CHAPTER 15

Individual Focus and Exposure: Some Historical Tensions

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Individual focus, exposure and subjectivity in the media are complex phenomena, and have been the subject of much discussion. Understanding complexity often requires an attempt to understand the various historical circumstances from which a present-day phenomenon originated. What do we know about the origins of different kinds of journalism which have a focus on individuals in common?

This chapter is an outline of a few historical developments that can be seen as precursors to current modes and genres in the media where the individual in one way or another has a prominent role. The history of these genres is at the same time a history of tensions. These tensions may contribute to understanding why "putting a face on journalism" triggers such different reactions.

Keywords: Journalism history, debate, narratives, consumer news, individualisation, tabloidisation

Introduction

In this collection, we have presented examples of individual focus and exposure in journalism in a number of topics and genres, from political journalism via sports journalism to health journalism, from news and features to the use of photos. When we set out to study these complex phenomena, it was because we understand them both as relatively new, *and* as becoming exceedingly more

common in contemporary journalism. But we also regard them as complex. Are they good or bad for journalism, for the audience, for public debate?

Understanding complexity also often requires an attempt to understand the various historical circumstances that precede a present-day phenomenon. As all case studies in this book are of a synchronic nature, we will round off with a short outline of a few historical developments that we know, or have reason to believe, were the precursors to today's modes, genres and discussions.[1] We will concentrate on traits that have survived or that can tell us something about contemporary journalism. A look into the past may help us to understand the question we posed in the introduction: Why do different kinds of journalism – all having a focus on individuals – trigger such different reactions?

The history of many of today's discussions is at the same time a history of tensions. Tensions between commercialisation and democratisation, between different journalistic ideals, between the ideals of the press and the needs of the audience, etc.

Since one danger with today's rather ethnocentric, Anglo-American view of journalism is that one risks losing sight of all other local traditions, I will use examples from both "general" media history and from the Nordic countries. They often point in the same direction, but can also contribute towards filling in some gaps in the picture.

I. The sound of the public sphere

The first area of tension is about who should be heard in the public space, and in particular, *how*. This discussion is currently at the core of discussions on online comments, social media etc. The tension between opening up the public space to the public, so to speak, and the situation just a few decades ago when the press still held the indisputable role of gatekeeper, has created considerable attention – and will probably continue to do so.

An important point to remember is that early newspapers were full of so-called user-generated content. The audience was not only present, the audience *was* to a great extent the press, and the personal voice was the normal voice.

History has taught us that the press first arose as an answer to the public's need to exchange information, mainly about economic affairs. The journalist

1 This chapter is built on the author's paper presented at ICA 2017 (Fonn 2017).

did not even exist, news as we know it had not been invented, and the newspaper was most often a minor business in which the printer, the editor and the writer were one and the same man. The space that was not filled with ads, was mostly open to the audience, and this contributed to creating a public sphere (Chalaby, 1998; Eide, 2010; Schudson, 1978; Parsons, 1989).

Furthermore, genres were quite different from what we regard as newspaper content today – they could be poems, letters, travelogues, short reflections, essays, debates. Most of these were both personal and subjective genres – and at times even private.

The early attempts at giving the public the right to free speech, however, revealed the fact that debaters did not know how to differentiate between an identity as a private or public person (Eide, 2010, pp. 122–123). The themes were manifold, and it took time to become accustomed to having access to the public sphere. According to Høyer (1995), debates in old Norwegian newspapers could even be used to refute rumours about romantic relationships between members of the audience, as in an example cited from *Morgenbladet* in 1820 (p. 166). Furthermore, women's magazines, which must be seen as important sources of influence for much of today's media, had agony columns at least as early as the middle of the 1850s, and there is no doubt that the public voice was often present. According to *Guardian* columnist Catherine Hughes, the agony aunt column of the first British women's magazine (*The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, launched in 1855) had a spectacular fate: What started as an opportunity to seek advice on reluctant fiancés, difficult relationships etc., within a few years developed a life of its own. It slid into what Hughes calls "a downright pornographic" column, with a wave of personal and private confessions from readers, which the editors were unable to stop.[2]

In the regular press, political debate became ever more important as pervasive political changes in both America and many European countries laid down the principles of democracy and freedom of the press in the 18th and 19th centuries. These currents eventually reached the outskirts of Europe, e.g. Norway, which in the mid-19th century embarked on the road to parliamentarism. But even the political debate of those days could be quite personalised and subjective – not only in the sense that debaters were subjective on their own behalf, but also in the way that private circumstances and details of

2 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/dec/20/women-pressandpublishing

opponents' lives were heavily criticised. Political arguments could often be accompanied by mutual personal abuse (e.g. Eide, 2010, p. 227).

