"LIFE GOT EASIER WHEN LISE AND LARS LOST 20 KILOS."

BUT WHY DID WE WRITE IT THAT WAY?

SUMMARY

A feature report on possible blind angels in case-driven journalism, using the launch of the weight-loss drug Wegovy in Denmark as a focal point.

By

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Content

Prologue

I hung up the phone long after I'd actually wanted to end the conversation.
The source had a lot on her mind.
She was disappointed with the newspaper – or more precisely: with me.
She had agreed to be featured as a case in an article about the greatest fears of larger bodied people – in meeting rooms, at the doctor's office, in cafés, and in many Danish homes.[1]
The Series 7 chair with its delicate legs.

Despite the population's weight development, the iconic Danish design classic had only been tested to support people weighing up to a maximum of 110 kilos, and Fritz Hansen Design had declined to comment on whether it was considering increasing the weight limit for its furniture – just as it had, years earlier, extended the legs of its chairs in recognition that Danes were getting taller.

Focusing on the Series 7 chair – beloved and widely recognized in Denmark – was, we thought, a clever way of drawing readers into an article about weight stigma in society. A topic we considered perhaps just as important – or even more important – than the many stories about the weight-loss drug Wegovy that were dominating the public agenda in early 2023.[2]

The source didn't exactly disagree with us on that.

The problem was simply that she didn't recognize herself in the printed version of the article lying in front of her.
She thought she sounded and looked "fat in a depressing way," which didn't match the strong and vibrant person she was – the kind who, on Instagram, wasn't shy about dancing in front of the camera.

Both I and the photographer had been quite pleased with the photos of the three case subjects in the article, which was part of our series on weight stigma.
I had even deliberately chosen the photo of her for print because, against the dark background, with her back turned to the reader and a slightly shy glance over her shoulder, she reminded me of the expression in Johannes Vermeer's famous painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.

If there's one thing that makes journalists roll their eyes, it's sources who want to control the final product – but I removed "the worst photo" from the online article and replaced it with one of the "least worst."
Yes, the pictures were dark. And yes, the three case subjects might have looked a bit somber and serious.
But they were still beautiful images.

And after all, it was a serious topic – which I had explicitly asked the photographer to consider.

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[1] "**They fear the chair in the meeting room", Jamilla Sophie Alvi, Thomas Lund Hansen, Jyllands-Posten 2023**

[2] **2021:** Wegovy is approved in the U.S. for the treatment of obesity.
Early 2022: The medication is approved in the EU and thereby also in Denmark.
Mid to late 2022: Interest grows significantly. More Danes begin seeking the treatment, both through doctors and alternative channels.
2023: Wegovy becomes widely available in pharmacies across Denmark. Its use accelerates, and the medication becomes part of many Danes' weight loss strategies. At the same time, a broad debate emerges about ethics, inequality, and accessibility in the healthcare system, as the treatment is not covered by public health insurance.
Source: *How Wegovy is changing Denmark, Sundhedspolitisk Tidsskrift 2023*

It's only today that I truly understand her objection.

When I reread some of my own articles now, I often spot implicit bias peeking through – in the angles I chose and the sources I highlighted.

That's not necessarily bad, problematic, or wrong.

I just wish I had more often been aware of the underlying reasons behind my choices of angle.

Because I must admit that even though I frequently went looking for a strong case, I sometimes ended up, unconsciously, pushing a victim narrative that robbed the case of agency, because I was not aware of my blind spots.

Sometimes you need distance or to read more books to see the world more clearly.

Or take a shortcut that illustrates the importance of greater diversity in newsrooms:
Talk to a colleague who wasn't shaped by the same cultural dough you were baked from.

In August 2024, I had an Australian visiting researcher from the Constructive Institute over for dinner at my home. We talked about blind spots in media and workplaces.

I offered an insider perspective on how unconscious stereotypes about immigrants persist, speaking as one of the country's few mixed-race journalists.

She listened attentively, and later that evening she shared an observation from a month she had spent in Denmark to something I had been entirely oblivious to:

"There's a constant stream of remarks and comments about bodies, weight, exercise, and eating habits – and lack of self-discipline. Australians are an outspoken bunch, but some of the things I have noticed here would be considered fatphobic even back home. … I don't think you can even hear it yourselves…"

She was right – I hadn't been able to hear it or see it.
Not until she pointed it out.
And had she, back in 2023, read the first 13 lines of the following feature article from *Berlingske Tidende*, she likely would have felt affirmed in her impression.
The headline read: **"Overweight People Cost the Treasury Billions"**[3]

[3] https://www.berlingske.dk/business/overvaegtige-laegger-mindst-15-milliarder-til-danmarks-sundhedsudgifter

BERLINGSKE

Overvægtige koster statskassen milliarder hvert år

12. februar 2023, Berlingske, Sektion 1, Side 16, Birgitte Erhardtsenog Vibeke Lyngklip Svansø..., 1762 ord, Id: e9676a8e

For overvægtige Trine Buhl er Novo Nordisks nye slankemiddel Wegovy vendepunktet, der har ændret hendes liv: »Det er mind-blowing.«.

Fedmeepidemien raser i Danmark som aldrig før. I gennemsnit har vi lagt syv til otte kilo ekstra fedt på kroppen siden 1987. Halvdelen af os er overvægtige, og lægger man det hele sammen, bærer vi tilsammen rundt på 35.000 ton mere fedt end for 36 år siden. Den byrde koster samfundet milliarder og atter milliarder.

Overvægtige koster statskassen milliarder hvert år

3 sider

At opbygge så meget fedt svarer til, at vi i alt har konsumeret 1,4 milliarder cheeseburgere ud over det, vi havde brug for.

This feature report portrays my attempt to understand some of the ways blind spots shape our journalism.

The word bias has in the later years drifted from a neutral academic term into a charged political symbol, partly due to its portrayal as a weapon of ideological influence under Trump's administration.

And even you when you read the word, you might be thinking:
"Oh, so now we're not even allowed to write anything anymore? To say things as they are. Does everything have to be *safe spaces* now—are we all tiptoeing on eggshells just to avoid offending someone, until we end up at a suffocating meeting in a 1968ish hippie commune where everyone must be heard and, ten hours later, no decision has been made?"

This isn't about offense.
It's about developing the best possible critically minded journalism — journalism that serves no agenda and is more truly aspirational objective.

Having bias is natural.

Even helpful. Without such mental shortcuts, we would be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information we face every second.

It helps us to navigate swiftly in the world, and were I dead set on writing total unbiased journalism, I would not get anything done.

We are all part of groups, and we are all subject to group psychology.
Our thinking and behavior often follow the herd.
If we're not aware of that, our journalistic choices can be co-opted against our will.
We can end up being unintentionally activist—or unwittingly contributing to the marketing of a pharmaceutical company's weight-loss drug—instead of staying focused on serving the public interest.

It's easier to hit pause on your inner autopilot when you know which narratives in society are shaping you.

There's already a lot of strong journalism in Denmark that dares to challenge dominant ideas and values. And fortunately, there are journalists who manage to free themselves from what's sometimes called *mainstream bias* — the tendency to stick to familiar newsroom or societal narratives for fear of professional or social backlash.

That might mean asking whether the small guy is really the one being mistreated by the big municipality — or if the story is more complex.

It could be about telling the full, nuanced story when parents of a severely ill child are fighting for access to expensive experimental medicine — including the difficult questions about how that might affect the sustainability of the healthcare system.

Or it might mean stopping to reflect: Am I becoming a 'trauma-chaser'? Someone who instinctively focuses on isolated, emotional personal stories and presents them as typical or representative.

It could even be about checking yourself before writing too optimistically about Ukraine's military progress — and asking whether you're, without meaning to, stepping into a long journalistic tradition of letting partisanship and nationalism cloud judgment in times of war.[4]

In the chapters that follow, I'll describe how I used AI to help me identify patterns and possible implicit bias in some of the case stories about losing weight, which Danish media published during the winter months of 2022—when the Wegovy wave truly began rolling through Denmark.

An important disclaimer:
The methods used in this feature report do **not** meet the standards of a scientific article, and this is by no means a thorough analysis with a scientifically airtight conclusion.
But it's a small test patch.

And maybe it can inspire the use of AI as a tool to challenge our blind spots, even though AI is just as biased as the material it's trained on, but sometimes AI can act as the most unbiased and brutally honest editor available – and the best part is, you're free to ignore the feedback if you find it off base.

At the same time, I warmly invite media scholars to collaborate on creating a meaningful bias-sparring partner — one that can both support the media profession and bring serious academic insight into the structural and cultural influences shaping Danish journalism today.

This report is meant solely as a conversation starter in journalistic newsrooms.

And to do that, I will present several types of bias that may be relevant for journalists to understand — and include conversations with two researchers and an HR director about how bias and masterplots are being addressed in the Danish media landscape.

Chapter 1: How Neutral Are We?

Denmark's national broadcaster, DR, emphasizes in its Public Service contract the importance of being impartial, fair, and balanced in its news coverage.

[4] Media Experts: There Are Three Fundamental Problems with the Media's Coverage of the War in Ukraine, Politiken, 2022

And in the original editorial pillars of *Jyllands-Posten*, it is stated that the paper's journalism should be guided by a pursuit of objectivity.

That didn't stop Per Nyholm, the newspaper's former foreign correspondent, from offering the following reflection on his 60th anniversary with the paper:

"In the beginning, I was instilled with so-called objectivity—something I, two generations later, don't quite believe in. Even the stories a journalist writes stem from a subjective choice. A journalist should be fair. That should be enough."

What "fair" means remains uncertain, but the idea of aspiring to objectivity still functions as a guiding principle among journalists—both in Denmark[5] and abroad.

