The aim of this licentiate thesis is to analyse how femininity is constructed in twelve portrait interviews of women in the dailies Dagens Nyheter (Stockholm) and Huvudstadsbladet (Helsinki) in September 1996, and to explore the portrait interview as a media genre. The qualitative analysis has a feminist and constructionist perspective and is connected to critical text analysis. It was carried out on two levels: first, femininity is identified on the linguistic level by choice of words, and second on the level of content (topical motifs/themes). The portrait interview as a genre constitutes a third dimension in the analysis: The aim is not towards the identification of femininity, but rather towards the identification of the portrait interview - a relatively unexplored media genre.

References (Swedish: omtal) to the principal character (or protagonist) are traced mainly through reference chains which consist of names, pronouns and substantive phrases. The interviewees were referred to by their full names in Dagens Nyheter (with the exception of the oldest and youngest interviewees, both of whom were mainly referred to by their first names), while the style of reference varied more in Huvudstadsbladet. The position of the principal character was also analysed through her relation in the text to minor characters from her working life and from her private life. These minor characters maintained their subordinate positions in all of the portraits except that of the youngest principal character, in which the subsidiary voices became at least as strong as the voice of the principal character.

Three frequently-recurring topical motifs occurred in the portraits: The first involved explanations for the principal character's success divided into three categories, agent, affect and ambition, the second concerned using journeys or trips as symbols for turning points in life, and the third referred to the ambiguity in the contradiction between private (family/other private life) and public (work) life. This ambiguity is connected to the portrait interview as a text type (genre) which features conclusions at the end of portraits, which in turn is characteristic of reportage. However, the analysis showed that the conclusions of the portrait interviews often also included elements of ambiguity. This was evident in the contradictions between private and public life that arose in the portrait interviews that focused on these two spheres. The portraits that focused on the principal character's public life showed ambiguity on a more general level concerning questions about being a woman and having a profession, and they often ended with a description of some details of her private life.

The women in the portraits were all constructed as being successful, in terms of having achieved direct success, reflective success or success in the form of life wisdom. The women of direct success were described as ambitious individuals with no side-tracks on their life paths, while those of reflective success were described as active heroines who had received help from different agents, who could use their affects as enriching ingredients in life, but who in the end had control over their own lives (life stories). The elderly women were constructed as having achieved life wisdom and their portraits were focused upon the past.

The portrait interview as a genre is characterised by journalistic freedom (in relation to the more strict news genre), by a "now room" (Swedish "nurum") where the journalist meets the principal character (usually via spoken dialogue that she or he transforms into written text to be read by a mass-media audience) and by the relatively closed structure of the portrait. The portrait is relatively independent in relation to the news genre and in relation to the context of what has previously been written, what is being written at the time and what will be written in the future - the principal character does not need to belong to the newspaper's usual gallery of actors. Furthermore, the principal character is constructed as being, independent in relation to the subsidiary characters and other media actors. The conflict is within the principal character herself and within her life story, unlike the news genre in which equal actors are in conflict with each other. The portrait is also independent in relation to the news life-span; the publishing timetable is not as strict as in the news genre, but is still dependent on the factors initiating the portrait.

The enclosures consist of a "raw analysis" of the twelve portrait interviews and of copies of the portraits.