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“Be authentic”: Authenticity Norms in German Politics and Self-Idealizations of Members of the Bundestag

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Abstract

This contribution goes back to a study of the formative power of identity norms in professional fields of occupation (fine arts and politics). In this article, we focus on the understanding of identity norms that members of the German Bundestag have to meet and/or to cope with. Thus, our research question is which demands professional politicians encounter and which ways of dealing with them are established. Operating at the intersection of governmentality studies, subjectivation analysis and qualitative inquiry, and based on narrative interviews with MPs, this paper demonstrates how in the field of German politics (at federal level) the MPs orientate their professional praxis towards the identity norm of an authentic self and conform to the expectation of a contradiction-free relationship between professional and private lives. In the process, the MPs develop idealizations of their selves in which aspects of their habitus become reflexive. We especially discuss these results against the backdrop of the emergence of modern parliaments and, methodologically, regarding the relation between habitual-implicit and reflexive-explicit structures of knowledge which are especially relevant in subjectivation analysis.

Keywords

Authenticity, Identity Norms, Subjectivation, Self-Idealization, MPs, Representation, Qualitative Research, Documentary Method

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This contribution goes back to a study of the formative power of identity norms in professional fields of occupation (fine arts and politics). In this article, we focus on the understanding of identity norms that members of the German Bundestag have to meet and/or to cope with. Thus, our research question is which demands professional politicians encounter and which ways of dealing with them are established. Operating at the intersection of governmentality studies, subjectivation analysis and qualitative inquiry, and based on narrative interviews with MPs, this paper demonstrates how in the field of German politics (at federal level) the MPs orientate their professional praxis towards the identity norm of an authentic self and conform to the expectation of a contradiction-free relationship between professional and private lives. In the process, the MPs develop idealizations of their selves in which aspects of their habitus become reflexive. We especially discuss these results against the backdrop of the emergence of modern parliaments and, methodologically, regarding the relation between habitual-implicit and reflexive-explicit structures of knowledge which are especially relevant in subjectivation analysis. Keywords: Authenticity, Identity Norms, Subjectivation, Self-Idealization, MPs, Representation, Qualitative Research, Documentary Method

Authenticity is gaining currency in a range of social settings as a principal metaphor by setting a vague objective, which serves as a point of orientation for conduct in professional and private contexts. One indicator of this is the German advice literature, which encourages readers to pursue the “path to an authentic personality” (Hille, 2011) in the private sphere, or to strive for “professional authenticity” (Moesslang, 2010) in occupational contexts. Likewise, the public statements of (German) politicians, in particular, frequently make reference to expectations regarding authenticity. The former general secretary of Germany’s governing Christian Democratic Party (CDU), Peter Tauber (2013), for example, emphasizes the need to “be authentic” several times in his social media guide for politicians (pp. 12, 16, 22). And another member of the CDU, the former minister of defense (2009 to 2011), Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, stated as a federal politician that “one ought to remain authentic” (SPIEGEL, 2011, p. 27). Accordingly, chancellor Angela Merkel was cited saying: “The authentic is very important. [...] People accept rather that your hair isn’t perfect, than having the impression to be exposed to an actor.” This list could be extended at will—and, already Weber (2012) underlined, the modern politician is “constantly in danger of becoming an actor [...] and only attending to the ‘impression’ that they make” (p. 64). Albeit, the public statements of (German) politicians do not provide any further basis for defining the imperative of being authentic with greater precision, nor do they allow to explain its power to shape conduct and possible reasons for such impact. Our paper, therefore, approaches the subject of authenticity as an identity norm

in the arena of professional politics (at federal level) with empirical data, that is, narrative interviews with members of the German national parliament (Bundestag).

To begin with, this examination dispenses with a theoretical deconstruction of norms of authenticity, as the fact that an “authentic self” can, for example, generally be called into question against the backdrop of the demise of the Cartesian ego does not mean that an orientation towards authenticity (ideals) in private and professional contexts cannot be a compelling factor in guiding behavior. Instead, as Lawler (2012) states, “people in the West conventionally counterpose being an (authentic) identity against doing an identity (performing)” (p. 101)—a point that has already been noted in sociological work on everyday culture and media cultures (Geimer, 2014; Goffman, 1959; Reichertz, 2001; Sennett, 1977; Soeffner, 2005; Strauss, 1959). Against this backdrop, the empirical results of our project on *aporias of subjectivation*—funded by the German research foundation (DFG)—are suitable for assessing authenticity as an imperative in a specific, circumscribed field (the arena of professional politics) in greater detail. In particular, it emerges that MPs (albeit in illuminatingly distinct ways) draw on shared knowledge that entreat them to regard themselves as true to themselves and to establish and represent the coherence and continuity of their attitudes to others as well.