Journalists often endorse ideals like objectivity and neutrality, but international studies show a systematic gap between these ideals and actual journalistic practice (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014)[6]. This is partly due to organizational, political, and commercial constraints that limit journalistic autonomy.
As a result, objectivity often functions more as an ideal than as a consistently practiced standard.

In the fall of 2024, the Constructive Institute hosted a visit from one of the leading researchers on media bias and human negativity bias.

Stuart Soroka from the University of Michigan arrived somewhat disheartened—still processing what, for him, had been a disappointing U.S. election.

As he sat there in the chair, telling us about his many years of analyzing the ratio of positive and negative words in media content, he confronted not just us in the room—but our entire media industry.

We're caught in an evolutionary remnant—both as news producers and news consumers—that scholars trace all the way back to when it quite literally paid off to perk up your ears and react quickly if something rustled in the grass.

Negativity bias stems from our tendency to assign more weight to negative experiences and information than to positive ones. It plays a key role in how we perceive and respond to the world around us.
A single negative comment or event can overshadow countless positive ones, because our brains are wired to prioritize potential threats and dangers. The very survival mechanisms that once helped us respond quickly to risk may now, ironically, trip us up.

Negativity bias affects everything from personal relationships to how we consume the news.
When three or four of the top stories on a news site's front page carry a negative tone—who's responsible?

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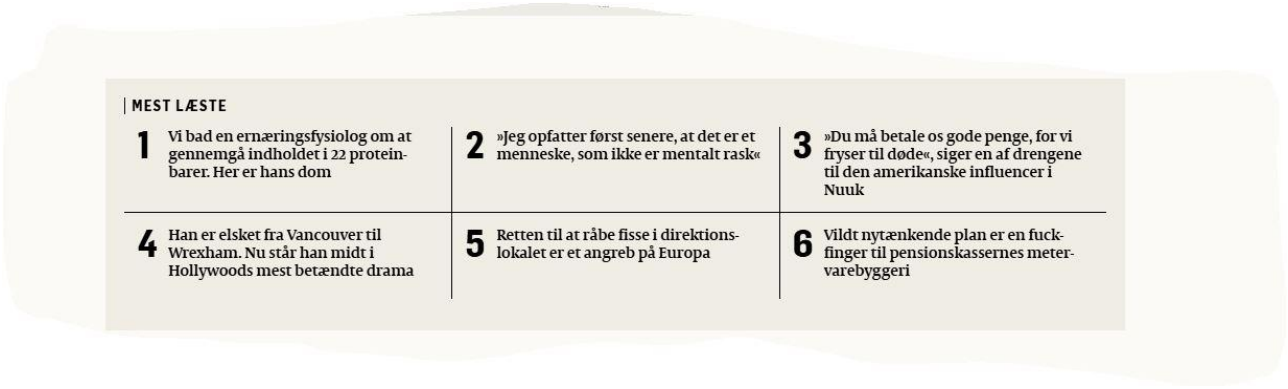
[5] In 2015, researchers from the Centre for Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark conducted the first major study among Danish journalists on their professional ideals and values. The conclusion, presented in the subsequent book *The Danish Journalist: Values, Production, Content*, was that objectivity is still upheld as a core value.

[6] Journalists' Professional Roles and Role Performance, Claudio Mellado (2019) Oxford University Press

Is it us, the journalists, making editorial choices shaped by our own negativity bias? Or is it the readers, who respond to and demand these stories? Or is it both?

In journalism, negativity bias can mean that negative stories tend to grab more attention and evoke stronger emotions than positive ones. This can influence not only how news is framed, but how audiences come to perceive reality.

Just like on an ordinary Saturday—January 18th at noon—on the front page of *Politiken's* website, where the most-read articles are as follows:



[7]

In the report *The Increasing Viability of Good News* (2022)[8], Stuart Soroka points out that actors who spread fake news and polarization benefit from the human psychological tendency to focus on negative, conflict-laden, and threatening information.

Using automated analyses of the language in thousands of news articles, he and his team document that negative emotion words far outnumber positive ones in frequency.
This does not necessarily mean that negative news is bad in itself — or that the audience does not also demand positive stories. The crucial question is rather when and how positive stories can work journalistically and still engage.

When the editor-in-chief calls for more constructive or uplifting content, one must therefore take into account, Soroka said, that both the journalist's and the audience's instincts pull in another direction — and that the solution is not necessarily just more positive content, but more conscious strategies for how all types of news are conveyed and how they resonate within the emotional landscape.
In the white paper *Constructive Journalism – Needs and Background, Goals and Models*[9], the work on bias is highlighted as important – and it refers, among other things, to the value set of the Dutch media

[7] Cut out from Politiken.dk, Translation: 1. We asked a nutrition physiologist to review the contents of 22 protein bars. Here is his verdict.2. I realized only later that it was a person, not a mental patient. 3. You'll have to pay good money, because we laugh ourselves to death, says one of the boys in the American influencer's Nuuk gang.

[8] Cross-national evidence of a negativity bias in psychophysiological reactions to news, Stuart Soroka, 2019

[9] "Konstruktiv Journalistik – en dansk-norsk hvidbog" 2024, SDU, Orla Borg, Peter Bro mfl.

outlet *De Correspondent*, which also served as an inspiration for the Danish media outlet *Zetland*: "We fight prejudice, stereotypes, and fearmongering" and "we strive to be as inclusive as possible" and "believe in transparency."
The white paper also points to the necessity of involving citizens, users, and varied source selection.
It all sounds good.
Noticing one's biases in journalism, so that one can either counteract them or take ownership of them, requires a concretely acquired awareness, a systematic working method, and collaboration with others who can challenge us to polish our lenses and shake ourselves free.
But how?

Chapter 2: My Biases

According to Reuters' Digital News Report from 2024[10], transparency in journalism and bias are among the points many users consider when deciding whether to click on a media outlet's news.

So, what could be more appropriate than attempting to be transparent about some of the biases that I have realized may influence my choices of sources, language, and angles in this report.

I am a female journalist affiliated with a nationwide daily newspaper.
My journalistic upbringing took place at a conservative media outlet with a critically investigative, often system-oriented approach to the world, based on so-called 'Jutland values.'

I have a strained relationship with news and prefer person-driven journalism. I am socially liberal and tend, in my journalism, to focus on personal choices and the personal responsibility for one's own life, which I believe one has as a citizen.

This year, I am affiliated with the Constructive Institute, and I prefer contextualized, explanatory, and investigative journalism over news.

My salary as a Fellow is paid by the Novo Nordisk Foundation, my friend works as an executive at Novo Nordisk, in which I also own shares, and over the past few weeks I have clicked through 350 articles from Infomedia with headlines about Novo's importance for the national economy, challenges with out-of-pocket payments, and doctors' mass prescriptions of semaglutide-based medications, as well as day-to-day analyses of the soaring Novo stock – the articles are from 2022 and 2023, and thus from before the drop in share value at the turn of the year, when Novo's new weight loss drug, Cagrisema, did not perform quite as effectively as expected.

Reading all this has left me with a sense that it's important for Denmark that Novo Nordisk does well – on the same level as our national football team.
That feeling clashes with my instincts, because I've been trained to resist that kind of emotional alignment.
I'm 50 years old, weigh 51.8 kilos, and am 155 cm tall. I exercise regularly, eat a pescatarian diet, drink alcohol, and don't smoke, and I am afraid of gaining weight.

When I search for a BMI calculator on Google, the first result I see is a sponsored link from Aleris Denmark, the country's largest private healthcare provider. They offer medical weight-loss treatments, therapy sessions for weight loss, bariatric surgery, and consultations with clinical dietitians.

[10] Reuters Digital News Report, 2024

When I enter my height and weight into their calculator, it gives me a BMI of 21.23. A short paragraph informs me that I am in the "normal weight" category (BMI 18.5–25).
What I don't learn – but have since discovered – is that there's a fundamental bias built into the BMI scale itself.

In Denmark, Wegovy is approved for people with a BMI over 30, or over 27 if they have obesity-related health conditions.
In other words, BMI is the determining factor in deciding who qualifies for the medication. But the standard Body Mass Index was developed based on data from middle-aged white men – and does not account for gender, age, or ethnicity.
Several Danish doctors have voiced concerns about how BMI is being used[11], and in 2023, the American Medical Association (AMA) issued a statement urging doctors not to rely on BMI alone when assessing patients' weight status. The index does not reflect genetic differences, the body composition of various ethnic groups, or the fact that someone can be "skinny-fat" or a heavily muscled athlete.

In short:
There is bias in the use of BMI.

And while writing all this, I've become aware of another bias I carry – one I hadn't thought about for years.
As a child, the school nurse measured our height and weight once a year. The overweight kids were called in more often.
My mother was overweight her entire life and tried every diet fad, without success.
I grew up in the heroin-chic era, laughed along at the "Fat Dorrit" character in Anders Matthesen's mega-hit *Terkel in Trouble*, and don't recall seeing larger bodied people in leading film roles during my childhood.
Unless it was a comedy.

I remember many powerful men with big stomachs during my years in the media industry.
But the only larger bodied, powerful woman I can recall having mentally indexed as a kind of positive role model is Lisbeth Knudsen, former Head of News at DR – and Kirsten Birgit Schiøtz Kretz Hørsholm.
A fictional senior correspondent on Radio24syv.
Played by a man..

[11] Doctors and Patient Association: There's No Point in Medicalizing 20 Percent of Denmark's Population, Politiken, 2024

AI-illustration

In short, the influences of home, school, society, and culture have shaped my thinking in a particular direction:
Thin means healthy. Thin is good. Fat does not equal power.
At least not if you're a woman.

But of course, that kind of unconscious bias is something we journalists all leave behind the moment we walk into our newsrooms.
Especially when, say, we're reporting on the so-called obesity epidemic or covering the launch of a revolutionary Danish weight-loss drug.

Or… do we?

