphere.

As table 4.1 shows, an interesting first finding is that the share representing the field of economic power has decreased markedly from 2005–2006 to 2015–2016. This development from the first to the second period is interesting considering the assumption that the economic field is increasingly depriving the political field of power (e.g. Østerud, Engelstad and Selle, 2003). On one hand it may simply be a result of the special status of the Saturday edition as a spearhead into new groups of readers. There might be an upper limit to how many grey businessmen wearing a suit and tie the average reader wants to spend her Saturday breakfast reading about. On the other hand it may be due

**Table 4.1.** Basis for professional power, 2005–2006 and 2015–2016, based on the studies presented in this article

Basis for professional power	Number 2005-2006* (female share)	Number 2015-2016* (female share)	Percentage 2005-2006*	Percentage 2015-2016*	Change in percentage points 2005-2006 to 2015/2016*
Economic	19 (6)	11 (2)	26	16	-10
Political	10 (5)	15 (10)	14	22	+8
Cultural	15 (1)	17 (6)	21	25	+4
Media	11 (4)	8 (2)	15	12	-3
Legal or public administration	7 (4)	7 (4)	10	10	0
Sports	3 (0)	3 (0)	4	4	0
Other	7 (1)	8 (2)	10	12	+2
Total	72 (21)	69 (26)	100 (29)	100 (38)	

to an increased recognition of the role that the Norwegian state plays in facilitating a viable market economy.

Another conspicuous change from 2005–2006 to 2015–2016 is however one of gender. Whereas women accounted for 29 percent of the interviewees in 2005 and 2006, ten years later this share had risen to 38 percent. This may reflect both an awareness of gender balance on the part of the editors, and an awareness of which professional roles should be given two full pages with a one-page portrait in one of the country's most read newspapers. After all, the fields of business and politics are also strongly gendered – there are quite simply more men than women in business, and more women than men in politics and the civil service. There is therefore an intimate relationship between the increase in the number of female interviewees and the increasing number of interviewees with a political power base.

## The dominant discourses

We chose eight profiles from each period for closer scrutiny in a qualitative analysis. We tried to acquire a balance between economic and political power,

and between male and female interviewees. When we set out to study these profiles, we discovered that almost all of them centered around three overarching topics. These are all topics rife with content and controversies about how the world should be seen. We can therefore say that the profiles centered around three prominent discourses. These were:

1. A discourse of national identity: How does the interviewee relate to what is normally considered good or bad values in Norway?
2. A discourse of personal power: What kind of abilities does the interviewee have to obtain and maintain power?
3. A discourse of gender: What male or female qualities does the interviewee have?

As we will see in the following presentation, the three discourses are interwoven, sometimes almost to the point of indistinguishability, and in some cases it is highly open to discussion as to which discourse should include which value. In order to decide that, we have had to assess the relative strength of the different utterances and characteristics, and their overall context. This does not, however, change the fact that these questions are what most of the texts revolve around. The leaders' manner of exercising power is a constant theme. The women are confronted with their femaleness or lack of such. And the degree of Norwegian-ness is seldom omitted, by the interviewer or the interviewee.

We have quantified the occurrences of the three discourses and find some minor developments from the first period to the second. The national identity discourse seems to be slightly more dominant in the first period. A slightly larger difference is also found regarding the need to claim an explicit distance to traditional gender roles in the first period. The difference between the two periods is too small to be considered important in our limited material, but could serve as a basis for further research.

In the following we will go through the three dominant discourses illustrated with typical examples from the texts, and finally also tie some comments to the connections between the three. (A more detailed overview of key elements in the discourses can be found in table 4.2).

