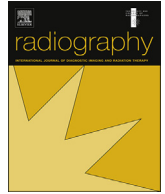




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Radiography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/radi

Who are they? Identities in the Norwegian radiographer profession as presented in the Norwegian printed press

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 May 2016

Received in revised form

19 July 2016

Accepted 21 July 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Occupational distinctiveness

Discourse analysis

Media

Public dissemination

ABSTRACT

Purpose: To explore how Norwegian radiographers are portrayed in written press.*Method:* Textual discourse analysis, following a multiple step strategy, combining both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. 189 newspaper articles were included. The articles were registered and subject fields were inductively categorized. Each subject field was analysed regarding the field's role as an agent of influence on public perception of radiographers.*Results:* On average, less than one article a year concerning radiography profession is published in Norwegian newspapers. A majority are published in newspapers with small circulation figures, often reporting on resources in the local health services where radiographers are involved. Mostly radiographers are placed in the articles' background playing supporting roles, frequently mentioned in the cutline as an operator of a new medical technology. There is a heavy emphasis on the technology, leaving the specialized expertise and radiography knowledge out. This focus persist in the instances where radiographers play a main role in the texts. When patient stories are told, positive value-laden words are used to describe the radiographer and both the technical and the patient-care aspects of being a radiographer are noticeable.*Conclusion:* Norwegian radiographers typically appear, in glimpses, as anonymous allied health technicians in local reports on new diagnostic equipment or resource utilization. The professional qualities and decisive skills required to handle sophisticated diagnostic equipment and continuity of patient care are underestimated. A more-nuanced media coverage might give radiographers a strengthened identity as important health-care service contributors.

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Introduction

Traditionally, studies of health professions have been centred on medical doctors, nurses, and physical therapists. The extensive knowledge base developed within these professions has contributed to respect and confidence, and thus to support in professional conflicts of interest. In addition to efficient patient care, radiographers are responsible for handling expensive and complex diagnostic equipment and hold specialized knowledge that is unavailable to the general population. To benefit from the public's confidence and support for radiographers, it is important to legitimize this unbalanced relationship by systematically unveiling the radiographers' profession and identity.

Identity can be defined as "the sets of meanings people hold for themselves that define 'what it means' to be who they are as persons, as role occupants, and as group members."¹ The scientific knowledge base of radiographers exists between advanced imaging technology and patient care. Their professional identity is developed in between this duality,² where conflicting epistemological disparities, after all, interact. The Norwegian Society of Radiographers politically emphasizes a strong professional identity among radiographers.^{3,4} In spite of this, only a few studies have aimed to describe aspects of identity formation in radiographers, and, possibly because of the aforementioned duality, previous findings are rather ambiguous. Radiographers are found to have an increased technical emphasis^{5,6} in addition to a safety and a professional discourse.² There has been an evolving research identity among some radiographers,^{7,8} while perceived subordination has resulted in poor professional identity along with poor autonomy and a poor sense of responsibility in others.⁹ In regard to patient care, positive attitudes for interacting with elderly patients are

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found,¹⁰ but radiographers also differ in their approach to taking the time to adequately inform patients.¹¹

Besides the dispersed and limited number of studies, the picture of vocational identity has been drawn largely from radiographers' descriptions or observations in the diagnostic department. Identity can indeed be explored by studying the tangible and specific professional duties of radiographers, as well as their clothing and equipment. However, as identity is both relational and contextual, the construction of identity also takes place in the interaction with others, as pointed out also by Decker.⁶ Taking a constructivist perspective, the way radiography is construed by the population in general is highly significant in studying identity formation.

Perceptions of a particular phenomenon are formed partially by the way the phenomenon is discussed by others, and one might assume that newspapers could provide proper presentations of whatever phenomenon is being discussed. According to critical discourse analysis¹² and discourse psychology,¹³ however, language has the ability to preserve, strengthen, or weaken relations in terms of their power; thus, it is never neutral. Language users will always have particular interests or perspectives reflected in their choice of words and expressions. Consequently, newspapers' presentations of the radiography profession play an important part in people's ideas about radiographers. An increased awareness of the impact of various discourses on the development of their professional role, according to Boyes,¹⁴ could also be helpful in their continuing professional development (CPD). The idea is that discourse and identity are thus interrelated.