The report *"Influence and Effects of Weight Stigmatisation in Media: A Systematic Review"* (2022) reviews 113 studies that examine how mass media shape and reinforce weight stigma – which the report concludes is widespread across news outlets, entertainment media, advertising, and social platforms[12].
Media content tends to emphasize individual responsibility for obesity while ignoring structural and social factors such as economy, environment, and genetics.

And the conclusion?
Exposure to stigmatizing media content is associated with negative attitudes toward people living with overweight or obesity – leading to discrimination and self-stigmatization.

Another report, *"Weight Stigma and Media: Assessing the Impact 2"* (2022), is based on survey responses from 1,200 American adults with a BMI over 30.

[12] Alexandra Brewis et al., *Influence and Effects of Weight Stigmatisation in Media: A Systematic Review* (2022), **Obesity Reviews** 23, no. 9 (2022): e13552, https://doi.org/10.1111/obr.13552.

It was conducted by the research firm Langer Research Associates for the Media Empathy Foundation, an organization focused on improving representation of higher-weight individuals in media and was funded with support from Novo Nordisk[13].

73% of respondents said social media "often" or "sometimes" reinforce negative stereotypes.
65% said the same about films and television.
One in three reported feeling personally disrespected by media portrayals, and over half said that people in larger bodies are rarely cast in leading roles and are typically depicted as lazy, unhealthy, or comic relief.

Remember the article I mentioned in the prologue from *Berlingske Tidende*, headlined:
"Overweight People Cost the State Billions Each Year"?

The introduction states that half the population is overweight and collectively weighs 35,000 tons more fat than 36 years ago.
Now, try reading the next lines while keeping the findings from the two reports above in mind:

"Building up that much fat is the equivalent of having consumed 1.4 billion cheeseburgers more than we needed. That fat accumulation didn't just happen – it took effort. And shedding it again will take serious effort too. If all that fat were to be run off, it would require every overweight person to take part in a relay race covering four billion kilometers."

Later in this report, I'll go through more news articles from the same period to look for implicit framing bias.

But first, I want to introduce you to a selection of bias types that you may recognize from your own reporting – and if you happen to have the time, I recommend reading psychologist Daniel Kahneman's bestseller *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, which inspired the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Biases We Should Know

Bias is often explained using the brain's two decision-making systems: *System 1* and *System 2*.
System 1 helps us make quick decisions based on experience and mental shortcuts (heuristics). It is fast, intuitive, and automatic – and it's here that implicit bias tends to arise.
Implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes that influence our decisions without us even realizing it – including the decisions we make as journalists.

Let me give you an example.
As a young reporter at the free daily *MetroXpress*, I was often tasked with doing quick "vox pops" – asking three randomly selected people on the street for their opinion on a current issue.
I can't recall ever stopping someone with an ethnic background different from my own and asking them to participate.

It wasn't a conscious exclusion.

[13] Weight Stigma and Media: Assessing the Impact A National Survey for the Media Empathy Foundation, 2022

The task was unpopular among reporters and something we just wanted to get over with.
But if I examine myself honestly, I probably assumed that a middle-aged woman in a headscarf or a man with a foreign appearance might not be following the public debate (despite the fact that my own father were Pakistani and read the newspaper every day).
Maybe I assumed there'd be a language barrier that would slow things down.

That might have been true – or it might not.
I'll never know.
Because I didn't ask.

I never questioned my own stereotyping – and as a result, the readers of *MetroXpress* were only ever presented with opinions from white young men, because in my experience they were the most likely to say yes when I asked to participate.

System 2 is slower, more analytical, and requires conscious effort. It helps us think critically and override the biases produced by System 1.

In my research, I've looked for validated Danish studies on bias in the media, and for research into newsroom methods for addressing and mitigating bias in Danish journalism.
But I've come up empty-handed.

So, I've turned to other professional fields for inspiration.
One of them is medicine.

In healthcare, professionals are trained to recognize and deal with different types of bias that can interfere with accurate diagnosis.
Diagnostic decision-making requires both System 1 and System 2 thinking – and I see several overlaps with the kind of decisions journalists make when choosing angles, sources, and narratives.

In a 2022 article in *Ugeskrift for Læger*[14] (the Journal of the Danish Medical Association) four Danish doctors made a chart that shows the two pathways a diagnosis can travel through the physician's mind.

System 2 can become a barrier in emergency situations, where the doctor must rely on pattern recognition and fast thinking – whereas quick diagnoses can go terribly wrong when based solely on System 1.

In a perfect world, the doctor is trained to use both systems – and knows when to activate System 2.

The same applies to journalists.

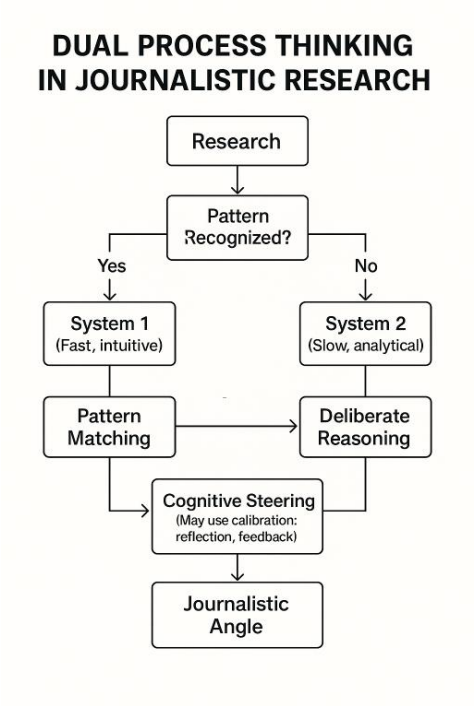
That's why — inspired by the four Danish doctors' model — I've translated it into a journalistic context and created a new model:

[14] Ugeskrift for Læger 2022, Simon Graff, Asser Mathiassen Oppfeldt, Martin Gotfredsen & Bo Christensen: Forskningsenheden for Almen Praksis, Medicinsk Afdeling, Regionshospitalet Horsens, Psykiatrisk Afdeling Middelfart, Lægerne i Låsby, Midtjylland https://ugeskriftet.dk/videnskab/diagnostisk-bias

Once we've gathered our research and are about to angle our material, we naturally operate in System 1. But it's often beneficial to shift into System 2 to avoid default angles that stem from our own biases overpowering System 2.

By deliberately engaging System 2 and activating our slower, more deliberate thinking, we may avoid falling for the easy angle — or the angle that sources are subtly trying to lure us into.

It can also help us steer clear of defaulting to an "automatic victim narrative" or catch ourselves in time if we're shaping the story more according to our own worldview than the case's own perception of reality.



Another type of bias, well-known in the medical field but highly relevant during the research phase of journalism, is *anchoring bias*.
It occurs when the first piece of information we receive unconsciously influences how we assess everything that follows.
This can lead a doctor — or a journalist — to latch onto a particular symptom or piece of data too early.

In this context, it's also useful to be aware of the *order effect* — our tendency to better recall the information we encountered first and last in an investigation or research process.

Research bias occurs when the data or studies we rely on are flawed or skewed, resulting in a distorted picture. For example, the earlier discussion about the BMI scale is a case in point.

So too is the fact that many of the reports I've cited on media bias originate from an American context — often based on the experiences of higher-weight Americans — which may not be directly comparable to the Danish media landscape.

At a time when many newsrooms are introducing correspondent roles — in areas ranging from healthcare to politics and crime — who frequently write columns, analyses, and opinion pieces, *observer bias* is a concept worth considering.

Observers tend to see what they expect to see, which can shape how they register and interpret information.
When observations require a degree of interpretation, personal attitudes and unconscious assumptions can slip in — and an observer's perception may be influenced by surroundings, context, or past experience.

Let's say a political commentator is covering a televised debate between two candidates.
The journalist has previously interviewed one of them over coffee.
During the debate, the journalist may — unintentionally — place more weight on that candidate's arguments and performance.
And if the journalist has greater background knowledge of one candidate, there's a risk they'll present that person in a more compelling light.

Selection bias is about choosing sources, cases, or situations that aren't necessarily representative of the bigger picture.

Affinity bias (also called similarity bias) leads us to prefer those who resemble ourselves — in background or interests — which can influence source selection and lead to one-sided stories.

Availability bias happens when System 1 favors recent or easily recalled examples, potentially distorting the story.
It may help explain why certain politicians or researchers show up repeatedly in the media.
If a journalist knows from experience that someone is easy to work with, always picks up the phone, and delivers a usable quote, the fingers will automatically dial their number.

Framing bias[15] arises when we use emotionally charged words or frames that shape how the public perceives an issue.
Take, for example, the debate about Danish student grants (SU), where the term "café money" was used to skew the discussion.

Confirmation bias is a major challenge in today's fragmented media environment, where polarization is flourishing.

If you've ever spent an hour debating with a conspiracy-minded friend, calmly laying out facts to counter arguments rooted in obscure YouTube videos — and ended up getting nowhere — you've witnessed confirmation bias in action.
The more evidence you provide, the deeper they dig in, often finding new videos to support their view.

Confirmation bias is when we, consciously or unconsciously, seek out information that supports our existing beliefs and disregard evidence that contradicts them.

A reader who, for example, is skeptical of immigration, may latch onto stories about crimes committed by immigrants, while overlooking more positive coverage.
It was Walter Lippmann — one of the most influential American journalists of the 20th century — who

[15] Sanne Opstrup Wedel, "Framing and Spin: How Our Attitudes Are Influenced," *Aarhus BSS News*, August 30, 2019, accessed June 9, 2025, Aarhus School of Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University.

first introduced the concept of *bias* into public discourse.[16]
Lippmann had gazed into the crystal ball and feared that Americans would make rash and illogical political decisions if stereotypes in the media blinded them to information that didn't fit with what they already believed.
In other words: *confirmation bias*.

