The genre of portrait interviews is widely read. It has, however, attracted little attention in academic research; the main focus of which has traditionally been on the news genre. But the portrait interview genre is an open one and, thus, offers interesting perspectives on both gender (Siivonen 1999) and national culture. It tells us not only about gender expectations, but also about how personal success is constructed in different cultural environments. The reason is that the genre concerns both so-called public issues and, even in newspapers, people’s private lives to some extent. However, even in the newspapers, the portrait interview genre is exceptional in that it focuses on individuals rather than on actions and views concerning several people (Siivonen 1999).

In everyday journalism, including journalistic criticism, portrait interviews are regarded as a less valued form of entertainment. They appear in the “soft” part of the newspaper, that is, in the life and culture sections on the last pages, or in weekend issues. This is in contrast to the more highly valued information that appears in the “hard” sections in the first part of the paper. As a genre, portrait interviews bring private issues to the public and have thus been considered to enhance the global process of personalization or intimization of the media (see Macdonalds 2003, van Zoonen 1991); thus, they convey an increasing number of stories about people or about hard issues written from the point of view of people. This process has been criticized as a tabloidization of the serious press by putting emotions and human interest-stories ahead of the media’s more significant content and value as sources of information. According to Macdonalds (2003, 59), some researchers belonging to the school of cultural studies (Fiske, Langer) as well as feminists (Holland, van Zoonen) discern democratic possibilities in journalistic approaches that value the ordinary, thus opening up the public sphere of the media to a wider range of voices, including those of women.

The point of departure of the present article is the assumption that crucial issues of gender, class and race as represented in media discourse can be studied with advantage in terms of the popular genre of portrait interviews.

In this comparative study of portrait interviews in Estonia, Finland, Iceland and Sweden, many similarities and some differences have been found in this particular journalistic genre. These similarities and differences may be attributed to different phases of development or to different cultures or market situations. The material consists of four portraits from each country, all published in the Thursday and Sunday editions of morning papers during week 46 of the year 1999 (15th to 21st November).¹

It was immediately obvious that there were differences between countries in the number of portrait interviews. These differences appear to be related to different sizes of the advertisement markets and to the economic status of the newspapers of the different countries; the latter factor has remained proportionally similar from 1999 to 2005. There is a connection between the size of the market and the number of portrait interviews: the stronger the papers’ financial situation, or the larger their advertisement market, the greater their volume and scope of soft entertainment sections or supplements on life and culture; it is in these sections that portrait inter-
views are most commonly found, as noted above. In addition, the different developmental phases of journalistic culture in the different countries must be considered, especially in terms of development towards personalization of the media content.

In this study, we draw attention to the types of messages that these portrait interviews convey to readers in each of the four countries. Our analysis focuses on the following themes: agency, ethnicity, gender and the time-space dimension. To be sure, many additional aspects were identified in the process of this research. In this paper, however, we have chosen those that predominated in the texts or that mirrored cultural differences or gender most clearly.

The Portrait Interview and its Voices

Four criteria were used for defining the portrait interview (Siivonen 1999, 76-77): First, the text has one principal character; second, the principal character is quoted at least once; third, the principal character is also portrayed in a picture (if there are more people, the principal character is the focus); and fourth, aspects of the principal character’s personal, public or professional life are covered in the text (Siivonen 1999, 72-77).

A portrait interview is the result of a process that starts with a dialogue between two individuals, the dialogue subsequently being transformed into a written text through a journalistic process. The journalist does not play a solitary role; he or she has usually had a verbal dialogue with the principal character. This dialogue is transformed into a written text that will, after an editing process, be read by a media audience. Furthermore, a photographer has captured the image of the principal character. These different voices negotiate to produce a portrait of the person (Siivonen 1999, 72-76).

Some portrait interviews take the form of questions and answers (the “quotation model”). The journalist’s voice is the narrator, and the principal character is quoted in the text. Representing all four countries, 8 out of the 16 portraits in this study fall into that category. Two Estonian and three Icelandic portraits consist exclusively of the journalist’s questions followed by the principal character’s answers (the “question-answer” model). In three texts, one Finnish and two Swedish, both forms occurred together; thus, the same portrait contains text created according to the question-answer model as well as to the quotation model. In these cases, questions and answers are usually about conflicts or controversial matters.

As any other genre, portrait interviews are constrained by their own generic conventions: The way that the story of an interesting individual is narrated has to meet certain expectations on the part of the readers, who are used to looking for easy reading in the morning papers’ life or weekend sections. As a genre, portrait interviews should offer readers something the “same but different” from a generic template (see Lacey 2000, 135). This certainly affects the choice of theme and writing style of a portrait interview.

An Overview of the Portraits

An overall look at the portraits shows interesting differences from the general representation of the men and women who appear in news programmes. There are more portrait interviews in newspapers’ weekend supplements (with sections such as Life or People) and larger cultural sections than in the ordinary weekday issues. Also, the larger the paper, the greater the likelihood that it carries a daily life section or cultural pages that include portrait interviews, which can raise their total number. This is evident when the Estonian and Icelandic papers are compared to those from Sweden or Finland. The reason for discontinuing special or weekend issues and cultural sections are economic factors (rising costs and less advertising revenues) as has been the case in Estonia in recent years (Postimees closing Kultuur in 1999, Eesti Ekspress closing Reporter in 2003 to reduce expenses). This has also been the recent experience in Iceland. Due to decreasing advertising revenues and increasing labour and production costs, Morgunblaðið has closed down or merged some of its supplements. Therefore, differences in journalistic culture can at least partly be explained in economic terms. The Finnish-Swedish language minority paper Hufvudstadsbladet, with a volume comparable to the Estonian dailies, contains 20 pages. In week 46 of 1999, however, it had more portrait interviews (23) than did the Estonian papers.