We will give a brief overview on studies on parliaments and representatives, pointing out what new perspectives the approach we apply can add to the existing research. We then explain the methodological and theoretical foundations of our study and relate our approach to strands in (especially German) sociological research focused on the analysis of explicit/implicit knowledge (in qualitative inquiry) on the one hand and on processes of self-regulation (governmentality studies) on the other. Thereafter we present empirical analyses of authenticity norms in professional politics, on the basis of which we reconstruct self-idealizations of German MPs, and then discuss these results with reference to the emergence of modern parliaments. The paper concludes with reflections on the possibilities of further research.

Research on Parliaments: The Relevance of MPs’ (Implicit) Knowledge

The starting point for the research on parliaments that take the parliamentarians, their actual practices and their knowledge into account is undoubtedly the work of Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan, and Ferguson (1962). Instead of addressing parliament as an ideal or merely theoretical construct, their study focuses on “the perceptions and behavior” (p. 4) of the parliamentarians. The premise of this study is the notion that

[A]ction in the legislative arena can no more be wholly comprehended by merely recognizing that its object is primarily to ‘make laws’ than can football be comprehended by knowing its object is to score more points than the opposing side. (p. 136)

Following this approach, the authors observe “parliament” as an ongoing accomplishment and try to break down different layers and forms of action in analyses that mainly follow the theoretical frame of role-theory. Making use of an extensive empirical study, in which 447 representatives from four American federal states have been inquired on their parliamentary activities, Wahlke et al. illustrate that, despite the fact that one can assume that the actors in parliament are confronted with similar demands and duties, the way they perceive these demands as well as the understanding of their duties and the motives regarding the exertion of these duties differ largely. In detail, Wahlke et al. identify either different forms of so called “purposive roles” (p. 245)—the ritualist, the tribune, and the inventor—that focus on the representatives’ attitudes towards legislation work as well as different forms of

“representational roles“ (p. 267)—delegate, trustee, and politico—a category by which the authors try to conceptually capture the representatives’ relation to the electorate (see for the discussion of these results, Wahlke et al., p. 377). This pivotal work has inspired a variety of studies in the US (e.g., Davidson, 1969; Fenno, 1973; Searing, 1994) and not least in (relatively recent) European and German social science inquiry (see for research on MPs: Oertzen, 2006; Patzelt, 1991, 1993, 1997; on the MPs’ staff: Busby, 2013; Busby & Belkacem, 2013; Scheffer, 2014; Schöne, 2011). In addition, some works have focused on the “parliamentary culture” (Schöne, 2010; see also: Brichzin, 2016; Willner, 2014) and have tried to combine different strands of micro-analytical analyses under the framework of the term.

Though the aforementioned studies can be seen as very inspiring for a qualitative approach on how parliaments work and on characteristics of politics in representative democracies in general, in our consideration they have two major shortcomings: First, the mainstay of most works is the activity in parliament—the MPs’ opinions and their actions are interpreted in light of their significance in bringing forth parliaments as a professional context and, hence, are discussed with regard to the parliaments functionality or its relevance in facilitating the democratic process. However, Fenno’s (1978) early empirical research on the “home style” of members of the US House of Representatives as well as theoretical discussions on the matter of representation (see Pitkin, 1967; Rehfeld, 2006; Thaa, 2008) raises some important questions here. In particular, Fenno (1978) not only points out that representatives have different working styles (“hill style” vs. “home style”) depending on whether they are engaged in parliament or in their constituencies, but also questions whether the work on political issues and in parliament (in the plenary assembly, in committees, and so on) is of more importance than other dimensions of the representatives’ actions (at “home,” respectively, in their constituencies). Particularly, as Fenno points out that this latter work is not about guaranteeing responsiveness or the “congruence between the policy preferences of the represented and the policy decisions of the representative“ (p. 240) alone (and not even in the first place)—instead, it is about the congressman “presenting himself” (p. 168), that is, the electorates would be interested not only in the presentation of policies, but use these presentations “to judge their representative as a person” (p. 241) to decide “whom they should trust.”

Thus, Fenno’s empirical work challenges the usefulness of a (theoretical) differentiation between “real” and “symbolic” politics, as in particular Edelman (1985) has put forward. Edelman defines symbolic politics as a form of political communication that is suited to affect or influence, “The cognitions of large numbers of people in ambiguous situations” (p. 7) “... helps create beliefs about what is proper; perceptions of what is fact; and expectations of what is to come” (p. 7). This differentiation between symbolic and real or effective (decision and law-making) politics has been a (contested) theme throughout research on parliaments and MPs—and in particular in German social and political research (cf. Sarcinelli, 1987; an overview on the debate give Hitzler & Kliche, 1995). But, if research on parliament is too focused on institutions and roles (see for this critique also the overview on research on parliaments from Brichzin 2016) it misses the chances related to a reconstruction of the MPs’ “perceptions and behavior” (Wahlke et al., 1962, p. 4) and overlooks what parliament (or representational politics) is all about “from the perspective of the actors,” as Schöne (2010, p. 32) highlights in his research on “parliamentary culture.” Thus, it seems important to genuinely take into account the MPs’ knowledge of themselves and their activities and address them in a sense as experts, not only of parliament, but of the arena of professional politics in a broader sense. Thereby, also biographical aspects of private life insofar as they are impacted by a parliamentary culture are to be considered.