His proposed solution carries a somewhat unsettling ring to European democratic ears today. He essentially suggested that governance might be best left to elites or experts — people less susceptible to mass manipulation.

In today's United States, former President Donald Trump has turned accusations of confirmation bias against the so-called left-wing media elite into a central part of his narrative — one that many of his supporters view as a struggle against the suppression of conservative voices.

Chapter 4: Meet "The Africa Bias Buster"

In March 2025, I found myself in a meeting room at the Danish embassy in Nairobi, surrounded by foreign correspondents, Kenyan politicians, and NGO representatives.
We had gathered for a workshop arranged by Cynara Vetch, International Project Lead at the Constructive Institute, in collaboration with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The aim was to challenge Danish journalists' biases in covering the Global South — which several of the Kenyan participants I spoke with described as a kind of "hit & run" journalism, focused on crises and still portraying the continent through a lens reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

One presentation in particular left a deep impression.
It wasn't about Kenya's political scene or booming tech entrepreneurship, but a tangible tool offered directly to the journalists in the room.

That same month, the media organization *Africa No Filter* launched the **Africa Bias Buster** — an AI-powered tool designed to detect and eliminate bias in reporting on Africa.[17]
You upload your text, and the Bias Buster analyzes it for both subtle and overt biases, assigns a score, and provides actionable suggestions for improvement — all in real time.

The tool was launched at a moment when concerns about *algorithmic bias* in AI were well-founded. But the developers of the Africa Bias Buster were undeterred. In their view, the tool tackled an even deeper and more entrenched issue: centuries-old stereotypes that have distorted how Africa and its people are represented.

I brought the idea back with me to Aarhus and used it as inspiration for examining potential bias in the way Danish media covered Wegovy case stories.

I created a *bias sparring partner* using ChatGPT, feeding it the bias definitions from the previous chapter, as well as my notes from classes on literary analysis, majority and immigration studies, political science, concepts of conflict, and conflict narratives from humanities-based conflict research.

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[16] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922).
[17] **Africa No Filter**, *"Africa Bias Buster: Frequently Asked Questions,"* Africa No Filter (2025), accessed June 9, 2025, Africa No Filter website.

I also added peer-reviewed studies on bias in journalism and academic articles on media portrayals of obesity that were publicly available.

I asked it to incorporate all relevant knowledge on media bias and to focus specifically on analyzing articles for tone and framing, identifying the types of bias present in each article, and summarizing how Wegovy's launch was presented.

It's far from perfect.
ChatGPT has, on multiple occasions, shown that it can replicate bias — especially gender bias — because, like humans, it reflects the biased material it was trained on.

Since I didn't train it on paywalled content, it's limited in scope.

Much like myself — and the editors I've worked with and counted myself among — who are tasked with making sure that reporting isn't one-sided in angle or source selection, or biased in its language, unless intentionally so.

Article Search and Selection

I used the Infomedia database and searched for articles using this string:
('Wegovy') OR ('Ozempic') OR ('vægttabsmedicin') OR ('slankemiddel') OR ('fedmemedicin')
The period selected was from October 1, 2022, to April 28, 2023.

I included nationwide and regional newspapers and magazines — but excluded radio and television coverage, as it was harder for me to access transcripts or analyze the language.

Certain web sources were also excluded if not covered by Infomedia access, and because it's not enough to analyze headlines alone.

This left me with a total of 1,153 articles.
I manually reviewed the headlines — which, of course, opens up the possibility of error.

From this pool, I selected articles that appeared to be *case-driven*, with a clear focus on an individual story.
This meant excluding most straight news reporting.

Why Focus on Case Stories?

Case stories are more than just personal anecdotes.
They are narratives of lived experience — of emotion, struggle, and perspective. They build a direct bridge to the reader and can draw people into topics that might otherwise seem dry or technical.

A case story has the power to stir emotions. And unlike professional sources, case subjects aren't always met with the same level of journalistic scrutiny — they're speaking from personal experience, not institutional authority.

In my view, case stories are potentially *market-shaping narratives*.
So when an editor at the morning meeting asks a journalist to "go out and find a good case" for the news story that's underway — one that the newsroom hopes will set the agenda — it might be worth pausing to ask:

What makes a good case?
Is it a case that confirms or challenge our worldview?
That aligns neatly with the chosen angle of the accompanying news story or play the role of nuance?

Is it someone who resembles our readers — and is it a problem if I, as a journalist, instinctively gravitate toward someone I feel more comfortable talking to, or someone I have something in common with, rather than someone who stands outside the group?

There is not a right or wrong answer – it depends on the situation and the target group for the story, but the thoughts could be useful.

One possible formula for a *constructive case* could be:
A case where the journalist has actively reflected on their biases during selection and interview — and where there's no predetermined narrative that the case is supposed to support.

For example, this journalist from a regional tv-station is on a case hunt, but the goal of the search becomes immediately clear to anyone reading the post:

"What's the most unfair thing in Skanderborg Municipality? I'm a journalist from TV2 Østjylland and currently working on a story about what families with children in Skanderborg Municipality find most unfair about their local government. If you're a family with children and would like to help, please leave a comment with your answer. Thanks in advance!"

The journalist's clear confirmation, negativity, and framing biases didn't land well with the public, who quickly pushed back in the comments — questioning the very premise of the research request.

You won't hear any criticism from me toward whom ever wrote the post.

I've been an editor at the same local media outlet.

I know for certain that I was more receptive to reporters who came to editorial meetings with cases that exposed municipal shortcomings — rather than those who wanted to highlight how happy parents were with their children's daycare centers.

Negativity bias, remember?

Chapter 5: Wegovy Under the Bias Lens

Through my manual — and by no means scientific — clicking through more than 1,000 articles in the Infomedia search, I identified 26 case-based stories centered on the weight-loss drug Wegovy.
You'll find the full list of articles with headline, date, and publication at the end of this feature report.

What follows is the Bias Lens Assistant's analysis of potential journalistic bias — focusing on framing, sensationalism, tone, and possibly stigmatizing elements — based solely on headlines.
That means the tool had no access to the full context of the article.

But since many readers never make it past the headline, the signals embedded in those headlines are far from irrelevant.
So here goes:

1. "Celebrities hoard Novo's medicine – now there's not enough for diabetes patients"
Possible bias: Sensationalism, Framing Bias, Conflict Framing
Comment: Use of the word "hoard" triggers an emotional reaction and creates a divide between celebrities and patients with legitimate need.

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2. "New drug: Dropped 12 kilos fast"
Possible bias: Sensationalism, Confirmation Bias
Comment: Weight loss is portrayed as dramatic and easy – without context. No mention of side effects or long-term outcomes.

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3. "I say yes to Novo Nordisk's Antabuse for food – but what about the ethics?"
Possible bias: Framing Bias, Moralizing Bias
Comment: Comparing the drug to Antabuse implies that food is an addiction. Ethical framing suggests a normative judgment.

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4. "He was one of the world's heaviest two-year-olds: Now Lucas is starting to lose weight"
Possible bias: Sensationalism, Emotional Appeal
Comment: Highlights an extreme case. Risk of stigmatizing and exposing a child.

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5. "New weight-loss drug takes America by storm and sells for billions – but also faces criticism"
Possible bias: Balanced but Sensationalist Introduction
Comment: Contrasts hype and criticism, but risks downplaying the weight of the latter.

6. “Jens lost 25 kilos in four months: ‘Weight-loss medicine gave me my life back’”
Possible bias: Success Story Bias, Confirmation Bias
Comment: Focuses on individual success with no discussion of broader implications.

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7. “Hyped slimming drug now available in Denmark: Heidi already lost 25 kilos”
Possible bias: Tone Bias, Sensationalism
Comment: The word “hyped” downplays scientific credibility and frames the drug as a trend.

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8. “Benjamin said goodbye to medicine and healed himself through food”
Possible bias: False Balance, Framing Bias
Comment: Suggests lifestyle changes are superior to medical treatment – potentially harmful narrative.

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9. “Weight-loss drug surges in Denmark: 27-year-old lost 40 kilos in under two years”
Possible bias: Sensationalism, Framing Bias
Comment: Emphasizes effect and speed, but not risks or societal implications.

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10. “You can easily lose weight by eating real food”
Possible bias: Moralizing Bias
Comment: Frames weight loss through a binary of “right” and “wrong” methods.

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11. “SLIM BY PRESCRIPTION: Liv lost 22 kilos in four months”
Possible bias: Framing Bias, Success Story
Comment: Medical weight loss presented as quick and effective – no caveats.

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12. “Overweight people hunting for obesity medication end up in the Wild West”
Possible bias: Stigmatizing, Sensationalism
Comment: “Wild West” implies chaos and desperation – stigmatizing portrayal.

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13. “Overweight people cost the state billions every year”
Possible bias: Economic Framing, Blame Bias
Comment: Targets a group as an economic burden. Risk of blame assignment.

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14. “The Silicone King stages a comeback with new miracle drug”
Possible bias: Celebrity-Centric Sensationalism
Comment: Focuses on fame and spectacle over substance.

15. “Alice lost 8 kilos with the much-talked-about slimming drug: ‘I didn’t dare believe it would work’”
Possible bias: Emotional Appeal, Confirmation Bias
Comment: Positive weight-loss example presented without critique.

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16. “Overweight Danes can buy slimming drug at half price abroad”
Possible bias: Consumer Framing
Comment: Frames medicine as a commodity – ethically questionable economic angle.

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17. “Top global celebrities secretly use Danish weight-loss drug – threatening today’s progressive body ideals”
Possible bias: Cultural Critique Bias, Framing Bias
Comment: Reinforces a contrast between celebrity culture and body positivity.

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18. “See the photos: Mindy Kaling’s WILD weight loss”
Possible bias: Visual Bias, Sensationalism
Comment: Focus on appearance and transformation – reinforces body obsession.