As far as content is concerned, the policies of minority papers are probably more similar to that of regional papers. There is a relationship between portrait interviews and the development of family pages. This is obvious from the analysis of the Swedish material. These sections have increased in volume in the regional Swedish morning press (Nilsson & Severinsson 2001). But even in the city morning papers, the importance of family pages has increased and more journalistic effort is put into them.

In Iceland, Finland and Sweden, stories about ordinary people are commonplace, whereas the Es-
Estonian papers tend to portray the élite. Portraying ordinary people was compulsory in the Soviet journalistic tradition of which Estonia was part until the 1990s (communist ideology featured the cult of ordinary people). Still in 1999, therefore, there was a strong tendency not to write portraits of ordinary people. Another explanation is the limited space in Estonian dailies, permitting coverage of the most prominent people and events only. This can be interpreted as a major cultural difference between Nordic and post-communist Estonian media, the former being more democratic. Since 1999, developments in Estonian media practices show that ordinary people are no longer as “unpopular” among journalists as was the case a few years ago. On the one hand, television has certainly exerted a pressure in introducing the popular reality show format, which includes ordinary people and their life experiences. On the other hand, it can be assumed that the Estonian media culture follows the same global tendencies towards personalization that were described above, thus bringing more human interest into the content of journalism and looking for everyday heroes to write about.

Initiating Factors
The portrait interview genre is relatively independent of the life span of the news. But at the same time, there is often a connection with the news agenda. The timetable for publishing portraits is not as strict as that for publishing news, but it nevertheless depends on factors that have brought the portrait to the fore (Siivonen 1999, 70-72). Earlier research (Siivonen 1999, Svensson 1998) has shown that portraits and reports often end with a “conclusion” – a double conclusion about both sides of the presented conflict. In portrait interviews, the conflicts arise from within the principal character. This is in contrast to news journalism, which describes conflicts between different groups or individuals. The “reasons for a portrait” tend to be more flexible than those for a “pure” news story (Siivonen 1999). The reasons for a portrait (as well as for a reportage) seem to live longer than those for a news story.

Initiating factors usually relate to something on the public news agenda or to private celebrations such as birthdays. In the 16 portrait interviews analysed, only two do not have an obvious initiating reason. One is with Páivikki Palosaari. It is a typical advertisement story in disguise, the idea of which is to promote Lapponian tourism. The other is with Gudrún Johannesdóttir, an Icelandic farmer’s wife. The remaining interviews are initiated by factors that relate to features of the morning press news agenda or to medialization and intimization. The first words in the interview with the dressage rider Louise Nathhorst are: “Louise Nathhorst rides softly... .” The headline presents her as the “Queen of dressage”. The interview ends with the topic of the forthcoming World Cup in Stockholm, and of the results of last weekend’s competition in Berlin. In Maimu Berg’s portrait, the point of departure is her new book. The sports news story focuses on a principal hero, the male Estonian sportsman Mart Poom who plays with Derby County in England. This is the main story of the sports page – not exactly a “soft” portrait interview, but nevertheless focusing on an event through its principal hero. The portrait begins with a subheading: “Estonian gatekeeper hit back the penalty and helped Derby double 2:1 to win”.

Series of articles can be seen as belonging to the portrait interview genre. It is striking that three of the four texts in the *Hufvudstadsbladet* interviews are features of such series. Elisabeth Rehn, a presidential candidate, is interviewed in a series called ”Presidentvalet 2000” (The Presidential Election 2000). Ulf-Johan Sunabacka appears in a series called “Nämnd men inte känd” (Mentioned but not known, “nämnd” also meaning “board”) – in which local politicians, who are expected to be unknown to the readers, are presented. Nina Kekkonen is interviewed in a series about former Lucias as Lucia Day, December 13, is approaching. Only the portrait of Carl Mesterton represents the traditional genre of the portrait interview: the birthday portrait (he turns 70). His portrait represents a traditional portrayal of elderly men. Material consisting of sports heroes (such as Estonian Poom and Swedish Nathhorst) is missing in *Hufvudstadsbladet*, as well as that of news portraits (Estonian Berg) – of which Swedish Hagman refers to an upcoming television programme. Three of the Icelandic portraits originate in the news agenda. In another study of *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* from September 1996, the majority of portraits were not parts of series; the texts were more independent of other material (Siivonen 1999).

The morning press is generally developing towards personalization and intimization. The birthday portrait constitutes one feature of this general development. This can be seen in the Swedish material in which most people celebrating their birthdays are no longer men 50 years and older. A birthday is the reason for focusing on former test pilot and general director of FFA (Flygtekniska försöksanstalten) Lars-Bertil Persson, aged 65. A similar case is Anna
Sofi Fia Holmström, an executive director of a computer company (ITC Interactive) who turns 25. The reason for the portrait of artist Edgar Valter, which appears in the Estonian material, is more traditional. He turned 70, just like Mesterton.

The tendency towards medialization can be seen in the portrait of Tommy Hagman, an “ordinary person”. His portrait is a typical example of the media’s tendency towards promoting media personalities (Ekcrantz 1996) who do not belong to the élite. The reason for the portrait of Tommy Hagman is a television programme about him broadcasted on Swedish television SVT on the very same day. On 18 November 1999, Göteborgs-Posten writes: “A life without eye contact – Tommy Hagman has Asperger’s syndrome.” The fact that Hagman lives in the region is probably another reason for the portrait interview.