**Table 4.2.** Assets of the discourses of gender, personal power and national identity, based on the studies presented in this article

Value	Discourse of gender, male	Discourse of gender, female	Discourse of personal power	Discourse of national identity
Success	Internally driven success	Externally driven success	Controlling the surroundings (internal)	Collective values
Failure	Externally driven failures	Internally driven failures	Legitimate power	Consensus
Career	Career important	Career not so important	Active career important	Career not important
Appearance	Natural	Vain	Winner	Natural
Social resource	Children not important	Children important		Nature
Competitiveness	Competitiveness important	Competitiveness not important	Competitiveness important	Equality (economic, gender and socially)
Control of others' actions	To a certain degree	Consensus	Yes	Consensus
Other important values				Rural, humble background

## The "Norwegian"

The discourse of national identity is clearly the most common of the three dominant discourses. In quantitative terms it appears twice as often as the discourse of power and four times more often than the discourse of gender. This dominance of the national identity discourse can be explained in several ways. One reason may be that this is the field where there is most chance of finding common ground for all parties – between the journalists, the interviewees and the audience.

Norway is a country where social mobility has been considerable since World War II, and most people either come from humble beginnings in a small place or they descend from somebody who does. The American dream is nowadays said to be far more within reach in Norway than in America – although differences due to inherited wealth are slighty on the increase in Norway as well (Aaberge 2016).

As stated above, Norwegian values may not necessarily – or always – distinguish themselves from values found in other Scandinavian countries, or in Northern Europe at all, but they seem to give a fairly good picture of Norwegian self-understanding. We claim that these are parameters of “Norwegian-ness” that are so deeply rooted in the Norwegian self-image that even when people do not identify with them, they need to relate to them. It could, although in a more subtle way, be said to hold somewhat the same position as the parameter “male-ness” as described by Simone de Beauvoir in her classic book from 1949, *Le Deuxième Sexe* – when you are not male, you have to be measured against the “male”.

In this small and egalitarian country, even the (rather small) upper and upper middle classes have been expected to act in a way that does not distance them too much from the man in the street, and even the popularity of the (powerless) royal family is based on their ability to be “of the people”. The paramount example is King Olav V, who died in 1991. During the oil crisis in 1973, his chauffeur-driven car had no access to petrol, so the king took a tram to go skiing and politely paid for his ticket. Norwegian society has changed profoundly since 1973, but this act earned King Olav a reputation as “the people’s king” which is still viable more than 25 years after his death. His grandson, the current crown prince of Norway, was recently widely criticised in public for sending his children to a private, international school.

As the above story suggests, a good Norwegian is also an outdoorsy Norwegian. If there are any signs of nobility in Norway, mountain hiking and cross-country skiing are among them. It must be said that a number of these norms also, at times, have a certain elitist ring to them. The lower ranks of society do not primarily build their ethos on mountain hiking, so to an extent one can say that the national and relatively class-blind “close to nature” ideology has some kinship with the old leisure class ideology better known from British or American culture. But there is generally a deep public affection for everything having to do with nature. One of the major bestselling books in recent years was literally about chopping firewood, and owning a small and remote log cabin with no electricity or running water is still highly treasured by a number of Norwegians. It is, however, important to note that a lot of identity-creating values may not always be expressions of what people really do – they are also viable *national myths* about what most people do. Norwegians are said to be born with skis on their feet, but only a third of the population ski and the number is decreasing (SSB 2016).

As national identity markers, however, national myths are very much alive (see also Haugen, this book). Almost half of the interviewees in our analysis explicitly state their love of nature. A Minister of Culture invited the International Olympic Committee to a cross-country skiing trip. They baked their own twist bread over a campfire and ate a special kind of chocolate, a local version of KitKat which due to a successful advertising campaign in the 1920s has ever since been associated with good old-fashioned Norwegian outdoor life. The way the story goes, it seems as if the twist bread episode was what made the IOC understand that not only snobbery, but also doping and match-fixing, are unacceptable in Norway: “[W]e sat around the campfire. [...] Made twist bread. They got the message,” as the minister put it. The clearly excited journalist later informs us that the Minister “of course” hiked to the top of the local mountain when she was young (20.02.2016). Furthermore, an interview with a prominent young MP with a Pakistani background is almost exclusively about being Norwegian. The MP is a Muslim, but his loyalty to Norwegian values is the core of the text, as both the quotations from the interviewee and the other choices of the journalist clearly show. The MP describes living in Norway as being “close to paradise on earth” (17.01.2015).