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19. “Julia Fox wants to make clear she’s not using Ozempic”
Possible bias: Moralizing Tone
Comment: Implicit judgment – use = bad, non-use = good.

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20. “Peter from Odense lost 16 kilos with expensive slimming drug: Subsidy might be cut”
Possible bias: Economic Concern Bias
Comment: Combines personal loss with policy critique.

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21. “Diabetic patient concerned over medication: It’s not fair it’s also used to treat obesity”
Possible bias: Conflict Framing
Comment: Pits patient groups against each other – zero-sum framing.

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22. “Anne vomits after eating because she wants to lose weight. Now she has a prescription for Wegovy”
Possible bias Emotional, Stigmatizing
Comment: Harsh and direct description – exposes psychological vulnerability.

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23. “Heidi has been on weight-loss medication since August: It’s not a miracle drug”
Possible bias: Low Bias, Reflective Tone
Comment: One of the few nuanced headlines – highlights limitations.

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24. “Henriette injects herself in the belly to lose 50 kilos”
Possible bias: Bodily Sensationalism
Comment: Visually disturbing – risks shocking rather than informing.

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25. “Heidi lost 25 kilos in a year – now she fears the state will cut her off”
Possible bias: Emotional Appeal, Economic Framing
Comment: Links personal fear to political decision-making.

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26. “Weight-loss drug gave Pia Pedersen her joy in life back. But the cost worries her deeply”
Possible bias: Emotional Appeal, Economic Concern
Comment: Personal story paired with systemic concern – potentially balanced.

No one is claiming the Bias Lens Assistant is necessarily *right* in its assessments — especially since these are based solely on headlines. As previously mentioned, the tool itself may also be shaped by bias.

The point is not to pinpoint or prove bias beyond doubt, but to borrow an external critical eye — one that can ask the kinds of questions you, as the writer, might benefit from having considered. That way, you can either take them into account or consciously decide they don’t apply to your story — before you hit “publish.”

But let’s take a closer look at a full article.
Take this piece from DR.dk:
“Jens lost 25 kilos in four months: ‘Weight-loss medicine gave me my life back’.”
The article was published the same day Novo Nordisk launched Wegovy in Denmark, as also stated in the subheading:
“Novo Nordisk today launches a new and effective type of weight-loss drug in Denmark, prompting both excitement and skepticism.”

According to the Bias Lens Assistant, the article exhibits several types of bias:

1. Framing Bias
The story frames Jens’s weight loss as a personal rebirth, with the medicine as a transformative catalyst:

“It has in many ways given me my life back.”
This kind of framing positions weight-loss medication as an existential solution — contributing to the perception that being overweight is inherently and wholly life-limiting.

2. Emotional Appeal & Individualized Narrative
The story begins with Jens's personal tragedy, creating instant emotional resonance and reader empathy:

"His wife suddenly passed away [...] and daily routines changed overnight."
This reinforces a heroic redemption arc in which the medicine plays a starring role. The emotional focus may overshadow broader structural conversations around health, lifestyle, and public responsibility.

3. Success-Story Bias
Jens's 25-kilo weight loss is presented without caveats or complications — and his transformation is visually underscored.
This reinforces *confirmation bias* for readers already inclined to view medication as the preferred solution.

4. False Balance / Balanced Critique?
Toward the end, critical voices are included — such as Bolette Friderichsen and Morten Zacho — who call the drug a "pact with the devil":

"We're turning obesity into a disease because we now have a drug for it..."
The critique is thoughtful and nuanced, but its late placement in the article weakens its impact, especially after the strong emotional narrative has already shaped the reader's response. This is an example of *placement bias*.

5. Economic Bias
Jens mentions paying DKK 1,300 per month for the drug. This hints at privatization and exclusivity — but these economic dimensions aren't explored further in a societal context.

6. Implicit Value Framing
By referring to his use of the drug as an "investment in life," the article ties health and personal responsibility together as moral virtues:

"I'm alone with my kids [...] so if lifelong medication is what it takes, then so be it."
This implies that taking the drug is not just about health, but about doing the *right* thing — even for your children's sake. A subtle form of moral pressure.

When I look across the 26 case stories, there are also counter-narratives to those about people who've had positive experiences with Wegovy.
One example is a piece from *Ekstra Bladet* titled:
"You can absolutely lose weight by eating real food",

with the subheading:
“Sustainable weight loss doesn’t have to be built on restriction and deprivation — and Mia Hauchrog Nilsson is living proof. In two years, she lost over 30 kilos simply by learning to recognize the difference between hunger and fullness.”

Because the article is paywalled, I didn’t feed it into the Bias Lens Assistant but reviewed it manually. Here’s my take:

Weight loss without medication is presented as the *preferred* method — reinforcing the idea that willpower is enough and subtly devaluing medical treatment.
The subject is portrayed as responsible and brave.

Even though Wegovy is not mentioned, the article was published on the same day as its launch — making it an implicit response to the wave of stories about pharmaceutical weight loss.

I could continue using the Bias Lens Assistant to examine more articles from that period.
But that’s not the point.
This is not a call to eliminate victim or black/white hero narratives — or to do media critique.

The goal is to show how easily a simple AI assistant can challenge journalism’s own ideals of impartiality — and reveal *potential* bias.

Maybe you cover climate change, immigration, or crime?
If so, you might consider — just for fun — collaborating with your preferred AI to create a bias spotter that can help you zoom out and, perhaps, produce stronger and more aspirational objective journalism.

For instance, such a tool might have helped both the North Zealand Police and Danish newswire Ritzau when, at 1:00 a.m. on June 5, 2025, they issued a bulletin reporting that a 50-year-old man had killed his 42-year-old wife in Allerød.

The police described it as a “family tragedy” — rather than calling it what it likely was: *murder*.

Despite growing awareness in recent years, the term “family tragedy” still lingers — a euphemism that risks concealing gender-based violence and falsely uniting victim and perpetrator in shared misfortune.

Words create reality.

And in a perfect world, editorial discussions during story development would render tools like AI unnecessary.
In a perfect world, newsrooms would reflect the full breadth of society — across social class, ethnicity, gender, body type, disability, age, and more — allowing colleagues to challenge each other’s blind spots and guard against monocultural thinking.

But the editorial reality in many places — as I see it — is often shaped by time pressure, financial constraints, a culture of self-management,
and people who, for the most part… resemble each other.

Chapter 6: A Quick Fix

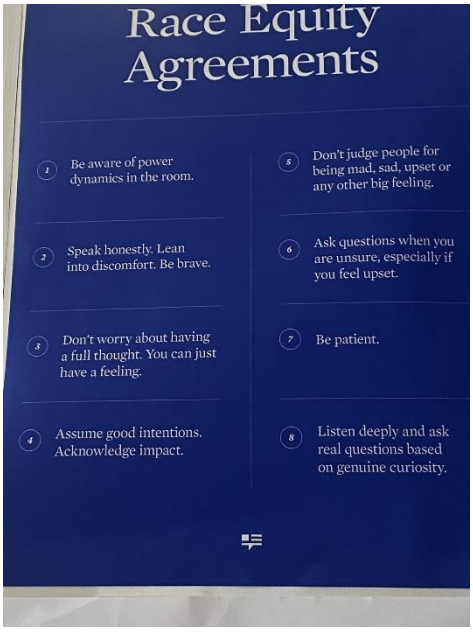
What can a newsroom do if it genuinely wants to move closer to the ideal of *aspiring objectivity*?

But is made up entirely of women in their 50s.
Or only consists of journalists from the capital, tasked with covering the entire country.
Or has only thin staff members, yet is expected to report on health and fitness to a population where many are living in larger bodies.
Or employs only ethnic majority Danes — and therefore lacks people who can see the world from other vantage points?

In the U.S., particularly, the go-to response has often been various forms of *bias training* and specific interventions designed to nudge employees' thinking toward greater diversity and inclusion.

But the question remains:

Does bias training actually work?



Poster from the newsroom of the podcast This American Life, where the team works intentionally to address bias and foster a meeting culture in which everyone's ideas and perspectives are welcomed and constructively challenged in a safe environment — all in pursuit of the strongest possible pitch. The editorial staff includes both men and women from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Photo: Jamilla Sophie Alvi

If you ask American legal scholar and social theorist Jonathan Kahn — whose work I was introduced to during the political science course *Majority and Immigrants: Mutual Skepticism and Adaptation* — the answer is both yes and no. People do learn new things about the world. But that doesn't necessarily mean they change their behavior.

In his chapter *Behavioral Realism in Action* from the book *Race on the Brain*, Kahn reviews research on bias training and concludes that the actual effect is often negligible.

"At best, the practical outcomes of behavioral realism, both in law and in society, are in doubt, and the unintended negative consequences of providing an illusion of fairness while draining attention and resources away from other approaches to framing and addressing racism are potentially substantial," he writes.

Bias training in the U.S., on which much of this research is based, often involves the so-called IAT test (Implicit Association Test), developed by psychologists Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji[18]. According to Banaji, the test is best suited for research and awareness-raising.

The IAT measures how quickly a participant associates, for example, Black or white faces with positive or negative words, and is used as an indicator of implicit bias. Despite its limitations, it has become widespread — with employees in courts, police departments, and private companies being asked to complete the test online to "uncover" their biases. Some companies have also installed screensavers with images of, for example, female pilots or Black doctors, and conducted role-play or group exercises in hopes of cultivating a greater sense of "we."

However, a major study involving over 6,000 participants found that nine popular bias-reduction exercises did produce immediate effects — but those effects had faded after just a few hours.[19]

Sociologists like Jonathan Kahn and Frank Dobbin are more comfortable recommending structural commitments instead: assigning responsibility for recruitment to specific leaders and holding them accountable through measurable outcomes.