If one agrees that the focus on the MPs’ knowledge is a promising point of departure, there is a second point of critique with regard to the aforementioned studies, as in particular

the reference to role-theory suggests that research is mainly focused on the MPs' explicit motives and common-sense understandings of their roles and duties. However, in different strands of social theory and empirical research it has been pointed out that, in order to understand how people act, it is not only of importance to ask them what they did for what reasons or what their explicit motives may have been, but to reconstruct the implicit knowledge guiding their actions, which the actors are not necessarily fully aware of—see already Polanyi's consideration on the “tacit” knowledge (1966), Bourdieu's notion of the Habitus (1994, 2000), Dewey's (1980) concept of habits as well as Collins' (2010) discussion of implicit and tacit knowledge, to name just some relevant authors all highlighting the same, implicit aspects of action-guiding knowledge. In the light of these considerations, to know how representatives do their work and how they relate different dimensions of that work (e.g., “home style” and “hill style,” Fenno, 1978) with each another (and also with other dimensions, such as their private life, their biographies) cannot only be conceived as a matter of motives or intentions, but also as matter of underlying habitual orientations (on the notion of orientations, see Bohnsack, 2010, 2014a; Mannheim, 1982, p. 243).

As part of a multiple informed qualitative inquiry into the knowledge of the MPs, in our empirical analysis, we therefore, firstly, consider the interplay of two different dimensions of knowledge relevant for the occupational practice: implicit-pre-reflexive (habitual) and explicit-reflexive knowledge structures. Furthermore, following remarks on the particularly normative (and sometimes ambiguous) requirements MPs have to meet or to cope with (cf. Borchert, 2003; Hitzler, 1994; Schüttemeyer, 2003), we, secondly, aim at a reconstruction of the dominant aspects of the normative order in professional politics which presets the relation of different dimensions of knowledge (of one self). To this, we focus either on the MPs' perception of normative demands (and work out how they refer to a common basic problem) as well as on their way(s) of dealing with them. In this respect, we follow—and as well depart from—the path, which the discipline of governmentality studies outlines.

Research on Subjectivation: On the Reconstruction of Norms by Taking up the Actors' Perspective

In recent decades, a strand of research that can be subsumed under the approach of “governmentality studies” (Bratich, Packer & McCarthy, 2003; Bröckling, 2011; Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991; Dean, 2010; Miller & Rose, 1990, 2008; Pieper & Rodríguez, 2003) has emerged in international sociological research. Picking up from Foucault, the resulting studies put the term of “subjectivation” or “subjectification” at the core of their analyses. Subjectivation is conceived of as a mode of self-regulation of everyday practice based not on dictates and prohibitions of particular behaviors; rather, subjects are always *brought forth* through discursive invocations. A widely known example of such an invocation is the *enterprising self*; famously put forth by the works of Rose (1992) and Bröckling (2016)—for similar approaches see also the works of Du Gay (1997) and Hall (1997). Thus, governmentality studies first and foremost focus on the normative requirements, actors in different arenas have to meet or to cope with; they focus on dominant discursive orders. However, in contrast to role theory, the discursive invocations that imply a certain way of relating to oneself do not assume a priori defined set of concrete roles, but they can gain relevance in differently role-related contexts. These invocations therefore comprise totalizing expectations in the sense of “identity norms” (Goffman, 1963, p. 130). This term is grounded in Goffman's assumption that research on how people (inter)act should not be focused on the question, who or what a person really is, but on how individuals are performing being a person, suggesting that we should focus on what constitutes these performances—and not, for example, on the question if performances are (in)authentic (for this argument see above and Lawler,

2012). According to Goffman, these performances are fundamentally shaped by social norms, and with the term “identity norms“ (Goffman, 1963, p. 130) he addresses such ideals of normality that governmentality studies call “type of subject” (Bröckling, 2016), such as the “entrepreneurial,” “optimized,” or “happy self,” etc. It is worth noting, however, that in contrast to Goffman the attention of governmentality studies is almost exclusively on the analysis of public discourses (e.g., advice literature) that point to particular subjectivation processes (Amling & Geimer, 2016; Geimer, 2019; 2017; Geimer & Amling, 2017, 2019; Geimer, Amling, & Bosančić, 2019). Especially “programmes of government“ (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 6) are analyzed arguing that their logic permeates into everyday and professional life: “Language here serves as a translation mechanism between the general and the particular, establishing a kind of identity or mutuality between political rationalities and regulatory aspirations“ (p. 10). The central proposition in the tradition of governmentality studies, that discourses (e.g., on the “enterprising self”) are also compelling and translated into the knowledge of oneself such as “values of self-realization, the skills of self-presentation, self-direction and self-management” (p. 27), has been called into question by a series of authors (e.g., Bührmann & Schneider, 2008; Geimer et al. 2019; Pfahl & Traue, 2012), suggesting a need for qualitative in-depth, empirical subjectivation analysis. Our following research, therefore, commences at the intersection at which *discursive-normative rules* concerning the “governing of the self” (identity norms) meet the (explicit and/or implicit) *framing of everyday action* in the field of professional (German) politics.