Gudrún Jóhannesdóttir’s and Páivikki Paalosaari’s portraits have no connection, either with the news agenda or with a birthday. Persson, however, is interviewed as someone celebrating his birthday, as is the 25-year-old Holmström. Birthday features are not particularly common in the other countries’ newspapers. In Iceland, it is customary for well-known individuals to be portrayed on their birthdays. Again, this can be explained by the development towards intimization of the morning press. Instead of celebrating élite male persons turning 50 and 60, the development is toward ordinary people, younger people and women.

Themes

Agency

There are major cultural differences in how agency is usually explained. In contrast to Eastern collective cultures, Western individualist cultures tend to explain agency in terms of inner aspects. Also, gender differences have been observed in defining selfhood through agency (Bacchi 1990). Social psychologists agree that women tend to define their success in terms of outside circumstances (external attribution) but to blame themselves for failure (internal attribution). In the case of men, success is usually thought to result from personal efforts, whereas failure depends on unfavourable circumstances.

Pilvre (2000, 1) shows that, in the Estonian weekly Eesti Ekspress Persoon column, agency is present in the texts on both male and female heroes. The concept of the media hero implicitly includes agency; people are portrayed as active and influential. In addition, gender-specific attribution differences can be seen in the presence of important others in the text.

Agency can include factors such as people’s initiative, ambition, affect and successful activities, to name a few. A main character’s success can also be described as a result of the activities of important others (which implies external attribution and lack of agency).

The individuals portrayed here show varying degrees of agency. The tendency to describe male careers as a result of inner ambition (internal attribution) is typically present (the artist Valter, the filmmaker Mesterton, the lawyer Gunnlaugsson, the businessman and writer Olafsson, and the businessman Persson). These people are all presented as highly professional, ambitious and creative in their respective fields. However, the Finnish local politician Sunabacka is an exception; his key to success is diligence. This quality is traditionally attributed to women, whereas it is rare in portraits of men. Overcoming health problems is found to be a driving force in the cases of the successful Estonian sportsman Poom as well as in the survival story of Hagman in Sweden. Hagman’s “success” is based on the fact that he has learned to understand his handicap, and that he dares to talk about his life. He questions the standards of normality and what normality does to people.

Apart from describing ambition and work, portraits of male heroes sometimes include references to important others such as business partners, colleagues or coaches. The portrait of the Icelandic lawyer Gunnlaugsson often refers to his friendship with the Prime Minister. Important others’ influence on the main character’s life is especially emphasized in the portrait of the handicapped Hagman.

Descriptions of success and driving forces in women’s portraits are more complicated. Apart from traditional ambitions of strong individuals (Berg in Estonia and Nathorst in Sweden), overcoming obstacles in private life can be a driving force (Paalosaari in Estonia and Kekkonen in Finland). The writer Berg says in her interview that she has never felt any restriction; her freedom comes from within. In the portrait of Paalosaari, who left an alcoholic husband, the first important other can be seen as providing agency and the driving force leading to success. Showing a woman’s personal career, beginning with a problematic private life and overcoming troubles, amounts to a very gendered statement. There is yet another very gendered explanation of female agency: Nina Kekkonen, a former Lucia girl, is described as having lost her chance of getting the education of her dreams because she got married.
and had a son. A similar experience can be found in the portrait of Gudrún Jóhannesdóttir. Within the Nordic countries, it is rare to explain women’s situations along such lines. In Estonia, however, it is a quite common cultural convention for women to stress in public that they have sacrificed their own work and studies for the benefit of the family.

The portrait of the presidential candidate Elisabeth Rehn differs in that it has a stronger focus on political issues. There is no description of how she reached the position she holds today. Ambition can be traced implicitly in the descriptions of her present position and her recent international career. Perhaps the portrait would have a more glorifying tone if it had been written on the occasion of a celebration rather than of a candidature. Courage is central to the description of Rehn. This can be considered a gendered attribute – would a male presidential candidate be characterized as courageous?

The definition of success as connected with public life only is questioned in the portrait of the farmer’s wife Gudrún Jóhannesdóttir. Her success lies in the fact that she has raised her children, provided her family with a good home, and is skilled in baking and needlework. Her interview stresses traditional family values and gender roles.

In the portraits of women, important others are stressed more often than in the portraits of men (Pilvre 2000,1). In the portrait of the female business executive Holmström, there is a father in the background and a female partner in the business; the importance of the latter to Holmström is, however, not stated. In the case of the Swedish dressage rider Nathhorst, the position of her coach is stressed. This is not unusual in portraits of either male or female sportsmen, as Pilvre’s above-mentioned research has shown.

Distinct cultural differences are hardly found in the descriptions of people’s success in the 16 portraits. Only the Swedish Tommy Hagman’s case is exceptional – a different success story of a kind that was hard to find at least in the Estonian mainstream press of 1999. In recent years, however, several success stories of disabled people have been published in the Estonian press. Again, this can be explained as a sign of change in the media – via human interest and emotion towards more voices participating in the public discourse.

Gender differences seem to be almost universal in descriptions of people’s agency. Yet, a lot depends on the position or occupation of the female hero. The agency and success of, for example, a creative person or a high level politician are described somewhat differently than those of a more ordinary woman. It seems to be implicitly recognized that women from these respective groups are different and should be treated differently by journalists – maybe more like men who, owing to the gender norms accepted in society, are allowed strong agency.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is emphasized to different degrees in the portraits from the four countries. This is understandable, as ethnicity in a country is highly dependent on its culture and history.