In Denmark, one of the media companies that has increased its internal focus on blind spots is TV2. This shift came in the wake of the 2021 #MeToo documentary *Sexism Behind the Screen*, which exposed incidents of sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior at the station. The documentary led to significant public attention and internal reflection on the station's culture.

In 2023, TV2 launched the *Shared Responsibility for Diversity* strategy. According to its accountability report, the goal was to "address bias, counter polarization, and reflect the whole of Denmark — internally and on air."

More than 600 employees attended sessions on unconscious bias and even more took part in ESG-themed dialogue meetings and live digital sessions on inclusion and equality.

Recruitment became a key focus area. An anti-bias writing tool was introduced, and blind recruitment was tested. At the same time, leadership was offered training in inclusive management.

TV2's HR department faced the challenge of recalibrating a workplace culture that had long revolved around a narrative of flat hierarchies and fun — a narrative that the documentary and ensuing backlash revealed to be misleading. The voices and biases of prominent male staff members had dominated and, at times, silenced others for years.

So how do you push for real cultural change — especially when bias training on its own isn't enough?

[18] Link til IAT-test https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

[19] Lai, C. K., et al. (2016). *Reducing Implicit Racial Preferences: II. Intervention Effectiveness Across Time*. Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 145(8), 1001–1016

Chapter 7: Bias and TV2

Interview with Lars Novrup, Director of People & Performance (HR) at TV2, June 2025

How did you approach bias training?
"We ran the training in collaboration with the DEI consultancy *Connecting Cultures*. It wasn't introduced as 'now you're going to learn how to handle your bias,' but instead framed as an exploration of human behavior and habits. We started with the executive board, then the strategic leadership team, then all managers, and finally the entire organization via webinars.

The goal wasn't to point fingers at who's biased, but to raise awareness about how habits and automatic patterns can stand in the way of progress. Bias was explained as something fundamentally human. But the core message was: If we say we want something different from what we're doing now, we have to change our behavior – or we'll stay stuck."

When did it start?
"We quietly got going in late 2023. When we began setting goals for 2024, we said: none of this will work unless the whole organization is engaged. So instead of copying others, we decided 2023/ 2024 would be a year of involvement. We visited every department and facilitated conversations around: What is ESG? Why should we care about it as a company? Then we zoomed in on the workplace: What makes TV2 a great place to work – and where can we improve?"

What came out of those conversations?
"It was striking: once people started talking, it was hard to stop them. Diversity came up in a broad sense – like how hard it can be to join the social group when you're new. Some said they hadn't experienced that, but then someone else said, 'Actually, we do have a problem.' And you could feel it in the room – everyone just went quiet. It was a breakthrough.

Throughout the process, we distilled key themes and communicated them back to staff. One data point stood out: '65% of us look forward to going to work – but 25% find it hard to feel part of the social community.' When a number like that is laid bare, it becomes hard for an organization that prides itself on community and inclusivity not to take it seriously."

How did you structure all the input?
"We used anonymous crowdsourcing, where people could write comments and like each other's. We held two one-hour digital sessions – completely optional – and had between 360 and 650 participants. It gave us a massive amount of data and some amazing insights. For example, gender-neutral toilets weren't mentioned at all. What really came up were things like generational differences – and parental leave. How do you make the transition smooth, stay connected, and come back well?"

What concrete steps have you taken to increase diversity at TV2 – to challenge established mindsets?
"We believe in targets and clear ambitions – but the best qualified person still gets the job, and we haven't implemented quotas. It's about creating collective awareness – especially among leaders, because it's in recruitment that you make the decisions that can shift diversity.

So we started addressing awareness about bias in the hiring process to ensure managers don't just call up someone they already know for a coffee. We introduced proper job profiles, assessment tools, conversations about personality – not just a focus on skills."

Are you worried that if your workforce is too homogeneous, their feedback just reinforces the existing culture rather than creating real inclusion?
"Absolutely. You have to look at your data with a critical eye. If lots of people mention parental leave, that tells you something. If no one mentions gender-neutral toilets – maybe that's not where you need to start."

But isn't there a risk that some needs never surface – because the people who have them aren't even employed?
"Yes, and that's why I say: this has to happen in stages. Once we gathered all the input, it became clear that what would work for us was a life-stage-based approach. Not just focusing on identity – but on how we support people in different phases of work and life, and the challenges that come with them.

At TV2, the work on bias gradually evolved into a more practical understanding of what inclusion really means: that everyone gets to show up to work as they are – and that specific needs are met where possible. We also acknowledged that not everything can be accommodated, but we strive for transparency and understanding.

One concrete example was the creation of an internal network for neurodivergent employees, which came out of this process. We also launched the *Parental Leave Pathway* initiative. It focused on preparing for leave, staying connected during it, and check-ins 14 days and one month after returning.

We also developed a pre-retirement program, aimed at employees approaching the next phase of life.

Part of the effort included creating 'conversation cards' for teams to use when discussing dilemmas – like: 'You overhear a colleague gossiping about someone at the coffee machine. What do you do?' – because, honestly, we had to admit those kinds of conversations just weren't happening before."

You've set a gender target at TV2 – and recently raised it. How do you make sure it doesn't just become a box-ticking exercise for the annual report, while the culture stays the same – the same 'old' mindset, just with more women?
We believe that a 50/50 gender split between men and women is a good thing. And we're almost there now. We've only set targets for the underrepresented gender—because that's what you can measure. You can't register ethnicity, so that makes it a bit more constrained. But I think the answer lies in your question: you need to do things that break the reproduction of culture in order to influence it.

And I can say this: Anne (our director) made a pretty bold decision when she recruited me. She said: 'People & Culture should be part of top management.' I'm part of a network with other HR leaders, and I can tell you, at many other workplaces, HR doesn't have a seat at the table—sitting way back in row 28—and then you don't get any real change."

Also, it starts to solve itself – if you change the composition of the staff, you change the organization. It creates a multiplier effect. But it takes clear ambition, and the leadership needs to show they mean it. And yes, there will always be some who find it annoying – and they leave. I've seen that happen over 20 years across industries.

That said, like the rest of the industry, we have a challenge when it comes to people with minority ethnic backgrounds or descendants. We're at about 4% – society is at 16.5%. One of our initiatives is to set up a talent program together with the industry, bring it all under one umbrella, and get some role models out there. Not necessarily to place them at TV2 – but because the industry needs them."

How have you worked with bias in editorial content?
"We've focused on raising awareness and it's been on the agenda alongside everything else – under the same motto: We want to reflect Denmark. That's what public service is all about.

We can't just be there for white Danes. Or older Danes.

So we've looked at: who do we call as sources? What's the composition of panels on *news.dk*? That includes programming as well. We've focused on improving representation – so that when people sit at home watching TV, they feel part of the national conversation, not just bystanders.

And yes, people have opinions. Some say, 'Oh great, now you've made a show with someone without legs and someone with darker skin.' But – of course we have to find a balance where we also try to reflect society."

What has stood out most in the insight you've gained from involving employees?
"We held two 'dialogue salons' – one at Kvægtorvet and one at Teglholmen – where we talked through the topics that came up in people's anonymous responses.

Both events opened with a talk by Abdel Aziz Mahmoud (journalist and host at TV2), who shared his experiences of being 'different' in Denmark – and the barriers that can bring. He used the image of a doorframe: one that everyone is expected to walk through, but some people keep hitting their shoulder on it. It's not a problem once, but if it happens again and again, it leaves a wound.

Ethnicity came up a lot in the conversations, but other issues surfaced too. Interestingly, there were clear differences between the two locations: At Kvægtorvet (TV2's main office in Odense), seniority and age were bigger topics. At Teglholmen (in Copenhagen), it was more about diversity in a broad sense – like LGBTQ+, eating less meat in the cafeteria, and gender identity. In other words, there was both a generational and cultural gap between the two buildings."

What's your key focus going forward?
"Behavior shapes culture – and without a shared language for why we do what we do, it's hard to change anything. That goes for employees and for our output – like journalism.

The goal has been to build greater psychological safety, so people can say things like: 'I'm not sure I feel supported,' or 'I need to sleep on this before I can make a decision.' Psychological safety is everything."

4 Indland

Nu skal der tages hensyn til de helt tunge danskere

INDBLIK

Danskerne bliver større. Fra i år skal visse stole i det offentlige kunne bære helt op til 250 kg.

THOMAS LUND HANSEN
JAMILLA SOPHIE ALVI

Vejer du over 120 kg, har du et konkret problem, når du bevæger dig rundt i samfundet. Helt almindelige stole brager i værste fald sammen, og samtidig udgør stole med armlæn et problem for mange personer med svær overvægt.

Men nu kommer det offentlige mennesker med svær overvægt i møde.

I en ny aftale indgået i december i fjor mellem Staten og Kommunernes Indkøbsservice (SKI) og leverandører af møbler til det offentlige, stiller indkøbsorganisationen på en af dekaftalerne særskilte krav til, at der skal indgå en række sygestue- og hvilestole, der kan bære helt op til 250 kg. I aftalen indgår der stadig stole, hvis maksimale bære-
-vi er 120 kg.
-en er målrettet pleje- og sundheds-
-træder i kraft i slutningen af
-ndelig sortiment afgøres af
-chager fra leveran-
-eervne
-ler af

overvægtige personer en anerkendelse af, at vores samfund har ændret sig,« siger Jens Meldgaard Bruun.

20-25 pct. af det offentliges møbelindkøb sker gennem SKI's møbelaftaler.

Jyllands-Posten har ringet til adskillige møbelfabrikanter, hvor flere bekræfter, at efterspørgslen på stole, der kan holde til flere kg, er stigende.

Det gælder Ecko, Flokk, der producerer kontorstole og stole til mødelokaler og loungeområder.