For the purpose of an analysis of the MPs’ knowledge of themselves, their routines and duties we adopted the dichotomy established in the documentary method between implicit-pre-reflexive (habitual) and explicit-reflexive knowledge structures (see e.g., Bohnsack, 2012, 2014b, 2014c; Bohnsack, Pfaff, & Weller, 2010), which was elaborated on the basis of concepts from Mannheim (1982) especially to differentiate between the rationality of official objectives and the implicit logic of everyday life and the knowledge structuring the latter (habitus/ habits), respectively. But, a rigid use of that framework presuming a principal dichotomy of explicit (reflexive) and implicit (habitual) knowledge proved not to be useful as a basis for the analysis of our interviews. In this respect, already Bohnsack pointed out that explicit knowledge can also encompass imperatives of (potentially) implicit self-control (Bohnsack, 2014c, p. 35; Bohnsack, 2017, pp. 152-185). Following these advice, we used the elaborated methodology of the documentary method to reconstruct the norm of being authentic, which proved to be particularly relevant through a reconstruction of the MPs’ perspectives in a comparative, in-depth analysis of single cases.

We argued that an analysis of politicians’ self-knowledge shouldn’t comprise only their activities in parliament as a central part of political culture (for example in terms of role theory) but should focus on effects of the normative order of that field on their relations to themselves. In this respect the perspective of the analysis of subjectivation according to governmentality studies seems to be a good starting point. Nevertheless, governmentality studies are restricted to discourse and content analysis of public data and texts (such as advice literature) and predicate specific types of subjects on a merely theoretical basis (that is without empirical consideration of the concrete actors). Against this background, we propose a modification of the documentary method which allows for reconstructing dominant identity norms in a given field and the actors’ modes of relating to them.

Methods

With regard to the presented reflections towards a subjectivation analysis that takes into account empirically the actors’ implicit and explicit knowledge of themselves and focuses on their perception of normative demands as well as on their way(s) of dealing with them, the

choice was for a qualitative research design that enables to get a grasp of the actors' perspectives. Therefore, the main method of inquiry were narrative interviews (Nohl, 2010) which allowed us to examine the assimilation and negotiation of normative expectations against the backdrop of (professional-)biographical frames. Additionally, we used group discussions (Bohnsack, 2010) that served to validate collective implicit/habitual orientations of its participants (see Amling & Geimer, 2018 on the results of these group discussions).

The selection of interview partners followed a strategy of seeking out stark contrasts. First, the selection focused on MPs of the GREEN PARTY and the CDU as the two parties differ starkly, not only in terms of their electoral success, but also in terms of their member numbers, internal structures and organizational density as well as their representational claims (Jandura, 2007, p. 19). These differences support the assumption that party membership in each case could possibly lead to the recognition of different normative expectations or different modes of dealing with shared expectations. Second, politicians in an early stage of their career and established professionals were selected from both parties; this was based, in view of the scholarship on expertise (e.g., Gruber, 1999), on the assumption that a different duration of exposure to professional demands and normative expectations could lead to different forms of handling them.

We researched the MPs on the parliament's website (www.bundestag.de/abgeordnete) and contacted MPs of both parties via telephone and e-mail, sending a short description of our research project. In this description we put the focus on our interest in understanding politicians' professional daily routines and related experiences in their (professional) biography and made clear that we followed an open, explorative design. We contacted roughly 200 MPs and appointed 25 interviews. In most cases, these interviews took place in the MPs' offices, three were recorded in a restaurant. In the following paper we will discuss three of these cases (see table 1), whereat our interest is not to reconstruct their idiosyncratic opinions or individual career paths, but to highlight general features of the realm of professional politics and in particular the relevant identity norms or subject types politicians have to relate to – and the surprisingly similar way, they do so (see below).