In England and America newspaper journalism started to resemble the press of today from the middle of the 19th century, when news became the paramount genre (Chalaby, 1998; Schudson, 1978). In many other countries this process was slower, although most countries eventually adopted the Anglo-American model. Many Scandinavian newspapers included genres throughout the 19th century that would not seem recognisable today, and were partisan newspapers until well into the post-war decades. Yet they also adjusted to the news paradigm as a parallel development from roughly the 1880s onwards (Ottosen, 2010, p. 173).

The institutionalisation of the press and the professionalisation of journalism contributed to narrowing down the space open to the audience. For one thing, this happened because professional newspaper writers outnumbered the debaters, so that "news" replaced "views". But it also helped to limit *how* the voice of the audience should sound. An immature public sphere was tamed. From Norwegian history we know that as the papers became more and more formalised as a social institution, they actively attempted to replace the emotional debate form with new genre norms more fitting to the new public sphere (Eide, 2010, p. 116). The press quite simply contributed to streamlining public debate by imposing certain frames for it.

Of course, these frames were not decided once and for all. The same struggle over the power to define what themes and what kind of language a public space could contain, has returned at each moment when new groups – labour, ethnic, gender – entered this sphere. The many publications that arose out of e.g. the labour movement gave much room to readers' letters (Chalaby, 1998, p. 26), but it took a long time before the debates and topics discussed among these readers reached the established press. The fact that some of them were even illegal for a long time, or that several editors throughout history have been imprisoned (f. ex. Chalaby, 1998; Eide, 2010; Ottosen, 2017) illustrates the point.

II. Facts or narratives

A second area of tension concerns the form of newspaper content – whether it should be "fact" or "narrative". One reason why broader parts of the audience gained access to public space was quite simply because more commercial

newspapers emerged. In the Anglo-American world, one can speak about at least two traditions from as early as the 1850s on: the "quality" newspaper for the upper echelons of society on the one hand, and the predecessors of modern tabloid journalism on the other (Schudson, 1978, p. 90).

In some kinds of publications, gossip and crime had been among the elements even as far back as the 18th century, but these genres started to proliferate when different kinds of cheaper publications started to emerge in the middle of the 19th century.

There are many theories about the rise of the so-called boulevard and penny papers. For one thing, new printing technology simply made them affordable to more people. But as cities grew, the relevant public grew as well. In traditional societies, most people knew their neighbours and their roles. In new urban societies, everyday life consisted of seeing a stream of strangers passing by. Who were they, how did they live, what happened in other parts of the city? With the new popular press, this led to the introduction of a hitherto unknown kind of surveillance of ordinary lives. In the US *The Sun*, established in 1833, changed journalism forever with its coverage of crime, as well as divorces and other details about personal lives (Spencer 2007). *The Sun* is also believed to have published the first ever piece about a suicide. In London at the same time, popular Sunday papers provided a mixture of sensation and sports, sex and crime, scattered with Dickensian poor and innocent victims (Chalaby, 1998; Sparks, 2000; Tulloch, 2000). In other words, they introduced the story or the narrative as a crucial ingredient in newspapers. The new press did not however cut out political content, but they gave their readers "a bundle" of stories, including "as much about political issues as they could give their attention to" (Hughes, 1940, p. 149, cited in Sparks, 2000, p. 20). In one way, newspapers became less informative. On the other hand, they may have packaged the necessary information in ways that made it more accessible to new groups of readers.

The rise of "tabloid" journalism sparked a controversy that points directly towards current discussions about individualisation of the media: The new public that emerged during the 19th century had the money necessary to make the newspaper industry grow (and particularly, the collective buying power to make business find it worthwhile to advertise in the papers). But they were also despised by the traditional upper and middle classes, as they had neither the

same education nor were believed to have the same rationality. "Instead they liked banner headlines, large drawings and photographs, snappy and spicy writing" – and human interest, as Schudson (1978) puts it. In fact, the middle classes probably also liked "banners and spice more than they cared to admit" (pp. 128–129). But the middle classes also needed to distinguish themselves from the new classes of newspaper readers. This can be seen as one important reason why two kinds of journalism continued to live side by side (ibid., p. 90): factual information and dispassionateness was closer to the ideals of the upper classes, in contrast to storytelling and a focus on emotion that was more cherished by a broader audience (and that the more privileged pretended not to care about).