»Jeg oplever flere og flere forespørgsler på stole til mennesker, der vejer plus 120 kg. For 10 år siden fik jeg måske en forespørgsel en gang i kvartalet, mens det er eksplosivt siden for de seneste fem år, hvor jeg får forespørgsler en gang om ugen,« siger sælger Robert Høgsaard, der har 38 års erfaring fra branchen.

Stol godkendt til 300 kg

Flokk sælger fleet kontorstole, og her efterspørger kunderne produkter, der kan bære mere og mere.

»Vi har nogle kontorstole, der er godkendt til op til 150 kg, men vi stødes på flere og flere opgaver, hvor de siger, at det skal være over 150 kg. Det kan være 180 kg eller 190 kg, og så er der selvfølgelig et meget begrænset udvalg, samtidig med at man får et produkt, der ser væsentlig anderledes ud i forhold til det, som deres kollegaer har,« siger Robert Høgsaard.

Hvis vægten når over 150 kg, kræver det helt specielle stole, og disse er der også stigende efterspørgsel efter, siger Rikke
-vdager Jørgensen, der er salgschef i
-d Larsen, som laver stole til per-
-sielle behov.
-r er siden en stol, der er
-ke er, fordi vi

SVÆR OVERVÆGT

Andelen af danskere, der har et BMI over 30, som er grænsen til svær overvægt:

2010: 13,6 pct.
2013: 14,1 pct.
2017: 16,8 pct.
2025: 18,5 pct.

Ifølge en fremskrivning lavet af Kraftens Bekæmpelse i 2020 vil 29,4 pct. være svært overvægtige i 2045, hvis tendensen fortsætter.

Kilde: Danskernes Sundhed

Chapter 8: A Look in the Mirror

One of the biggest journalistic aha moments I had during my year at the Constructive Institute came from a course on conflict research.
We analyzed U.S. presidential speeches, dove into conflict theory, and read sociologists whose thinking helped sharpen our lenses—allowing us to see more layers in reality and recognize society's masterplots. Sometimes, we could even begin to trace the underlying dynamics instead of getting caught up in isolated events.

These days, when I read the news, I'm more attuned to spotting a journalist's bias. But what fascinates me even more is how many stories are shaped by recurring narrative structures—masterplots. Some are intentional, others clearly unconscious.
This entire feature report is, in essence, an invitation to ask each other: Are we unknowingly writing ourselves into one of these masterplots? Take, for instance, the victim narrative—one I see frequently in Danish media, and one I've certainly fallen into myself.

Of course, there are real victims in society, and they deserve both airtime and public attention. But perhaps we should be more cautious with the victim rhetoric—even if our negativity bias helps us harvest the clicks.

Let me offer an example.
I once worked as a head of communications at a disability organization. One day, I got a call from a national TV station preparing a story about hate crimes against people with disabilities. They believed the problem might be on the rise, having found a few recent cases where wheelchair users had been verbally harassed—one had even been spat on. It was awful.
But we had just conducted a survey among our members, and there was no indication that hate crimes were a widespread experience.
Guess whether we got airtime to add that nuance to the story?

We didn't. But I was glad we opted out. For the sake of our members, we resisted feeding into the "victimhood-for-victimhood's-sake" narrative.

That experience was my first encounter with the kind of societal masterplots journalists tend to write into.

More examples from my time as the head of communications at the disability organization?

Well, I often encountered a complete absence of critical questions directed at people with disabilities from journalists.

Because most journalists don't live with disabilities themselves—and perhaps rarely even interact with those who do—they're somehow preconditioned to assume people with disabilities should be pitied. And so, the hard questions never get asked.

With all those experiences, you'd think I'd be trained to avoid these unconscious victim plots—or any of the narrative defaults floating around that quietly shape our work.
But no.

Looking back at my many case-driven articles, I can see just how often I slipped into familiar masterplots.

After Wegovy's rollout in 2022–2023, I teamed up with a colleague who covered the hard news angle, while I focused on writing counter-narratives to the surge of stories with headlines like *"Woman was fat – got weight loss meds – now she's thin"* (insert nuanced doctor quote at the bottom, which no one reads to).
One of those counter-narratives is the article I referenced at the beginning of this report. The headline was: *"Now we need to accommodate the heaviest Danes."*

The three case profiles in the piece shared their experiences of shame in navigating a society that hasn't caught up with rising body sizes. I was the one who reached out and asked whether they recognized themselves in that issue—not the other way around.
And if I run the piece through my own Bias Lens Spotter, it hits a nerve:
Activism. And the "it's society's fault" masterplot.

Here's what the Bias Lens flagged:

The article *"Now we need to accommodate the heaviest Danes"* is a clear example of constructive journalism with strong emotional and activist elements—but it teeters dangerously close to losing its journalistic neutrality.
The journalist (me) is clearly driven by a core belief: that people with severe obesity are victims of a society that physically and culturally excludes them—and that society must fix this.
This belief shapes source selection, tone of voice, and the near-total absence of critical or alternative viewpoints.

The article leans on three core narrative frames:

1. **The Victim Narrative**
   People with higher body weights are consistently portrayed as victims of discriminatory environments—afraid to sit down, humiliated in public, forced to adapt their behavior to the

limits of furniture. One woman's story about a chair collapsing in a play center, and the intense shame that followed, is emblematic.

2. **The Structural Discrimination Narrative**
   The piece compares access challenges for people with obesity to those faced by people with disabilities before ramps and elevators became standard. Obesity is framed as a form of systemic inequality. There's no real examination of whether or how these two groups should be compared.

3. **The Solution and Normalization Narrative**
   The article highlights new furniture designed to accommodate heavier bodies, presenting it as a welcome and necessary development. But it sidesteps any ethical, economic, or public health debates about adapting society to an epidemiological trend with clear individual and structural dimensions.

The language is emotionally charged and dramatized, with phrases like *"in the worst-case scenario, the chair collapses"* and *"she was too scared to breathe"*, intensifying the reader's emotional response.
What's missing are counterpoints—voices questioning whether this societal shift is the right priority, or how it aligns with prevention and personal responsibility.

The result? A clearly biased piece in both framing and angle. It's hard to tell where journalistic reflection ends and personal engagement begins.

Ouch.

There's nothing *wrong* with the article per se.
Sure, I could have written it differently—more investigative, less conclusive, less binary, and with way less pathos.
But if there's one thing I'd go back and change, it's how I portrayed the case subjects.

They were strong, funny, resourceful people—and I didn't let that shine through.
It's not a constructive case if you strip your sources of agency.
That turns both the subject and the broader issue into victims.

I'm sorry.

It's easy to believe we're just reporting reality in journalism—even as we unconsciously reinforce pre-existing social narratives.

But how do we learn to recognize those narratives before we end up sitting here, years later, having to ask a scruffy AI assistant for help seeing what we missed?

That's what I asked two researchers.

Chapter 9: Who Are We Not Hearing From?

Assistant Professor Ann-Katrine Schmidt Nielsen from the Department of Communication and Culture – Nordic Language and Literature – wrote her PhD with the catchy title:
"Veterans in Danish Media and Contemporary Art – An Investigation of the Returning Soldier as a Discursive-Affective Assemblage in Danish Media and Contemporary Art."

I met her during my studies, where she gave a talk on how media, art, and film portray "the veteran as a trauma hero."

At one point during her presentation, she said something that rubbed me the wrong way:
"Danish media is generally very fixated on trauma stories."

That's a hard pill to swallow as a journalist.
Especially when I personally know reporters whose focus on the lack of support for returning soldiers has genuinely helped push for policy improvements.
But it's precisely when our worldview gets challenged that we need to push our *confirmation bias* aside—and just listen.

To be clear, Ann-Katrine Schmidt Nielsen is not arguing that the media should stop covering returning veterans.
But research into media portrayals of soldiers with PTSD—both in Denmark and abroad—shows that the intense focus on trauma can overshadow other victims of war in the national consciousness.
If trauma heroes become the central figure of our sympathy, rather than the victims of our military actions, it becomes harder to have a critical conversation about the war itself.

As a researcher with a journalist's sensibility, Schmidt Nielsen suggests that newsrooms would benefit from more systematically mapping who gets to speak—and who doesn't—when we cover major societal issues.
"Newsrooms could try something really simple," she told me during an afternoon meeting at the university. "Just hang up a poster that says: *'Who are we forgetting?'* Every time you're tackling a major societal topic.
Take the Wegovy rollout, for example. You could ask: who are we using as case subjects? Is it only women? And the doctors—who do we quote? What interests might they have? And who's being left out of the conversation?"

This was her answer to my long, rambling question which I have tried to angle a bit for the purpose of this report:
"How on earth can journalists keep an eye on society's masterplots in the rush of everyday work, when we don't have the blissful benefit of hindsight and external perspective like researchers do?"

She followed up with a question of her own:
"Do you guys ever sit down and talk about who might hold a counter-narrative when you're putting together a case story?"
I gave her my classic *"we do, but sometimes, well time and … sort of"* answer.

Right now, she's working on a project about the growing trend of people testing themselves for potential health risks and predispositions to disease.

While working on that she has started to see the emergence of a new masterplot in society—one where the individual is increasingly held responsible for their own health and lifespan.
Whether it's about obesity, genetic risk factors, how long we live or how we die—or the whole longevity movement that promises you extra years if you pay for tests and treatments (often with no proven effect)—the story is always the same.

"It places the responsibility for your health, even your *future* health, on your shoulders," she said. "And if you haven't done the testing or prevention, then in a way, it's your own fault if you get sick.
And in a way, you're never really healthy—you're always kind of a patient-in-waiting."

She paused and added,
"It's part of a hyper-medicalized worldview, where you're constantly expected to prevent an illness that may or may not ever come. And that's the moment—between those case stories of longevity influencers and other lifestyle journalism—where it might be worth stopping and asking:
Am I writing myself into a new kind of societal narrative here? And who stands to gain from that?"