Betty Azizi—*all persons are anonymized*—stems from the Green Party and at the time of the interview had been a MP for almost twenty years already; she was in her mid-forties then. Pit Franke and Gabi Wolf on the contrary belong to the Christian Democratic Party and were in their early to mid-sixties when the interviews were recorded. Whereas Pit Franke joined the Parliament for the first time in 2013, Gabi Wolf held her second mandate at that time. The interviews were roughly organized into three different thematic sections (*biography*, first generally, then professional career(s); *everyday life*; *self-perception*) and introduced with an open question about the politicians' (professional) biographies. The follow-up-questions that brought up other aspects of the MPs' occupational routines or professional career, were put forward only, when the narrative thread following a question had been exhausted. In compiling the interview's guideline, we therefore initially followed the usual approach of the documentary method: The focus is on questions that stimulate the interviewees to tell or report about their everyday practices and routines and/or their (in this case: professional) experiences, as narrations and detailed description are considered the genre of text by which the implicit knowledge can be reconstructed (Nohl, 2010, 2016). In contrast, or better in addition, to this approach we also included questions that encouraged the politicians to express their reflections on different matters, and thus forced a change to the genre of *reasoning*; e.g., we asked the interviewees to give and explain an example of a good or a bad politician or tell us about someone, who has been a role model for them, and so on. To include both kinds of questions (provoking narrations and reasonings) was important to be able to relate implicit *and* explicit knowledge structures.

The audio recordings of the interviews were the basis of all further analysis, of which the first step was to identify topical structures. With respect either to this topical structure of each single interview as to the sections of all interviews that proved fruitful for comparison (in accordance with the usual procedure in the documentary method) we identified passages or sections—usually 5 to 7 sections of roughly 3 to 5 minutes length for each interview—to be transcribed and analyzed in detail. As the focus of the analysis is on *how* actors treat a certain topic or on *how* they describe themselves in reply to our questions and as we assume that this “how” refers to a *modus operandi* of an *habitus* that (with reference to Bourdieu) is documented time and again, it is not considered important to analyze the complete interview, but only those sections where the *modus operandi* can be reconstructed from very distinctly (see Bohnsack, 2014a and 2010). Besides, as pointed out, we did not aim for an extensive interpretation of single but on the typically relevant identity norms or subject types that politicians have to relate to and typical ways of doing so. As we deviated from the usual procedure of documentary analyses (where the sections of interviews or group discussions, in which the genre of reasoning prevails, is going to be sorted out) we selected sections, in which the politicians told us about their professional career and/or their daily routines *as well as* sections in which they started on their own initiative or in reply to our questions to reason on the characteristics of good/bad politicians, role-models—in general: in which they reflected on expectations politicians have to meet in their perspective. The analysis of these sections followed the principle of comparative sequence analysis: First, the politicians’ utterances are being analyzed in relation to the context, in which they are expressed. This is due to avoid the missing of contextual meanings, see Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) on the indexicality of language. Second, these meanings—or rather: the *habitus* they are pointing at—are being analyzed in comparison to other cases: Usually the comparative analysis started with two thematically comparable sections of two cases (i.e., narrations on the professional career or the answers to the initial question or the initial impulse). To identify the *habitus* of one single case, different sections of that one case are being compared, too. In our project we followed this well-established procedure, but in addition analyzed the sections of self-reflection, in which the politicians reasoned or argued, *independently* from the sections, in which they told us about their daily routines or professional career.

All sections were analyzed according to two steps: the formulating interpretation and the reflecting interpretation (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 110; 2014b, p. 136). Where the first step comprises a very detailed analysis of the thematic structure of a section, thereby also identifying revealing expressions and metaphors used by the interviewees, the second step aims at the reconstruction of the *way*, these topics are being dealt with—and here the comparison to other cases is of high relevance (see below).

The rigor and trustworthiness of our analyses were ensured by the principle of comparative analysis; other empirical cases constitute horizons of comparison (Nohl, 2010, pp. 202-203). This approach helps to minimize the researchers’ perspective, in that own normative or evaluative horizons are disregarded in favor of the actors’ perspectives (Bohnsack, 2014c, p. 39, p. 44).

Results

Subject Types in Professional Politics: The Authentic Self

The research question that led to the *identification of the norm of an authentic self* can be summarized, again (see above), as follows: Which normative expectations do all respondents regard themselves as being subject to and which imperatives of self-regulation are exerted on the actors in the institutionalized arena of professional politics? The relevance of

the (identity) norm of the authentic self also becomes clear through the fact that the questions, in response to which the interviewees established a reference to the concept, varied starkly – authenticity, then, is treated quite similarly across a wide range of different topics and text genres (reasoning, description, narration) and highly relevant for very different types of MPs (see sample). MP Betty Azizi, for example, replied thus when asked what constituted a good or bad politician:

Azizi: [...] who do I find so bad. (.) Müller. (.) I think he's a disaster; you always have the feeling he'd sell anything. (3) //Hmm.// He doesn't stand by what he says and he is not authentic. (.) People who aren't authentic; (2) I find them just terrible. (2) //Hmm.//

Y: And what is that?

Azizi: Mhhh when one=when they don't stand by what they proclaim. (.) So I have this colleague here; (.) also from my delegation (.) I always think, man; (.) you're too young to be saying that. (.) He always goes along with the old ones.