As far as nature is concerned, rougher seems to be better. The interviewees not only have experienced rough seas, they climb the highest peaks, swim the deepest depths, and spend nights outdoors with scouts (02.04.2005, 31.01.2015, 20.02.2016, 17.01.2015). One interviewee was proposed to by her husband on the top of Romsdalshorn, a mountain peak 1550 meters above sea level where one literally has to climb to reach the top (06.08.2005). Another interviewee claims to love nature though without convincing the journalist, and the latter writes rather sarcastically: “He loves the sea and he loves the mountains, he loves early in the morning and late at night” (19.03.2016).

Love for nature is a core value, and is proved through the urge to leave “civilisation” for the peace of nature. Even those who do not make it to the mountain tops make a point of their love for nature. Long walks in the woods to “flush the brain” are prescribed (02.04.2005). Some can hardly wait to leave politics or business to raise sheep or deer on a remote and tiny farm (19.11.2005, 06.08.2005). Only one of the interviewees, an oil industry official, admits openly that he regards economic gain – and consequently jobs – as more important than nature. This immediately makes the journalist from this

business magazine correct him, almost disbelievingly: “Don’t you believe in the carbon balance?” (11.04.2015).

Norwegian-ness is important also when it does not have to do with nature. The president and CEO of a major Norwegian international company makes a point of how he had to introduce a “Nordic management philosophy” when he was a regional leader in Asia. Whereas the Thai managers were brought to meetings in their chauffeur-driven Mercedes and private lifts, this interviewee promoted a culture where management was “on the ground, in touch with the employees” (23.05.2015).

## Personal power

The second most salient discourse in the interviews is about power. All profiles contain a story of success – the road to power or the road to new power. But talking about power in Norway is often difficult without referring to “Norwegian-ness” at the same time, as for example in the Olympic Games case, where the minister is also exercising power through being Norwegian. To get a better grasp of how power is presented, it is useful to take a look at the *roads to power*.

As a rule, the road to power is described as long and demanding. Social class and geography tend to coincide in Norway. Names like Vestertana, Dønna, Klæbu and Evje are scattered around in the texts. To Norwegians they are important signals: these are remote and humble places. Quite a few of the interviewees come from such places, and both the interviewees and the journalists love to make a point of it: the further away from the more densely populated and relatively urban south-east, the better.

The place where the interviewee grew up is presented in most of the profile interviews we have analysed. In more than half of them the birth-place is used to tell the story of a class journey – which is also mostly geographical.

This combined class and geographical journey probably serves two aims, one of identification and one of legitimising power. The mere use of these remote places in the journalistic texts may trigger a feeling of identification in the reader: “Imagine, it is possible to grow up in Vestertana and end up in a prominent position in the capital.” But in several cases a low, or even a lack of, education among the parents or grandparents is also emphasised, as if this is a

quality that adds credibility and thereby legitimacy among an assumed non-elitist public (23.05.2015, 29.04.2006).

Both the interviewee and the journalist engage in telling these stories. The interviewees make a point of their ties to their home regions and express how they always long to go back (and one day they will). The Minister of Fisheries is for example presented by the journalist as someone who grew up on a small farm in “a district in the districts” in sparsely populated Finnmark (19.11.2005). Finnmark is the northernmost county and the word “district” in Norwegian signifies a rural place. This is also the minister who “loves to work with sheep”. These elements serve both to affirm her love for her remote birthplace and as a way of legitimising her being deserving of a position in the political elite.