III. The nature of narratives

A third area of tension is a "sub-tension" when it comes to narratives – it is about how real people should be represented in media narratives. Although tabloid-like journalism introduced more human interest, it does not necessarily follow that more people's voices were actually taken seriously. Crime and tragedy were still the surest ways most ordinary people had of making it to the news, and a mixture of considerable social inequality and poor press ethics did not always do much for the way they were represented. Chalaby (1998, p. 163) cites numerous examples from the end of the 19th century, like "Extraordinary Scare at Forest Hill", "Death from Excitement" and "Fire in Glasgow: Exciting Scenes".

In fact, news stories about crime, tragedies and other sensations bore with them an inherent risk – the risk of *othering* the individuals they wrote about, or identifying a visible difference between "worthy and unworthy" victims. In Norway, the tradition of popularised newspapers is much younger than overseas and dates back mainly to the 1930s, but the account of a murder in the quality paper *Aftenposten* from 1915 illustrates the problem *per se*: A young woman was killed in one of Oslo's poorest neighborhoods. She had been married for four days, and the newspaper's suspicion was immediately directed at her husband, a Swedish guest worker. Not only was the name of the guest worker disclosed at once, but the young murder victim was also described this way: "She was of the unfortunate kind that without hesitation moves in with any man who will give her a roof over her

head, something to eat and something to drink."[3] In other words, it was implied that she had it coming.

Many have pointed to the reportage as a more fruitful way of representing individuals, often even with an ambition to leave the realm of the high and mighty and capture reality as it "really" is. And there is some truth to this: Even in times when the audience's access to the media was limited, reportage was a genre where individuals could be more than one-dimensional walk-ons in the stories. One classic example is the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg's article series in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* from 1886, "Among French Farmers" (later published as a book, *Bland franska bönder*, in 1914). The story, to a great extent told through individual farmers, land-workers and their opinions, behaviour, clothing etc., visualises class difference in France, but the characters are complex human beings, never simple victims or offenders. They all have their good and bad sides, as human beings do.

The featuring of ordinary people's plight in reportage from this period ranges from the rather low-key portrait of the people in the French countryside to the both angry and sad account of child labour in John Spargo's *The Bitter Cry of the Children* from 1906. Young boys, often no more than nine or ten years old, destroyed their health, injured their hands or other limbs and could even lose their lives working in mines and quarries around the United States. If they survived, but were disabled, they were often thrown away as useless workers.

The examples of great reportage in journalism history are many, from the works of the social reformers of the British 19th century via the muckraking tradition in turn-of-the century America, to Martha Gellhorn's war reportages in the first half of the 20st century (for a brilliant overview of reportage, from pre-journalistic times as well as from the 19th and 20th centuries, se John Carey's edited collection *The Faber Book of Reportage*, 2003).

IV. Spectator or participant

The next area of tension relates to whether or not the personal voice of the journalist should be heard – and whether it is really possible for the journalist, who is as much a part of society as are their sources, to be solely a spectator?

3 Aftenposten 12 and 13 November 1915: https://eavis.aftenposten.no/aftenposten/51691/, https://eavis.aftenposten.no/aftenposten/51372/

This tension is of a rather new date, stemming from the introduction of the objectivity ideal in the beginning of the 20st century. Although many journalists still adhere to it, there has been no lack of debate about this ideal. The tension between subjectivity and objectivity in journalistic practice creates a considerable paradox, as some of the most prestigeous journalistic reportages were historically permeated with participation and a personal voice (Coward, 2013, p. 21). There is even a solid tradition in which journalists, openly or in disguise, have taken on the plight of the people they wanted to portray. If the objectivity ideal were an ex post facto law, it would in fact mean that some of the most cherished classics of journalism were not journalism.

The subjectivity-objectivity dimension is elaborated in more detail in chapter 2, and this discussion is in no way confined to narrative stories, but a few examples of narrative journalism can serve to make the point in this limited space. John Spargo tried to do the same work as the young boys at the quarries, had his hands cut and bruised and spat anthracite after only half an hour just like the young children. His contemporary Nellie Bly gained access to a mental hospital in Boston by pretending to have a psychiatric condition, and experienced the abuse, the freezing cold rooms and inedible food that the patients were subjected to (*Inside the Madhouse* from 1887).