Ethnicity is stressed in the Finnish portraits, which appear in the Swedish-language press. The people represented are Swedish speakers. This is, for example, the case of Elisabeth Rehn, a person with political power in a country with a different majority language. Belonging to the Swedish language minority provokes discussions of what it means to have political power (Elisabeth Rehn), to maintain Swedish traditions in Finnish mainstream culture (Lucia girl Nina Kekkonen) or to work for a Finnish-speaking television company (Mesterton). Ulf-Johan Sunabacka is also Finnish-Swedish, but his ethnicity is neither stressed nor problematized.

In the Estonian context, the nationality theme is important. This is not surprising, as the society was still in a phase of nation-building in the 1990’s, at which time differences between nations acquired a new meaning. It can even be claimed that there was a “flourishing of nationalist ideologies and politics” which, in addition, had strong gender markers (Gohrisch, Hahn et al. 2001, 17). It would be too optimistic to claim that this period is over; nationality and ethnicity are still hot issues in public discussions, and they have become even more prominent after Estonia joined the EU in 2004.

In Palosaari’s portrait, being Lapponian is a central theme of the interview, one reason being that the story is meant to promote tourism. She criticizes Estonians for erroneously expecting foreigners to come and take charge. “Things must be done by the people themselves, and their roots must not be forgotten.” Mall Oja, head of the Finnish tourism development centre in Estonia, refers to Palosaari as a Lapponian counterpart to Nokia. The ethnic background of the Estonian interviewees is diverse. Palosaari is Finnish-Lapponian, Valter’s mother is Latvian, and the footballer Poom lives in England. He could be described as a global citizen in a fashion similar to Louise Nathhorst. Only in the case of the Estonian Maimu Berg is reference to ethnicity lacking.
Ethnicity is not a prominent issue in the Icelandic material. Iceland is highly homogenous in ethnic composition, origin and culture. All the interviewees are Icelandic. Interestingly, however, the following two statements are worth mentioning. The deputy MP and farmer Ólafia Ingólfsdóttir expressed her views on importing Norwegian cows to Iceland with the purpose of diversifying the existing stock and increasing milk yields. She strongly stresses that, because Iceland was settled in the 9th century, the Icelandic cow has served the country well, and that there is no need to allow foreign stock into the country. The entrepreneur Ólafur Jóhann Ólafsson, who presently lives in New York, compares the American tax and welfare system to that of Iceland. He states that living in Iceland is much easier due to lower tax rates and a more elaborate welfare system – a recurring theme that is often mentioned by Icelanders who have lived abroad.

In the Swedish portraits, only Swedish ethnicity is represented; the interviewees are Swedish as a matter of course. Even though ethnicity is not on the agenda in the portrait interview of Nathhorst, it is possible to read it as an article on a global or European agenda in the portrait interview of Nathhorst, it is expected to bring to the public, are traditionally more associated with women; and women tend to be regarded as “experts on life”. This may be one explanation for the larger number of women appearing in the portrait genre. However, the question remains how gender is framed in the portrait interviews. At first glance, there seem to be more gender markers in the portraits of women. Empirical data from research conducted in Estonia have shown that unwritten gender conventions/differences are revealed by journalists’ questions in interviews (Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia 2004). For example, a female politician is asked different questions than a male politician in a similar position. Focus on private rather than public life is easily observed, as well as a tendency towards presenting women as group members (such as members of the female sex or of a political party). In contrast, men are represented as individuals. Exceptionally successful women in public life are “tested” by the media from the perspective of normative womanhood. Women in high positions do not often protest against trivial gender-biased questions; they leave the journalist free to choose the topics of conversation.

Describe looks and appearance is one way of framing gender. But in cases such as the above, looks are seldom described. Photographs, however, seem to be gendered. In almost all portrait interviews, photos are the main key to the person’s appearance. Usually there is one picture, often with an unclear background. There are four wide-open smiles in this group of portraits. They are all women, one from each country: Maimu Berg, Anna Sofi Fia Holmström, Gudrún Jóhannesdóttir and Nina Kekkonen. This could be a coincidence, but smiling in front of the camera seems to be a marker of femininity. Several photos are torso portraits in which the picture ends near the waistline. The portraits of sports persons (Poom and Nathhorst) show the most action.

It is interesting to note how the person is being framed. There is the text, the photo, the fact boxes, all describing the person quite differently. According to the fictitious journalist Annika Bengtzon (author Liza Marklund 1999), the morning papers conceal interesting and personal information in fact boxes, while tabloids address these aspects in the text of the interview (Siivonen 1999, 167-168). Different aspects of a character description appear in different parts of the layout. Private information is placed in the fact boxes and in the endings, the “issues” are in the text, and the “looks” are in the photo.

Fact boxes or sidebars seem to be places in which private matters can be expressed. This is true of the portraits of Elisabeth Rehn, Ulf-Johan Sunabacka, Lars-Bertil Persson and Edgar Valter. In the main interview text with Valter, it is not clear whether or not he has children. However, the interview contains information boxes with his curriculum vitae. Also included are references to his fam-
ily, his wife, adopted daughter, and pets. Further down in the column he is asked five questions – routine questions given to each person being portrayed this way. The Icelandic portraits contained no fact boxes. Both Rehn’s and Sunabacka’s private lives are discussed to some extent, both in the portrait text and in the box.