Obviously there is an unsurmountable gap between the values of the national identity discourse and the discourse of power. But this is the interesting aspect of the class journey story: it creates a bridge between the two discourses. This is apparently so important that some interviewees even stress it a little too heavily. One interviewee, the head of one of Norway’s leading grocery chains, inherited the position, but his father, the founder of the firm, was a self-made man. The interviewee grew up in a middle class area in Norway’s third largest city, Trondheim, not a particularly humble background. Today he is a successful man with taylor-made suits, a mansion in one of the capital Oslo’s most exclusive areas, children in an international school and a fluent management lingo – just the kind of man one would expect a business newspaper to cherish. But in his negotiations with the journalist, he apparently feels he has to defend the choice of school for his children, and the fact that he does not want to move back to Trondheim, a city further north, by stressing the fact that he grew up in a home with “plastic furniture in the living room” and black pudding every Tuesday (19.03.2016). The journalist then comments that the interviewee may have “lost his simple *Trønder* soul”, the word *Trønder* (from the mid-Norwegian county of *Trøndelag*) frequently being associated with moonshining and country-style rock music.

There is a lot of defending going on in the interviews, whether it is the interviewees’ social backgrounds or their current power positions that have to be defended. One of the few interviewees with an elite background, a lawyer and head of an important division in one of Norway’s most successful international firms, is also the daughter of a well-known TV personality. In the interview she distances herself from her privileged background by stating that it made her



“embarrassed” when she was a child (06.08.2005). A former government minister and now head of government relations for a major global firm – who is also a musical artist and the daughter of a prominent and long-standing Labour MP – describes her way into politics as a mere matter of coincidence. As a young trainee in the civil service she accidentally ran into a bunch of young Labour politicians with whom she had – just as accidentally, as the story in the profile goes – jammed with after a concert in her remote birthplace a few years earlier (02.04.2005). As readers, we are allowed to overlook the fact that most ordinary teenagers do not get a chance to jam with people who hold a concert in their birthplace, and that it is equally unlikely that the reunion in a government ministry some years later should be totally incidental.

All the interviewees are people with power, but the interesting thing is how the discourse of power changes from middle-of-the-week to Saturdays. On weekdays, the newspaper will regularly promote the strong leader and support “international” management styles where the distance between the top and bottom is considerable, and the paper also has a soft spot for union busting. In the Saturday profiles, however, the interviewees express a belief in close relations and community spirit. The CEO of the grocery chain claims that his employees “must be willing to invest [themselves] totally” in the firm. This quote does have a certain totalitarian ring to it. But at the same time he expresses belief in a corporate culture where “everybody is themselves”. Suits and ties have long since been excommunicated – implying also that these managers are down on the floor and on a par with the employees. The Norwegian chairman of a major car dealer furthermore makes his 3000 employees stand up and cheer when he gives a speech. This may sound like some kind of religious worship, but the journalist assures us that the chairman is no “Sun King”. The chairman confirms this by underlining the importance of trust – the employees’ trust in him gives his power legitimacy (30.04.2005). A government minister from a very remote place, who nevertheless made it to the corridors of power, is furthermore presented as living “together with several [minister colleagues] in an apartment complex”. In the text, this free apartment in Norway’s most expensive area almost sounds like a collective, which could be irony. The irony is however obvious when the reader learns that she goes to work in a black car with a driver, but as the colleagues share the car, it is implied that it is almost a kind of public transport (19.03.2005).

Furthermore, the asset of power does not come easy even after it has been achieved. People sleep on the office couch after long working hours (29.04.2005) and spend lonely nights in the ministry flat in the company of crispbread and stacks of documents (31.01.2015). For power to be legitimate, it also needs to have social responsibility outside Norway's borders. The chairman of one of Norway's largest state-owned companies with a considerable international reach, makes a point out of all the measures the company performs in poor countries (23.03.2016). The grocery CEO cannot admit that he is planning a luxury holiday in Africa without at the same time stating that he likes to help the Africans by "supporting their health service, supplying ethanol furnaces to a slum in Nairobi, and [choosing] fair trade roses from Kenya [for his grocery customers]".