Spargo's and Bly's actions were efficient ways of showing the realities of the milieus they described, but were also acts of empathy. Gellhorn's journalism is another well-known example – she is said to have introduced a new kind of subjective reporting both during the Spanish Civil War and later about the Holocaust. The new element was that she focused on the civilians as well as on leaders and military strategy – and also included her own reactions to the atrocities the civilians were subjected to (Coward, 2013, p. 28). This method of reporting travelled across borders: Gellhorn's contemporary, Norwegian Gerda Grepp, the first Scandinavian reporter to go to Spain in 1936, had exactly the same attitude to her work and included reports on how the war affected women, children and the wounded in hospitals (Vislie, 2016). Her colleague Lise Lindbæk risked her life to get the best stories from the war, and also functioned as a caregiver and nurse for the soldiers (Slapgard, 2003).

V. Enlightenment or trivialities

There is also a long-standing tension between enlightenment or public education and mere trivialities, which is particularly applicable to the

individualisation debate. Among other things, the 19th century saw a wide range of – often quite non-commercial – magazines and journals that first and foremost attempted to contribute to public enlightenment. Høyer (1995) has collected a number of fascinating newspaper names from 19th century Norwegian history, illustrating the wish of periodical makers to try and reach out to the people "out there" – such as *The Citizen's Friend*, *The People's Friend*, *The People's Voice*. Some were aimed at the least fortunate – as one title, *For the Poor Man*, illustrates well. Contact with the reader was, however, far more difficult to establish than for those publications targeting higher social strata. The editor of *For the Poor Man* had also soon to change its name: it turned out that its readers disapproved of being called poor – a message that was not conveyed directly to the editor, but through a group of teachers who worked among the poor.

One interesting thing about 18th and 19th century public enlightenment publications is, however, probably that this is where we find the origins of what Fairclough (2010, p. 98) calls "synthetic personalisation" – a way of addressing the readers which pretends to speak to each and every one of them. There is an obvious kinship between this more modern form and the early publications with encouragement and advice directed at the readers. A plethora of magazines – and this was as common in the outskirts of Europe as in the English-speaking world – could specialise in anything from the best fertilisers to how to read the Bible. The publications would call on ordinary people to read books, or provide them with recipes for healthy food. A Norwegian magazine, established in 1810, directed particularly at people in the countryside, included information on how to best preserve one's clothes, how to harvest wild plants, the harmfulness of tobacco – or good advice to young people who were on their way out into the world (Eide, 2010, pp. 189–191).

There is quite simply a tradition alongside the regular press where one finds many examples of the features that today are often described as reader-oriented. What the editor of *The Poor Man* probably did wrong, however, was that he did not know his public. Regional newspapers, local newspapers, and papers directed at certain groups – like political periodicals – were more successful. And again women's magazines can be used as an example. Even in century-old magazines one can find many features that resemble today's reader-directed consumer news – like home economics, lifestyle, relationships, health issues and Q&A columns. These magazines' comprehensive

coverage of homemaking – recipes, nutrition, food preservation etc. – are often regarded as mere trivialities today, but were important information that very likely contributed to improving public health and even reducing the risk of infectious disease (Hagemann, 2013; Fonn, 2013).

Eide and Knight (1999) have pointed to the fact that this kind of journalism – which they call service journalism – was a natural result of modernity. People broke away from their traditional communities and their ascribed roles, and needed new advice on how to maneuver in a new and complex world. They also had money to spend, which led to a new relationship between news and advertising. Current discussions about content marketing (which very often uses synthetic personalisation) are in no way new – journalism history is full of examples of "news" which in reality was advice on what to buy (f. ex. Ottosen 2010, pp. 156, 278).

VI. Personalisation of power

The last aspect of individual focus and exposure which we will try put into a historical context – and which is also rife with tension – is the personalisation of people with power.

In modern times different kinds of personalisation of powerful people, most notably politicians, have been criticised for taking the political out of politics and replacing it with prying into other people's private lives, or confusing a politician's personal qualities with the qualities of his or her political party – which has certainly often been the case. But personalisation has also been a powerful tool to make power accountable – of bringing people with power down from their pedestal.