Although looks are not described in a direct manner, it is clear that gender is framed by descriptions of emotions and behaviour. When “love” is in focus, it is a woman (Nathhorst); but when “calculated risks” are referred to, then a man is being portrayed (Persson). In several articles, gender emerges as a topic in more or less direct ways. In the article on test pilot Persson, the dangers of his work are central even though he calls them a “calculated risk”. He also points out that test pilots are not part of a macho group: “They are just like any other person who has a job to do.”

In the portrait of the IT executive, it is clear how stunned the (male) reporter is to find a competent woman in this position. “... Fia says and doesn’t in any other way look like the stereotyped image of a successful female business executive ...”. The text continues: “Instead Fia glows of a timely presence and she radiates a sort of schoolgirl witty and full of guts”.

Aspects of gender are more likely to arise when women are portrayed than when men are portrayed. Interviews with men tend to lack a gender perspective. However, the seeming absence of gender must not be equated with no gender at all. In the cases of the two men portrayed, the course of the interview remains within the boundaries of their professional lives. This is also the case in the interview with the female deputy MP who is interviewed in her professional capacity. However, in the interview with Gudrún Jóhannesdóttir, there are numerous references to gender. The fact that she is a housewife escapes no one. The journalist describes her home. “While I sit here, drink coffee and eat these wonderful cakes ... it is of course Gudrún who baked the cakes that her husband and I are eating.” There are other references that underline her position as a homemaker, i.e. her talent for sewing. “Gudrún isn’t only capable when it comes to baking cakes, one can clearly see from her home that she is quite skilful with her hands.” At one stage Jóhannesdóttir says, “From a young age, I started to sew clothes for myself. Later on I sewed nearly all my children’s clothes, from both old and new.” During the end of the portrait, Jóhannesdóttir concludes, “I was, in fact, raised to marry and have children.” The other women in her life whom she mentions (her mother and grandmother) come from the same fold. They were caring individuals, who took great care of the home and family. The men in her life – the important others – are there to support her and her children and to provide the family with material goods.

Gender is not an explicit topic of the Finnish portraits; however, the whole topic of Lucia is a gendered subject. In the Kekkonen portrait, the principal character explains that she never received the education she wanted because she got married and had a son. The Sunabacka portrait, on the other hand, contains the theme of a family suffering from the principal character’s engagement with work and society – the main character is a man. “From time to time my family suffers ... sometimes stress situations develop, but then I call the deputy”, he says. This is definitely a Nordic issue. From an Estonian point of view, family is not regarded as an obstacle to a man’s career.

In her portrait, Berg is referred to as a “writer” in the heading and “writer” and “journalist” in the lead. From the point of view of the Estonian language, gender cannot be derived from titles. Both given name and surname are used. No direct reference is made to her gender. The heading is about a writer who breaks off her love relations and, in her books, refers to the widespread notion that women are experts on relations. This can be read as an indicator of gender. The heading comes from the writer’s own statement that she is “destructive about love relations in her books”. Maimu Berg is portrayed as a successful, free and independent creative person, well adjusted to a changing society in which writers of her generation are rarely pleased with what is going on. The only conflicts concern how to divide herself between work and creation.

In Päiviikki Palosaari’s portrait, we find an important other – a man with whom she is in love, the saxophone player Pekka Saari. “Pekka is my savour”, says Päiviikki sighing. The hero is referred to as follows: “When the family life is fine, if you can totally trust another person, that gives much energy and support.” The moral of the story is that the basis of a woman’s successful career lies in a well-adjusted private life.

Robert Connell (1995) emphasizes that we have to consider that several masculinities can be understood in terms of gender relations such as hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalization. The jubilee-portrait of Persson can be described as a representation of hegemonic masculinity. He fears nothing, he has a job to do, and talks about “calculated risks”. He has a high position, a background in the military, a beautiful villa and wife
to travel with. The portrait of Hagman could, in Connell’s terms, be described as a representation of a type of marginalized masculinity. Hagman talks about his fear. The article even starts by stating that he is “constantly afraid of breaking an unwritten rule”. Hagman willingly mentions his need for security. He refers to his insecurity and struggles with relating to other people. His problems challenge the bodily dimension of masculinity. When compared to former test pilot Persson, who has no obvious fears, the different types of masculinity are clearly framed.

**Time and Space**

The concepts of time and space are central to the dynamics of everyday life. Although physical distances and measurements of time remain the same, their perception has drastically changed in recent times. Travelling was once something that relatively few could afford. Now it is a key element of modern times.

In the portraits, “travel” and “international life” are closely linked to success and career. Bachtin (1988) has written on the role and character of the road of life in literature. Based on his ideas, one can read portrait interviews and see that the journeys described often construct important turning points in the lives of the main characters (Siivonen 1999, 130-131). In Siivonen (1999, 159), all twelve principal characters except one travelled. Those who did not travel are often represented as “ordinary people” or, in some cases, as unhealthy. Exceptions to this are the Sunabacka and Kekkonen texts that construct ordinary people as not celebrating or travelling, but nevertheless ordinary. Successful individuals such as Nathhorst, Persson, Rehn, Mesterton, Ólafsson and Poom represent the typical successful career maker who takes a trip (or trips) abroad, or who has worked abroad.