## Gender

Gender is a challenging point for at least two reasons. Firstly, gender is both a role and a kind of discourse. Secondly, the discourse of gender is challenging because it is highly arguable as to whether different characteristics and parts of the text should be seen as a positive or a negative position within the discourse. It must be noted that the use of the words positive or negative here does not imply that some traits of gender are "better" than others, but that they are regarded in varying degrees as qualities of this or that gender. As in most Western countries, the Norwegian culture operates with double standards. If a woman drinks beer and swears loudly, is she liberated or is she masculine? The gendering of the interviewee is nonetheless a prominent feature, and the ambivalence of the values in the discourse is frequently raised. Is combining a power position with being a mother possible? Is being a Minister of Justice responsible for denying a number of refugees shelter more difficult when she is also a mother? (02.04.2005). Can a man say that he hates to work on his car, but loves romantic comedies (26.02.2005) without placing himself in a negative position within the discourse of gender? Sometimes the journalist situates the interviewee in an explicitly negative position in the discourse of gender. A male parliamentarian is described with "a striped, beige scarf that appears strangely feminine" and "the high-toned, light laugh that in a way drains his authority" (17.01.2015).

Terms like the "glass ceiling" and the "old boys' network" are frequently used (02.04.2005, 06.08.2005, 23.03.2016, 31.01.2015). In one case, the journalist

makes a point of the alleged rarity of a woman being so powerful, and follows up by pointing to this interviewee's feminine traits, but then contrasts these claims by describing her as fearless and tough (02.04.2005). Women's looks are frequently commented on in a gendered way, whether it be because of their long curly hair, an (assumed) all-over tan (02.04.2005) or more unexpected looks for a woman, such as a "boyish figure" (06.08.2005). We find this practice regardless of the gender of the journalist. In several of the interviews, the women interviewees have to make an effort to get the message through that they in fact are vigorous, playful, brave and tough. And when the journalists – or the interviewees themselves – present the females as tough, they mostly resort to signs we recognise from the discourse of national identity. As an example, one female interviewee insisted on proceeding alone to a mountain top in terrible weather despite her husband's warnings: "I was prepared to spend the night outside, but the worst thing was that he was likely to call the Red Cross" (23.03.2016).

These personal stories can of course be about power more than gender – they confirm the fact that these people have the competitiveness necessary for the job. But the way such stories are highlighted in the interviews with women also suggest that there is an unavoidable aspect of gender here. It is as if the references are used to assure the readers that the director is "tough enough" for the job. Or maybe "man enough"?

The Finnish scholar Jonita Siivonen (2007, p. 14) has argued that gender is a central dimension in how journalists present the protagonist in profile interviews. The female interviewee is expected to care about children and the home, while the male interviewee is expected to care more for his career. It turns out that these underlying assumptions can be found even in a business daily, where both men and women are invited to be profiled because they have a remarkable career in business or government. The men are rarely as openly gendered as the women, and if so it is in quite a different way – as with the "strangely feminine scarf" and "light laughter" above. And whereas husbands and children are often presented as an obstacle to the women's careers, or an obstacle they have successfully overcome, a wife will more typically be presented as someone who redecorated the house while the interviewee was doing important things out in the world (19.03.2016). It seems that the women interviewees need to be gendered in a double way – that they are both woman enough for their gender and man enough for their job.

This of course demands traditionally male qualities to be seen in women synonymously with gender equality, and this will often be the case. The irony is, however, that by emphasising so heavily such qualities in a woman, the journalist at the same time sends a message that these women deviate from the norm. In this way they contribute to maintaining existing gender roles even when the women are not gendered in the traditional way – an example of so-called normative contradiction.