Ms. Azizi characterizes Mr. Müller here as a bad politician by arguing that he merely “sells” i.e., wants to conduct a transaction to his advantage and to that purpose is willing to make statements that he later does not honor. From Ms. Azizi's perspective, this does not correspond to the expectations to which politicians ought to conform, which Ms. Azizi ascribes to the term “being authentic.” Her assertions highlight not only her expectation in terms of the continuity and coherence of the behavior of politicians (their statements and behavior must correspond and must not change), but also the assumption that these homologies are established in that the private person acts in a manner identical to the public person or that there are at least no contradictions between the private and professional selves or spheres. This can be seen in the sequence following Azizi's characterization of Müller, in which she describes a politician from her own delegation. That MP, in her eyes, simply cannot possibly stand for what he proclaims as he aligns himself with the positions of the “old ones,” who cannot align with his personal experience on account of the generational difference (“you're too young”). The following norm of the authentic self thus emerges: he/she is inauthentic who claims or attempts to claim as his/her own for the purposes of self-representation or self-promotion things which must be foreign to him due to his lack of (personal) experience.

A quite similar reference to the “authentic self” is expressed by MP Pit Franke as well when he is asked whether there are parallels between the role models he mentions in the interview and his own life:

Y: Would you say that (.) there are parallels between the lives of these people (.) or z- or perhaps rather between how you do things and how they do what you do (.) and their

Franke: You can only (.)

Y: own life,

Franke: Yes. You can only be (.) convincing when you're authentic. (3)

Y: Hmm. What (.) What does that mean?

Franke: So it's when people: believe; (2) what (.) you say. (.) Authentic (.) you yourself (.) are the opinion you are the opinion, the people say (.) I buy that from him, (.) //Hmm.// I understand. (.)

Mr. Franke also references to authenticity as a norm and sine qua non of the possibility of being an effective politician and that means by acting as himself. The people have to “believe” him and that only works if he “is” “authentically” his opinion, i.e., that he embodies it to the greatest

possible degree. Only then do the people “buy” the positions of him or MPs, which Mr. Franke elaborates as a process of understanding—bringing the “selling” into a metaphorical context not in terms of the logic of insincere promotion as a negative horizon (see above, Ms. Azizi) but as (the enabling of) persuasion as a positive horizon. The authentic self in politics implies, then, for Mr. Franke as well, a coherence and continuity in the political praxis (and that that praxis matches the convictions and actions of the private person).

Based on these statements (and many others which cannot be interpreted here) from politicians with different backgrounds (regarding our sampling strategy), it becomes clear that identity-related authenticity norms in the arena of professional politics are highly relevant. However, this does not address the question as to whether these norms have any effect on the actors’ occupational practices. After all, the reference to authenticity could simply be a rationalization in the mold of the legitimating function of common sense (see Bohnsack, 2012, p. 124), or perhaps they could be seen as a “protective wall of secondary legitimations” (Schütze, 1983, p. 286; a concept with which Schütze largely disregarded to study subjects’ own theories in the empirical analysis). In another paper, Geimer in a similar manner referred to “myths of the self” (2014), which may not merely not correspond to habitual orientations that guide the social actors’ practice, but indeed contradict it. Thus, against the backdrop and considerations of the “compulsion to perform” (Soeffner & Tänzler, 2002a, p. 8) in politics, or the challenge of being successful on the manifold front and back rooms of the “electoral market(s)” (Weber, 2012, p. 39), one could simply reject all authenticity demands as mere fictions and posit “representation and distortion” (Soeffner, 2000, p. 287) as the fundamental characteristics of a “‘supra-individual’ habitus” (ibid) of the politicians. According to this assumption, that is, that a “switching between representation and distortion is necessarily a part of the supra-individual habitus of a politician” (Soeffner & Tänzler, 2002b, p. 21), there would be only one form of relationship between MPs and authenticity norms and this would be a contextual-strategic management of self-presentations. As our further analyses and the conclusions drawn from them will show, this theoretical assumption is untenable, generalizing and simplifying.

Relating to Subject Types in Professional Politics: Idealizations of the Self

Rather than now turn to additional interviews in order to validate the existence of the normative pressure to be authentic, in the following we will draw on our analysis hitherto to examine in-depth the question of how this pressure is being dealt with by the politicians, i.e., on possible forms of self-regulation exerted on the actors in the institutionalized arena of professional politics that enable the politicians to deal with the expectation to be authentic. In order to closer examine these ways, we will first take a look at the case of Ms. Azizi.