There are variations between countries in this regard, too. The Estonian material portrays Estonians living abroad as well as foreigners. In the Finnish portraits, there is a Finland-Swede who has worked abroad. In contrast, the Swedes portrayed stayed in Sweden all the time and only left their country for trips abroad (Nathhorst). In the Icelandic material, there is the case of the international businessman who lives and works abroad but, at the same time, has strong links to his native country and visits several times a year. The Estonian material refers to conflicts in space and time (different parts of Estonia and the Soviet period), whereas the Swedish interviews construct time and space as someplace one can go for success and celebration, and then return home. On the other hand, there is the portrait of Holmström in which there are conflicts of regional status between the capital Stockholm and other parts of the country. This is quite similar to the Valter portrait’s arguing against Tallinn and city life. In Hufvudstadsbladet’s material, only Rehn has worked abroad; however, Mesterton goes abroad to celebrate his birthday. For the two others, no “moves” are described whatsoever, which is quite unique in the portrait genre. One reason may be that the portraits are parts of series in which the characters, here one woman and one man, are not public figures and are constructed as ordinary people rather than career hotshots.

There is a strong connection between travelling and a successful career. Within the Icelandic context, the two are often intertwined. Because of the few educational options available at the post-graduate level in Iceland, it is common for people to seek further education abroad, then return home with their expertise to launch their careers. Ólafur Jóhann Ólafsson is a prime example. He is in his mid-thirties, a very successful businessman, presently holding the position of vice chairman of Time Warner Digital Media. At the age of 20, he went to the United States to study for an undergraduate degree in physics. After his degree, he started to work for the Sony electronics company in which he climbed the corporate ladder and made a name for himself in the world of corporate finance. In his portrait interview (as well as many previous ones), he strongly underlines the fact that, despite living in the United States, he has strong roots in Iceland and takes pains to come home several times a year. To him, Iceland is home – a place for rest and solitude. New York, on the other hand, is a place for work and success in his professional life.

To Rehn, home is not a place for rest. She has been abroad and has now returned home. Her earlier work abroad receives quite a lot of attention in the interview. Her returning home to run for the office of president can be compared to the traditional (male) hero’s return home to save his people (Bachtin 1973, Siivonen 1999).

Another young businessperson is Anna Sofi Fia Holmström. The headline of her interview, “Young comet in cyberspace”, describes the velocity of her career. She is a fast mover in the Internet society. Her fashionable office is contrasted with her childhood days in the suburbs of Gothenburg and the forest and nature of Dalsland, where she spends her leisure time. She points out that one does not have to be in the capital Stockholm to succeed in the IT business. Her career moves have included an educa-
vation in chaos management at Århus, Denmark, and she worked at Ericsson before she started her own company. “But with all Fia’s knowledge of com-
puters, IT and web products, her entrepreneur blood was boiling hot in her veins so she started ITC.” Ac-
tion and youth are the two central themes in the in-
terview.

The career of the former test pilot, Lars-Bertil Persson, crucially involved travelling. His portrait interview takes places at his villa in Värmdö. The focus is on all the different planes he has flown and on the various jobs he has had. There has been a great deal of travelling in his life, not only in the air. He has flown 25 different plane models, and his job has taken him from Lund to Luleå, Lidköping and Bromma. Also, he was sent to England for an edu-
cation in the 1950s.

The realm of sports is one in which travel and career often blend. The life of the Swedish dressage rider Louise Nathhorst is full of travel: from Stockholm to England and Germany, back to Sweden and then to the United States. Nathhorst and the horses are travelling to different competitions. These jour-
nies are not really discussed; rather, they provide a way to give Nathhorst a queen-like status. She is competing at an international level, having achieved her goals by going international from the beginning. The Estonian footballer Poom is not unfamiliar with travel. His present home is in England. He travels with his team and with the Estonian national team all over the world.

It is of some interest to study what kind of indi-
viduals these people represent on a scale from “pri-
vate to public” interpreted in terms of being “free to travel” or tied to family and home. In the instances above, this seems to be less a question of gender than of age. And what happens when the women get as “old” as the family fathers – do they disappear from the newspaper pages?

Not all get to travel, at least not in the physical sense. The article on Hagman may be described as the most personal of the Swedish interviews; not only does it focus on his handicap, but also on other hardships throughout his life. It is a journey through the struggles of life. The interview takes place in a coffee shop featuring an exhibition of Hagman’s cartoons. He explains that he always felt different. His childhood days at school are described as a “hell” and he was beaten up as a teenager. One trau-
matic moment is the death of his mother – she drowned in front of his eyes. “The accident took away his security in a world he did not understand.” However Hagman receives counselling from a psy-
chologist and realizes that he has Asperger’s syn-
drome; he finds a new identity. The mental journey then becomes the way towards self-understanding.

Sunabacka and Kekkonen are not going any-
where, nor have they been anywhere. According to previous research this is not common (Siivonen 1999): the portraits of women contained descriptions of both work-related and private journeys. Those still active in their career “flourished” the more they travelled. The young actress became a mother as she moved to another country; when she moved back, she was an actress and a mother; now she is also the main star of a theatre production.

With regard to Kekkonen, there is a passage about her tour of Finland in 1979 as Lucia. Neither Sunabacka nor Kekkonen is described as a travel-
ling person; their respective images are quite ordi-
ary. They are described in everyday situations, not at the top of their careers. The same applies to the Icelandic farmer’s wife, Johannesdóttir. The travels in her life consist only of instances when her family decided to move.