She thinks for a moment longer, then continues:

"Just as a thought experiment—take the current debate around assisted dying, where even the Prime Minister has publicly shared her personal views.
Could there be a political interest in promoting a narrative where your health and lifespan are entirely your own responsibility?
Because let's face it—we're in a time where the healthcare system is under serious strain, and we don't have enough workers to care for the ageing population…"

Chapter 10: A Book of Masterplot, Please?

In May 2025, Constructive Institute hosted a guest named Ville Hämäläinen, a friend of one of our Finnish fellows.

Ville is a doctoral researcher in Comparative Literary Studies at Tampere University, Finland.
He's worked on the project *"Dangers of Narrative"* and the follow-up consortium *"Instrumental Narratives: The Limits of Storytelling and New Story-Critical Narrative Theory."*[20]
Last spring, he was a visiting scholar at the Centre for Fictionality Studies at Aarhus University.

I thought to myself: *this is exactly the person to help point out society's masterplots—so we as journalists can either consciously write ourselves into them, or deliberately avoid doing so unconsciously.*

I caught him in the hallway just before he headed back to Copenhagen, where he's currently a guest scholar at the Søren Kierkegaard Centre.

Ville, you talked about how media tends to tell the same stories over and over again—just with new faces. You call them masterplots. What exactly do you mean by that?
"Masterplots are narrative templates we often repeat in journalism—usually without noticing. They're

[20] For an in-depth exploration of the strategic and ethical limits of storytelling, see the research project "Instrumental Narratives: The Limits of Storytelling and New Story-Critical Narrative Theory" (iNARR), led by Maria Mäkelä and funded by the Academy of Finland, 2018–2022.

the mental models we use to structure and make sense of the world. They bring order and clarity, but they can also oversimplify and push complex societal issues into the domain of the individual."

Can you give some examples of these masterplots?
"The burnout narrative is a big one—especially in the Nordic countries. These are stories about people who collapse under work pressure and then find a new path. It's like a modern Cinderella story: suffering followed by personal success.
There's also the 'failed citizen' of the welfare state—the person who 'falls through the cracks' and whose story becomes a symbol of institutional failure. All of these plots work, but they easily turn into templates that end up shutting down more structural conversations."

You also mentioned that these plots show up in climate journalism. How so?
"A lot of climate coverage follows the 'awakened individual' storyline: 'I saw a glacier melt, and it changed my life.'
The issue is, this kind of story shifts responsibility away from political and economic structures and onto the individual.
It's a spiritual awakening dressed up as climate activism. Instead of asking, 'How are we regulating the shipping industry?', we ask, 'How did you reduce your carbon footprint?'"

But those stories work—they get clicks and shares.
"Yes, and that's exactly why they're hard to let go of. But the real question is: *Do they lead to systemic change?* If every climate story follows the same arc—one person changing after a crisis—then we're training the audience to believe that *this* is the solution."

So what can journalists do to avoid falling into this trap?
"First, we need to train ourselves to recognize masterplots at the idea stage. Ask yourself: What kind of narrative am I unconsciously trying to confirm? Am I seeking out people who already fit a pre-existing storyline?
Then look for *ruptures* in the story. Do the sources say things that don't fit neatly into the plot? Are we brave enough to follow the complexity, instead of flattening it back into the template?"

So we should actually look for what doesn't fit?
"Yes—and we should also feel free to call it out meta-journalistically. Even small remarks—like 'this story may sound familiar to you'—can help readers become more aware of the narrative they're being offered.
It's about expanding understanding, not narrowing it."

Does a manual of masterplots exist somewhere?
"Unfortunately, no. But maybe it should.
Until then, we have to help each other spot them. We don't need to avoid all masterplots—some are necessary and effective—but we need to use them consciously and ask: *Who or what is made invisible in this narrative?*"

Here are some classic master plots for you to know:

The self-made hero" – the underdog who rises through hard work.

"The decline of society" – the idea that things are getting worse.

"The innocent victim" – a pure figure harmed by external forces.

"The dangerous outsider" – used especially in immigration or crime reporting.

"Redemption after failure" – personal transformation through suffering.

Epilogue

Yesterday I took my own medicine.

I prompted: **Where is the writer biased in how this "feature report" is *angled, written, and told*?**

I hope it is not a big surprise for you that AI found, that I have confirmation bias.

I have predominantly interviewed researchers who share my critical stance on bias, representation, and masterplots in journalism. Which can create a kind of "intellectual echo chamber" where opposing views—such as defenders of traditional journalistic objectivity—are notably absent.

I am guilty of 'Framing Bias' and using the masterplot of a Redemption Story, where I invite you to follow my personal transformation arc from unexamined bias to reflective awareness, which invites you to identify with my awakening. That frame encourages agreement—and may subtly suggest that those who disagree are simply not "there yet."

I openly acknowledges some of my own biases—especially the use of victim narratives— but even this self-critique tends to reinforce the underlying normative goal: To produce more inclusive, identity-aware journalism.

Which is not ideologically neutral.

I'm a fan of the BBC's campaign "Made to Make You Think," to which I have added my own little bias-disclaimer twist:
"I'm not here to tell you what to think—but to get you thinking—and this is my standpoint in the world."

I'll not tell you how to work with bias in your journalism – and I will not even tell you that you should – but I told you what made me think - and what I know so far.

There is no grand conclusion here, but I do have a few recommendations for the media industry:

Foster genuine representation.
Newsrooms will be better equipped to produce investigative and critical journalism from multiple angles if they also work to build psychological safety and a shared language for asking challenging, clarifying questions—about each other's journalism *and* about each other's perspectives.

If everyone on a team agrees—or believes some opinions are inherently more "right" than others—ask yourself whether you're unconsciously reinforcing a masterplot. Analyze which questions are not being asked, and which people are not being heard.

And last but not least:
When you choose a case, be curious if your case subject later criticizes how they were portrayed. That's where the real learning happens.

And with those closing thoughts—which admittedly sound like something printed on the inside of a fortune cookie—I wish you all the best in your journalism.

Appendix:

Source: Infomedia

1. *"De kendte hamstrer Novos medicin - nu er der ikke nok til diabetespatienter"*
Aarhus Stiftstidende, 27. november 2022

2. *"Ny medicin: Smed hurtigt 12 kilo"*
Ekstra Bladet, 30. november 2022

3. *"Jeg siger ja tak til Novo Nordisks antabus mod mad, men hvad med etikken?"*
Berlingske, 2. december 2022

4. *"Han var en af verdens tungeste to-årige: Nu er Lucas begyndt at tabe sig"*
Randers Amtsavis, 8. december 2022

5. *"Ny slankemedicin har taget USA med storm og solgt for milliarder, men produkter møder også kritik"*
DR.dk, 11. december 2022

6. *"Jens tabte 25 kilo på fire måneder: 'Slankemedicin har givet mig mit liv tilbage'"*
DR.dk, 12. december 2022

7. *"Hypet slankemiddel kan nu købes i Danmark: Heidi har allerede tabt 25 kilo"*
TV2 Østjylland, 16. december 2022

8. *"Benjamin sagde farvel til medicin og spiste sig rask"*
Skive Folkeblad, 23. december 2022

9. *"Slankemiddel stormer frem i Danmark: 27-årig tabte 40 kilo på under to år"*
TV2.dk, 26. december 2022

10. *"Man kan sagtens tabe sig ved at spise rigtig mad"*
Ekstra Bladet, 31. december 2022

11. *"SLANK PÅ RECEPT: Liv tabte 22 kilo på fire måneder"*
EB.dk, 9. januar 2023

12. *"Overvægtige på jagt efter ny fedmemedicin havner i det vilde vesten"*
Berlingske, 30. januar 2023

13. *"Overvægtige koster statskassen milliarder hvert år"*
Berlingske, 12. februar 2023

14. *"Silikonekongen gør comeback og satser på ny vidundermedicin"*
Berlingske, 13. februar 2023

15. *"Alice har tabt sig 8 kg med omtalt slankemedicin: - Jeg turde ikke tro på, at det kunne lykkes"*
AvisenDanmark.dk, 4. marts 2023

16. *"Overvægtige danskere kan købe slankemiddel til halv pris i udlandet"*
Berlingske, 9. marts 2023

17. *"Klodens største stjerner bruger dansk slankemiddel i smug - og truer tidens progressive kropsidealer"*
Soundvenue.com, 11. marts 2023

18. *"Se billederne: Mindy Kaling i VILDT vægttab"*
Seoghoer.dk, 15. marts 2023

19. *"Julia Fox vil gerne understrege, at hun ikke bruger Ozempic"*
Soundvenue.com, 21. marts 2023

20. *"Peter fra Odense har smidt 16 kilo med hundedyr slankemedicin: Tilskud kan være på vej væk"*
DR.dk, 23. marts 2023

21. *"Diabetiker er bekymret over medicin: Det er ikke fair, det også bliver brugt til at behandle fedme"*
BT.dk, 24. marts 2023

22. *"Anne kaster op, når hun har spist, fordi hun vil tabe sig. Nu har hun fået en recept på slankemedicinen Wegovy"*
Politiken, 22. april 2023

23. *"Heidi har brugt slankemedicin siden august: Det er ikke et mirakelmiddel"*
TV2 Østjylland, 23. april 2023

24. *"Henriette stikker sig i maveskindet for at tabe 50 kilo"*
Nordjyske Stiftstidende, 24. april 2023

25. *"Heidi tabte 25 kilo på et år - nu frygter hun at 'danmark' smækker kassen i"*
TV2.dk, 24. april 2023

26. *"Slankemedicin gav Pia Pedersen livsglæden tilbage. Men økonomien bekymrer hende voldsomt"*
Politiken, 29. april 2023