Referring to the journal of the Norwegian Society of Radiographers (NRF),¹⁵ Norwegian radiographers are currently concerned with role extension, radiation protection, and working conditions in general. There are reasons to expect that other issues are prioritized in newspaper articles presented for the general public. Analyses of subject fields in newspapers may enable radiographers to more adequately identify mistaken presentations and discuss strategies to adjust the picture. The aim of this study is, therefore, to explore how Norwegian radiographers are portrayed in the printed press.

Method and materials

Computerized searches were conducted in the Retriever database (Atekst), which is Scandinavia's largest digital, high-quality news archive providing access to information not generally available on the Internet. Original articles from all of the major Norwegian printed newspapers and several union publications and magazines (not the journal of NRF) are retrievable.¹⁶ The aim was to identify all relevant articles published in Norway during the last five years.

The only search term was the truncated term Radiographer*. There was no upper limit for any manageable number of identified documents before the documents could be reviewed, thus no further limitations were imposed on the search.

As shown in Fig. 1, the search identified 369 documents, and after screening documents according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, a sample of 189 articles remained for initial categorization.

Data excerption and analysis

All documents included were imported into Nvivo11¹⁷ to organize, analyse, and gain insight into the material. The analysis followed a multiple-step strategy, combining both a quantitative and a qualitative approach to what is referred to as document analysis¹⁸ or textual discourse analysis.¹⁹

Considering the documents as a container filled with content,²⁰ the first step was to manually and inductively label each article

with keywords based on its main topic and thereafter categorize articles with similar topic. The frequency of each subject field indicated the extent of media coverage during the last five years. Thereafter, the sources (newspapers) were divided into four categories based on their average circulation figures. The coded articles were then counted by newspaper circulations to clarify any imbalance.

A further analysis was aimed at how radiographers are portrayed in the media, thereby illuminating the articles' roles as active agents,²⁰ simultaneously shifting towards the fields of critical discourse analysis.¹² The initial step was to mark the text where the word *radiographer* occurred, and then to decide whether the radiographer's position was in the *foreground*, having a leading role, or in the *background*, relegated to a supporting role with less importance. Counting instances of both positions illustrated how radiographers were described by these terms within each category and said something about how the professional image of radiographers emerged to the reader through the Norwegian media.

Eventually, the denomination of the words describing the radiographers in both the foreground and the background was thoroughly analysed. Positive or not-positive wordings and value-laden adjectives used in describing radiographers' work imply whether readers get a favourable or less-than-favourable impression of the profession and radiographers' professional knowledge.

Both radiographers' positions and denominations were analysed by subject field to reveal accumulations in any category. The entire analysis process was completed jointly by two researchers to ensure consensus in coding the data, thereby increasing the study's validity.

Results

Based on analyses from a sample of 189 articles in 69 different Norwegian newspapers, a profile of the Norwegian radiographer's representation in the written media was drawn. The first section of results presents subject fields; the second deals with the qualitative aspects of appearance, providing examples from the analysed texts.

Subject fields

The introductory coding procedure resulted in 19 different subject fields. The seven largest categories (>10 articles per subject field) are shown in Table 1. The "other" category, containing twelve small subject fields (<5 articles per field) included union work, history, Health Safety and Environment (HSE), working conditions, role development, training and education, overconsumption of diagnostic services, privacy, popular science, stories from radiographers outside Norway, and recruitment. Due to each field's small number of articles, these were not included in the further analyses.

The total distribution of newspaper articles across subject fields was fairly even, although excluding the "other" category, there was a larger proportion of articles concerning issues on *organization, capacity, waitlists* and the like (Table 1, first column). The category of *manpower: supply and demand* had similar features; therefore, the two categories could be considered together (for a total number of 67 articles). Consequently, more than two-fifths of the newspaper articles written about radiographers in Norway during the chosen period reported on issues concerning challenges and difficulties due to resources in the health services domain in which radiographers are involved.

Excluding the "other" category, the three smallest subject fields were *patient stories, emergency preparedness, and mobile x-ray*, with 15, 16, and 16 included articles, respectively. The remaining categories included either articles about *mammography* and/or *breast cancer* or *new technology/equipment* (24 articles each). Together, the

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