To illustrate the concept of time, we can look at the portrait of Maimu Berg, in which the novel at-
mosphere of the 1970’s and 1980’s is described. The journalist asks how those who do not remember these times can read the book. Berg says that it should be read as a historical novel. There is a refer-
ence to time shift: she says that she has always writ-
ten historical novels, but that her books are getting nearer the present time, and that the next novel may well focus on the 1990’s. One of the conflicts de-
scribed is about the possible reception of the book in view of time and change in mentality over time: Do younger readers understand the 1970’s and 1980’s when Estonia was part of the Soviet Union? The journalist asks Berg what makes her write about her own time, which is so hostile to literature. Berg says that she does not feel any hostility towards writers at the moment (which was a general notion of the atmosphere in Estonia at the end of the 1990’s).

The story of Päivikki Palosaari begins in 1994 with a reference to her divorce. Then, the actual meeting is described in present time. At the end of the story, the journalist returns to 1998, the year in which she started her career. In the last passage, the start of her career is mentioned: in 1981, she was the owner of a small grill-kiosk. The times are com-
pared; the circulation of money was then 500 FIM daily, whereas now it is hundreds of thousands. The exotic place, situated 170 kilometres from the polar circle, is referred to. She says that the 67th parallel has brought her happiness. The story is very much attached to Lapponia. Palosaari is described as the
spirit of the place. The writer says that other Lapponians have elevated her to the status of a Lapponian matriarch. “Everything which Päivikki has created carries the stamp of being Lapponian.”

Concluding Remarks

Admittedly, in comparing portraits of women and men at different hierarchical levels of society, it is not always evident which analysis results depend on gender or on other factors. This is worth considering, for instance, when comparing the portraits of presidential candidate Rehn and a local (“wanna-be”) politician, Ulf-Johan Sunabacka. One is a well-known politician with a ministerial background, whereas the other is unknown to most readers. Also, on the basis of 16 portraits, it is difficult to draw any conclusions with regard to how gender is framed and how this differs from country to country. Nevertheless, however, we have found some interesting patterns.

The portrait interview is a more common genre in the Swedish and Finnish press than in that of Estonia or Iceland. This is due to different journalistic practices between the countries, at least at the end 1990’s. Estonian daily newspapers are still thinner than the papers of the other countries and do not usually contain many “life” pages (except in weekend issues). Comparable to these is the Swedish-Finnish Hufvudstadsbladet, a minority paper containing 20 pages (still broad sheet in 1999). In the Estonian press, the news is still mostly event-oriented (hard) and not centred on individuals (soft); there is, however, a pressure towards more soft, human-oriented news. The Estonian press is changing, following the global tendencies towards personalization of the media content. Arguably, however, this process was not clearly visible in the text examples from 1999.

Gender stereotypes seem to exist in many different cultures. There is a tendency for men to be portrayed with a focus on their social role. In contrast, portraits of women tend to focus on personality, which is usually framed according to gender conventions prevailing in the given society. Female portraits typically stress gender, whereas male portraits are often neutral in this regard. However, the fact that personal matters are not mentioned does not make a presentation of male gender neutral. Focusing on social roles and leaving out themes associated with the private sphere can be seen as a convention in framing male gender. The male has long been the unquestionable norm for neutrality and normality; only recent research on masculinity has paid attention to the gender bias of the seemingly neutral discourse in media representations of men.

The occupation of the interviewee and the genre of the story (a news-based interview or a portrait in weekend supplement) play a noticeable role in setting the degree of gender bias in the text. We have seen that a portrait of a woman athlete, a female presidential candidate or a female writer can be written according to the same rules that apply to writing traditional portraits of men, thus concentrating on the woman’s social role. This is usual in dailies, in which portrait interviews are based on news stories (on, for example, a newly published book or winning a sports contest). There is a hypothesis still to be tested in the Nordic cultural space: maybe men’s portraits are today containing more text on so-called private life than before.

Human aspects (e.g., health and welfare) are more prevalent in Swedish portraits than in the others. Estonian portraits from 1999 are very concerned with successful careers. During this period, portraits of men do not focus much on maintaining a balance between public and private life (as was found in the Finnish Sunabacka case). Ethnicity is stressed in the Finnish material, as it comes from the Swedish-speaking minority press. Ethnicity is also a prominent theme in the Estonian material. Due to the still on-going nation-building phase of the society, ethnicity is a very prominent topic of public discussion in that country.

Notes

1. This week was chosen to coordinate this project with the project Media Cultures around the Baltic Sea, which was started in 1999 by researchers from different countries and was supervised by Swedish researchers Jan Ekecrantz and Tom Olsson. See the appendix for data about the newspapers and articles.

2. It is worth noting that the term “portrait interview” is not equivalent to the Swedish word personporträtt (person portrait), the Estonian portree (portrait), the Finnish henkilökuva (person picture), or the Icelandic einkaviðtal (private interview). Apart from the Icelandic word, these terms do not contain the word interview at all. Still, however, portrait interview seems to be the most suitable term for this genre.
3. Lucia is a Swedish tradition of celebrating light on the 13th of December, the darkest time of the year. Lucia girls are chosen to participate in the festive parade.