In her interview, Ms. Azizi on several occasions at length reports on her commitment to change the situation of minorities or of the socially weak and she presents examples that link her efforts immediately to the realm of (her) private life: She speaks of children (referring to the situation of her daughter at school), of migrants (by reference to her own biography), of underprivileged women and so on. In her statements we can therefore identify a characteristic implicit logic of her professional action: Ms. Azizi is doing work that concerns a specific aspect or content that is marked as relevant and reasonable in multiple ways. Hence, her statements document a value-rational logic of action, which is furthermore linked to an orientation along individual capacity or rather an orientation towards the recognition as a capable individual. This logic, of course, takes on contours if compared to the statements of other MPs as for example those of Mr. Franke (see below): In his interview it becomes clear that his professional (as well as his private) actions are structured by the implicit assumption that there is one objective solution to every problem. The orientation of his habitual practices in different

contexts then is towards the right “methods” or procedures one needs to apply to gain insight in this one right solution.

Likewise, in the interview of MP Azizi not only the interdependency of individual biography and professional practice is obvious, but it seems that the same logic of action is relevant in both realms, occupational and private. Beyond that, it is remarkable that Ms. Azizi is aware of some aspects of that habitual logic, despite it being part of the pre-reflexive knowledge. This becomes evident in her self-designation as “small heroine.” Ms. Azizi develops this designation as an ideal in the context of a narration on her personal contact to women in a military regime, who work as midwives there. In the same section of her interview, Ms. Azizi makes other examples, too, for example, of people who stand up against right-wing extremism in Senftenberg, a small town in Eastern Germany, and calls these people “small heroes.” Thus, the descriptions outline the image of a person that a) fights for clear and undisputed social objectives, i.e., the improvement of the situation of the socially weak or those in need of protection; that b) remains more or less invisible, despite her important contributions. That and how Ms. Azizi considers herself a “small heroine” shows not only at the end of the section, where she applies the notion to describe herself resp. her own actions. The self-designation also reoccurs in several parts of the interview and is particularly evident in a passage in which she portrays her contribution as a MP to a new bill:

At the end, of course, everyone was there, just not me. Hmmm. But the law is there. And I was the person. I was the person who had the idea and I know it. Hmm. And without me the Berlin Declaration would have fallen by the wayside a few times and if I hadn't at some point grabbed Ms. Meyer's mobile phone number to ring her and say now please jump in now otherwise the law will die. Hmm the law wouldn't exist. But history won't celebrate me for it. Perhaps at some point a scholar will try to find out and then someone will admit that it came about with Ms. (Azizi) but. God. History; it falsifies so much anyway. Hmm. I know it and the law exists.

The structural logic of this heroic story consists in the implementation of an idea against all adversities: At the right time, upon exhorting the right forces and with luck on her side, Ms. Azizi can realize this idea and create a law that significantly improves the situation of disadvantaged groups. Azizi is, as “a small heroine,” the person who is not adequately honored for the birth of the law, just like the midwives in the military regime, whose story is rather forgotten; nevertheless, she knows about her achievement and does not have to be celebrated for it. The metaphor of the small heroine thus implies the image of someone who takes care of socially necessary or desirable work and does that as a strong and capable individual, even though this, his/her power is relativized by referring to this someone as a “small” hero. The metaphor of a “small hero/small heroine” therefore takes up some essential aspects of the implicit logic that structures Ms. Azizi's professional and private life: recognition as a capable individual and commitment to objectives that are marked as socially relevant. Therefore, the self-designation as a “small heroine” can be called a self-idealization. The self-ideal exaggerates important components of Ms. Azizi's habitus that thereby also become reflexively available for her—which is not to suggest in the least that it does make sense to speak of *the* habitus of politicians (see above). On the contrary, habit-specific adaptations and correspondences to authenticity norms are evidently present.

A similar way of dealing with the normative pressure to be authentic can be found in a lot of other cases (we cannot present in detail), too, that is, these cases are also characterized by self-idealizations: Alongside the “small heroine” Ms. Azizi, there is the “methodologist” Mr. Franke; the “factual and sober person” Ms. Wolf; the “grocer of numbers” Mr. Lopau and

so on (Amling & Geimer, 2016, 2018; Geimer, 2017; Geimer & Amling, 2019). At the heart of self-idealizations are, on the one hand, (metaphorically condensed) representations of central aspects of professional orientations and, on the other, the representation of the lack of contradiction between these and the orientations within the domain of private life. This allows politicians to represent the coherence and continuity of their orientations for themselves and for others. In this respect, it could not be claimed that the cases under investigation here allow for the reconstruction of *one* and the *same* habitus; rather, they show largely *similar forms of bringing dimensions of a person's habitus into accordance with norms of identity and authenticity* in the field of politics. Moreover, self-ideals do not operate exclusively on the level of implicit operational know-how, but they are also not purely theoretical self-reflections – they are both at the same time.

It is especially surprising that even in the interviews of politicians that do not mention authenticity explicitly, self-idealizations can be found, as in the case of MP Gabi Wolf. Ms. Wolf achieves meeting the identity norm of the authentic self by seeing herself in both a political-professional as also in a personal-private context as a "factual and sober person," an "objective person." This point of view in a professional context can be seen in the following interview extract, which comes immediately after she describes taking up a new occupational position:

This is why I say I am an objective person; I am a rational person. And expertise is always for me the alpha and the omega. With this political babble you can get somewhere to a certain degree. You don't do politics itself any favors, you don't do voters any favors; and the matter itself certainly not.