Challenging the power elites became common in the 19th century, and thereby began the first real instances of personalisation of power in the way we recognise it today. Accountability is to an extent dependent on some kind of communication with the public, that people with power appear as real persons of "flesh and blood". It is interesting to note Michael Schudson's account (1994, see also 1978, p. 66) of the introduction of the interview in American journalism in the 19th century (whereupon it spread to Europe). One hundred and fifty years ago the interview was still not in common use. According to Schudson, American journalists could use interviewing as a method of collecting information as early as during Abraham Lincoln's presidency, but making

politicians accountable by actually quoting what they say, did not become common until late in the century.

Pre-interview personalisation of the powerful can however be found at least as early as in the 1830s in Norwegian press history. The first known Norwegian investigative journalist was Peder Soelvold, who edited the newspaper *Statsborgeren* (*The Citizen*) from 1831 to 1835. He was intent on making peasants and other common people – "the little man in society" anno the 1830s – aware of their rights, and on making sure that the authorities followed the law. His writings were characterised by personalised attacks on civil servants and members of parliament – even by using "perfidious jargon" (Eide, 2010, p. 221, see also Høyer 1995, pp. 203 ff). Perfidious jargon did not necessarily do much for the cause in the short run, at least not for Soelvold himself, neither did the fact that some of his accusations could never be verified. He was libelled, imprisoned and died in a poorhouse at forty-eight. But in the long run even the unwise and daring acts of people like Soelvold probably contributed to dismantling any undue respect for people in power, and making investigations on behalf of the public acceptable.

By the first decades of the 20th century, press researchers can find various examples of "confrontational" interviews in Norway, but on the other hand fewer exampes of investigative journalism (Ottosen, 2010, p. 173). American investigative journalism of the same period, the so-called progressive era, is however well known internationally – journalists from different Western countries often refer to the so-called muckraking period as extremely influential. Both Spargo and Bly belonged to that tradition (Bly was even the first journalist to be given the name muckraker), but a considerable share of the original muckraking stories concentrated on the interests of the public through disclosing power abuse among business leaders and politicians. Ida Tarbell's *History of the Standard Oil Company* from 1904 (first published in *McClure's Magazine* in 1902) is among other things an exposure of the aggressive techniques John D. Rockefeller used to make his Standard Oil Company a major business monopoly.

Another parallel, and to an extent intertwined, tradition stems from – again – the spreading of the news paradigm in the 19th century. News meant a focus on the timely – and as the word implies – the new. Politics however was – and is – a continuous process. As Chalaby (1998, p. 83) puts it: "To report on politics, the past needs to be constantly reactualized and this proved

increasingly difficult for journalists whose time reference concentrates on the last 12 or 24 hours." In Britain, this led as early as in the 1880s to a coverage of politics that became "increasingly focused on personal issues and political figures, rather than on political issues and political principles. A major aspect of the personalisation of public life by journalists was the disclosure of politicians' private life" (ibid., p. 76).

What was lost as a result of this development? Before personalisation, major British newspapers published, among other things, parliamentary proceedings from beginning to end. On one hand, it is easy to see that this was a genre that did not appeal to everyman. But Chalaby argues that with the replacement of parliamentary proceedings by news (including what one must assume was increased use of interviews with politicians), some of the accountability disappeared, as the public no longer had direct access to political negotiations (Chalaby, 1998). The partisan press which developed in Norway at the same time was also characterised by long and detailed reports from political meetings. They were gradually replaced by interviews, but as late as in the beginning of the 1950s, these reports constituted an important journalistic genre (Hjeltnes, 2010, pp. 251ff). In these reports, readers could see dialogues between politicians almost like in a play (Ottosen, 2010, p. 182).

Empowerment and exploitation

The affluent years of post-war society saw the rise of a new consumer society, securing wealth and welfare for new groups. The question of whether the developments described above meant "dumbing down or reaching out" (Sparks, 2000, p. 8) did not become less important as the 20th century proceeded.

At the same time, the tendency in journalism to put more weight on the individual and personal was strengthened, as a result of more influential tabloid newspapers, more use of photography, the introduction of television etc. – and subsequently also what Sparks (2000, p. 22) describes as a "mild tabloidisation" of the quality media. The rise of increasing individual focus and exposure has probably led to both an empowerment of the "little man" and an enrichment of the media, but also to unwanted exposure and exploitation – and consequently has created new tensions. It is safe to say that it has not always expanded the understanding of the lives of other human beings.

Individuals exposed in the media for example often still remain one-dimensional characters whose primary role is to fit into a more paramount frame.