References


Appendix

Estonian material

Due to the rarity of the genre portrait interview, two quality dailies Eesti Päevaleht and Postimees are included in the Estonian material. They together included 31 portrait interviews during week 46, 1999. The Estonian papers of 1999 are quite thin compared to their Nordic counterparts (EPL 20 pages during workdays, Postimees 24 pages during workdays) and can be compared to minority papers, for example Hufvudstadsbladet in Finland (which contains also 20 pages). Because no papers come out on Sundays, the Saturday issue of 20 November 1999 was included. Postimees is the largest daily in Estonia, owned by the company Eesti Meedia (actually Norwegian Schibsted). It is published six days a week and its circulation in 1999 was approximately 50,000 copies. It has a tabloid format. It is more popular in the countryside and among Tartu people, as it was originally a Tartu-based newspaper (from its foundation in the 19th century until 1998). It still has fewer readers in the capital Tallinn than its competitor Eesti Päevaleht. The weekday issue contains 24 pages. The weekend issue (24 pages) in 1999 includes separate supplements: Postimees Extra (Life supplement) 16 pages and Kulttuur (Culture supplement including television programmes for the week) 32 pages. Eesti Päevaleht is a quality daily issued in Tallinn, owned by Ekspress Group (actually Swedish Bonnier and Estonian businessman Hans Luik). The circulation of Eesti Päevaleht in 1999 was ca. 30,000 copies. It had a broadsheet format but is now tabloid. Eesti Päevaleht has the largest readership among people in Tallinn, and it is the second largest daily in Estonia. The weekday issue contains 20 pages. The weekend issue contains 28 pages together with the culture supplement Arkaadia and the life supplement Pluss. The four Estonian portraits are:

1. (F) Kirjanik Maimu Berg purustab oma raamatutes armusuhteid [Writer Maimu Berg breaks love relations in her new books], Culture department, Postimees (18 November 1999).
2. (F) Lapi Nokia nimi on Päiviikki Palosaari [The name of the Lapponian Nokia is Päiviikki Palosaari], Weekend supplement Postimees Extra, Postimees (20 November 1999).
3. (M) Mart Poom naasis edukalt [Mart Poom made a successful comeback], Sports department, Eesti Päevaleht (18 November 1999).

Finnish material

Hufvudstadsbladet is a minority paper published in Swedish in Finland and has a circulation of 55,084 (2000) copies seven days a week. The paper is nowhere near as large as the Finnish Helsingin Sanomat (454,833 copies, 1999) or Swedish Dagens Nyheter (347,900 copies) and does not contain different sections every day, only on Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays. The weekday paper contains 20 pages. Since this project was carried out the paper has changed from broadsheet to tabloid. During the actual week Hufvudstadsbladet contained 23 portraits. After this pilot study we will include Helsingin Sanomat in our material. Sundays there is a section called SÖNDAG containing reportage, a children’s page, youth page and such. Mondays there is a sports section and Thursdays a television and radio tabloid paper called VISION containing some reportage also. Neither SÖNDAG nor the sports section has regular portraits, but SÖNDAG usually contains at least one (almost or) whole page portrait interview. On the diary page of the regular paper there are portrait interviews marked Dagens jubilar [The celebrator of the day], but there is not one every day. This study will discuss four portraits – two published on Thursday 18 November and two on Sunday 21 November 1999. Both days had two typical portraits, texts that focused on a person more than on one topic, and these happened to be one woman and one man each day. The four portraits from Hufvudstadsbladet are:

1. (F) Elisabeth Rehn: FN-soldaterna ska få större rörelsefrihet [UN-soldiers will get greater mobility]. A portrait of one of the candidates of the presidential election in January 2000 (18 November 1999).
2. (M) Uffe Sunabacka, obunden grön: Kämpar för Grankullaelevernas bästa [Uffe Sunabacka, independent green: Fights for the best for the pupils in Grankulla]. The local politician Ulf-Johan Sunabacka wants to become elected in the town council by the next local election (18 November 1999).

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3. (M) Full rulle för 70-årig veteran [Full speed for 70 years old veteran]. A filmmaker celebrating his 70th birthday. A portrait interview with film director Carl Mesterton (21 November 1999).


Icelandic material

The two Icelandic morning papers are Dagur and Morgunblaðið. Dagur is the smallest newspaper published in Iceland, with a daily circulation of 7,200 or 7.8 per cent of all published copies. Dagur is divided into two sections. One is the main news section, featuring news of domestic and foreign events, along with sports. The other section has a more rural outlook in its editorial focus, where cultural events, daily life, folklore are highlighted from the various regional areas in rural Iceland. Morgunblaðið is by far the largest newspaper in Iceland with a circulation of ca. 55,000 copies published every day. This translates into 59 per cent of the newspaper market. In addition to the main daily news section, Morgunblaðið offers its readers a variety of supplements every day that cover a wide range of issues such as sports, children, business & economy, family, travel, automobiles, culture, real estate, along with the large Sunday section that contains a menu of photo essays, longer feature articles and interviews. The four portraits include two from each paper – two men and two women. The four Icelandic portrait interviews are:


Swedish material

Göteborgs-Posten and Dagens Nyheter contained 53 portraits in week 46. Göteborgs-Posten is based in Gothenburg and DN in Stockholm. They were at the time both full-sized papers with a circulation of 347,900 (Dagens Nyheter 1997) and 261,000 (Göteborgs-Posten 1997) seven days a week. Short description from 1999: Both papers are divided into three parts. Dagens Nyheter has section A for news & economy, B for culture and C for sports, and Stockholm. Göteborgs-Posten has a similar division, section 1 for news, 2 for sports and economy and 3 for culture. Within the three parts there are several subtopics. On Fridays and Saturdays there are weekend supplements (Aveny och Två dagar in Göteborgs-Posten and På Stan and Lördag söndag in Dagens Nyheter.) Portrait interviews can be found in all sections of the newspapers. The four chosen portraits from the Thursday and Sunday papers are:


2. (F) Ung komet i cyberrymden. Vi gratulerar [Young comet in cyberspace. We congratulate]. A birthday portrait of executive director Ann Sofi Fia Holmström, 25 years. Göteborgs-Posten (18 November 1999).


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