## **The relationship between the three discourses**

As we have seen, there are similarities between different aspects of the various discourses, and sometimes they even overlap. An example of this is when the male Minister of Fisheries tells the journalist about his childhood at sea: “I was outdoors in all kinds of rough weather, mainly alone, and in situations that were much more severe than I realised at the time” (05.11.2005). With this statement he is claiming a positive position in all three discourses: he loves and at the same time challenges and masters nature (national and male gender discourse) and he is daring (important both in a power discourse and a male gender discourse). Another is the example of the Minister of Culture and the Olympics mentioned above, or the Norwegian CEO in Asia – the Norwegianness of his statement about management also presents one type of power. Other values can be seen as positive in one discourse and negative in another. The journalist states that the first name of a female ombudsman (“Sunniva”) means “sun gift”, but follows up by saying she is actually more like “darkness in the middle of the day” and “thunder” (06.06.2015). This could be associated with strength and determination in regard to power, as well as with something “unfeminine” in regard to gender. On the other hand, this woman is the national ombudsman for gender equality and it is just as likely that the dark description may be a positive description of a modern woman.

There are some differences between the various groups of interviewees, as far as both gender and position are concerned. Since mountain climbing, hunting and the rough outdoorsy life have traditionally been the males’ domain, one could believe that the claim of actively using nature would emphasise the masculinity of the male interviewees. But surprisingly, we find that this claim is uttered more frequently by the female interviewees than the male. The women may express their active use of nature to score in the national identity

discourse and at the same time as a break with the traditional woman's role – and thereby score some points as tough and daring in the discourse of power as well. Two thirds of the male interviewees, on the other hand, stress their experience of a class journey, whereas less than half of the women do the same. A closer look reveals that this is probably caused by the actual background of the male interviewees in our material. But the men also more frequently claim a humble and modest lifestyle, which gives them a positive position in the national identity discourse, and at the same time strengthens their position in the discourse of gender.

The interviews of persons with an economic power base are additionally more dominated by the discourse of power, while the interviews of persons with a political power base are dominated by the discourse of national identity. This is less surprising, as business culture is more hierarchical than political culture, the former with CEOs and other strong leader roles, the latter more team oriented, based on political parties. The dominance of the national identity discourse among persons with political power can be explained by the fact that their power base is national, they need the votes of as many people as possible, and “Norwegian-ness” is the value they share. A vast majority of the interviewees with a political power base focus on the class journey story, while less than half of those with an economic power base do the same. This may demonstrate the democratic value of the class journey in the political world, but also suggests that it is easier to get to the top in politics than in business without an elite background.

## Conclusions

Given the fact that both the choice of and the portrayal of people with power in Norwegian society often differ from what one expects from a business paper with a neoliberal stance, the first conclusion one can draw is that social and discursive practices probably count. When a business paper, in a country where strong political currents can be described as “state individualism”, tries to appeal to a larger public it seems that other questions are asked and other aspects highlighted on Saturdays than on weekdays. But there is also another, interesting point to be made: The three discourses we have detected in the texts are largely what make the interviewee recognisable to a broad and diverse public. Close scrutiny of the profiles reveals that the three discourses are almost

like a grid, where the more unique information about the protagonists can be placed. We also find that the interviewees try to balance the presentation of themselves within the three discourses, to obtain what they regard as a positive position in all three of them. The overall impression of the person in question is thereby to a large degree shaped by the proportion of the different discourses. In some cases a certain value will assure a positive position in more than one discourse – like mountain climbing which may be positive in all three discourses. Other values might be positive within one discourse and negative in another. An example of this is competitiveness and a strong career orientation. These are values that can be positive for a business person when the issue is power, but negative from a national identity discourse point of view, and even more questionable when it comes to gender. Along with the three discourses the interviewee's professional role constitutes a complex web of possible positions. In several cases one can spot a negotiation between the journalist and the interviewee about the position in which the latter should be placed.

We can therefore draw the conclusion that the three discourses function beyond making the interviewee interesting and legitimate to a diverse public. Consequently, one can say that this particularly “individual” genre is almost as much about broader collective phenomena, as about the individual – herself or himself.

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