Each new step in media development has led to new ways of presenting people, addressing sources and the audience, and even new ways of presenting and staging the journalist. Each new step has also led to deepened tensions and renewed concern for where journalism is heading: As Zelizer (2000, p. ix) for example has pointed out, after some years of television the initial criticism waned, but was replaced by criticism of the more superficial kinds of television programmes instead.

The personal as political

The social changes of the 1960s and 70s in particular introduced new topics and new ways of talking in the public sphere. The freedom revolution associated with this period entailed a myriad of liberty movements where new groups claimed public attention, but one important and distinct feature was the focus on women's personal experiences under the motto "the personal is political". This movement did not initially strike a particularly strong chord either with quality or tabloid journalism, since this large group of readers was still often confined to the women's pages. Within a decade, these ideas had however spilled over into journalism in many ways (helped by a surge in female journalists). Topics formerly thought of as female – and thereby marginal – were increasingly reflected in news media, with papers and magazines advocating feminist issues like women's health, workplace equality, abortion rights etc. The former "female" journalism has probably influenced contemporary journalism greatly, as it brought health as well as a broad range of other formerly "private" issues – regardless of gender – into the public sphere (Coward, 2013; Hjeltnes, 2010). A long-term effect (which can also be attributed to the rise of New Journalism in the same period) is a more personal voice on the part of the journalist. New tensions arose from a rising tendency to include experiences that would earlier be regarded as private, and is among the many things explored in Coward's *Speaking Personally* – aptly subtitled *The Rise of Subjective and Confessional Journalism* (2013).

A more affluent society and more focus on everyday life also led to an explosion in consumer news. Edifying articles from the 19th century turned into what is today called service journalism, reader-oriented "more use than news"

journalism or how-to journalism, often with the use of "synthetic personalisation". The tension between enlightenment and triviality still prevails – there is an ongoing discussion about whether journalism has now reached the uttermost borders of triviality, and the fact that the relative new-comer *content marketing* can often be hardly distinguished from this genre contributes to its bad reputation.

With the increased focus on the market and the rise of economic and business news directed at a broader public from the 1980s on, another inherent tension can also be noted: between reader-directed news that is useful to all the individuals it pretends to address, and news that in reality both requires and enhances a kind of competition among the readers. Stock market advice, and advice on market trends relating to buying or selling homes are typical examples (Fonn, 2015).

A potent combination

The – preliminary – peak of journalism's crusade for accountability must be said to have been reached when an American president had to leave office after the Watergate scandal in 1973. This important event in modern journalism history[4] also clearly illustrates how the two traditions of investigative journalism and individual exposure have somewhat merged into one – the scandal. It is currently difficult to imagine the media without the potent combination of power (in particular politicians), accountable individuals, and the scandal. Even in the Scandinavian countries, who have always lagged a bit behind the Anglo-American world when it comes to introducing new media phenomena, scandals have become much more common during the last few decades (Midtbø, 2007; Allern & Pollack, 2009).

Individual exposure, however, has its limitations where accountability is concerned, as it often means that one person is sacrificed, whereas the problems or misdeeds the press wanted to address continue as before. The advances that, after all, have been made in making power accountable during the last century or so also do not necessarily mean that all journalism about people with power has become especially irreverent. After more than a century in

4 Watergate was much less of an impressive journalistic masterpiece than the myth will have it, but on the other hand, the myth has played a particularly important part in legitimising journalism's role as a public watchdog (e.g. Zelizer, 1993).

which accountability has been a driving force behind the journalistic watchdog ideal, a considerable part of the increased focus on powerful individuals still consists of mostly uncritical celebrity news. There is widespread curiosity on the part of both the media and the public about who these people who run the country (or make a lot of money in business) are, and there sometimes seems to be as much interest in how political and other leaders live, as in how they work. But even this tendency may be attributed to some kind of democratisation – it can be seen as the preliminary last stage in closing the gap between the elite and the "people", the gap between those who govern and the governed, but it is also based on a need and a wish for authenticity in contemporary culture (Coward, 2013, p. 3; see also Enli, 2015).

Concluding remarks

This outline has given some historical context to the currents of individual focus and exposure that we see in the media of today: the history of the audience as media makers, the tension between "facts" and narratives, the tension between tabloid-style human interest and more in-depth reportage, the possible connection between public enlightenment and "reader-oriented" journalism, and the background for the personalisation of politics. All this can hopefully contribute to an understanding of what kinds of individual focus, individual exposure and subjectivity we are dealing with when we study the media – and why there are so many differing opinions on putting a face on journalism.

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