Directly before the cited extract, Wolf describes a situation where she refrained from using a good opportunity for tactical and strategic self-presentation, and not only did she refrain from stressing her outstanding reputation, as she herself describes it ("a reputation like Donnerhall" [famous German stallion named "echo of thunder," authors]), but she even accepted a false assessment of her. Homologous to her description of herself as an "objective... rational person," in her description of the situation, also an implicit orientation that guides her (professional) action can be identified, according to which she wanted and was able to convince through her professional work and not through (a desired) self-depiction. The "political babble," as which, in her view, this form of communication to enhance the profile of one's position is also to be understood, is admittedly expedient "to a certain degree," yet it is not for her, since politics already suffers from it (as do likewise the voters) and also the (not more specifically identified) "matter" is not advanced through this. The fact that, for Ms. Wolf, it is hardly about the "matter" itself, becomes clear when one considers that in the whole 2-hour interview, although she speaks a number of times about the importance of "expertise" and her "knowledge," she hardly (or only peripherally) mentions her decades-long area of specialty, in whose service this knowledge exists. One may interpret this as implying that a particular dedication to the "matter" would call into question her objectivity as a politician. She does not reveal such a position, motivated by philosophical-political convictions or personal experience, at any point in the interview. Rather, it is clear that objectivity and professionalism not only characterize her political work, but also her orientations in private life. For example, in Ms. Wolf's description of the way she treats the school achievements of her daughter an emotionless objectivity and distant "professionalism" is apparent that even runs the danger of negatively and permanently affecting their personal relationship. Wolf herself notes in a brief account the difference between the achievements of her daughter ("excellent student," who "had only the best grades") and her own reactions to that ("quite decent"), as well as the

difference between her rational reaction and the emotionality of her daughter (“at some point she blew her top”).

MP Gabi Wolf thus does not refer at any point to an authentic self as a norm, and she quite clearly does not experience the expectation associated with this remaining true to herself as external, challenging demand; and yet she fulfills this identity norm through the correspondence of private and professional attitudes to a particularly high degree. The concordance of her personal objectivity even goes so far that she was willing to discuss personal characteristics or foibles with colleagues that may be detrimental to professional interaction (alcohol problems of a colleague, the managerial style of a colleague). It is moreover particularly telling that Wolf’s own extensive objectivity in the professional and private spheres are thoroughly (at least in basic terms) reflexively available to her without them becoming a purely legitimating rationalization of her actions. Rather, those aspects of her habitus that are not only relevant to private life but also for her professional practice have become more and more reflexive for Ms. Wolf. In this respect, it is again indicated to speak of a self-ideal that Ms. Wolf brings up in the interview over and over again, which can be identified by the term “objective rational person.” These outcomes of our analyses presented here make it clear that politicians’ self-idealizations are a form of self-knowledge that allows them to reconcile reflexively their own habitus with norms of authenticity.

Discussion

When Erickson (1995, p. 127), with reference to Goffman and Mead, claims that authenticity only becomes a topic of everyday life “when a self-referential [...] problem arises that calls one’s habitual character into question,” the necessity of thematizing authenticity for MPs appears to be based on an *increased and omnipresent* pressure to relate to the public, the electorate, the professional colleagues and not only as a public politician, but as a private person. MPs respond to this pressure by having at their disposal an image of their “habitual character” (Erickson, 1995, p. 127). This seems particularly plausible in the light of our empirical evidence. In the following passage, MP Franke discusses negative, early experiences in politics and refers to himself as a “representative of the people” who is also, to a certain extent, always a representative of his (idealized) self:

Then there are other things that strike me as particularly difficult here. Whereas before I used to stand for a thing, for a product, now my person is very far from irrelevant. Hmm. That’s what you stand for. That’s what... You have to stand for yourself, so to say, and you have to say what a top bloke you are, that’s all... If what we’re talking about now – if you’d asked me about it ten years ago... Hmm – “Talk about your life” – then I couldn’t have done it. I wouldn’t have done it. Hmm. So you have to make yourself into a product, since this follows logically from what other people want. They want to know who they’re sending as a representative of the people. That means it’s less about – and that’s quite funny in my case – it’s not about me being employed because of my professional experience. Actually, what happens is that someone from the electoral district is sent as a representative of the people – someone they trust. And in this sense your person is the most important issue. I had to get used to this, since a scientist stands for his theory, for his model and his results. And not for his person. Hmm.

“Before,” as an entrepreneurial scientist, Mr. Franke stood for a “thing,” or even for the “product” manufactured by his firm. “Now” (as a politician) his “person is very far from irrelevant.” This means that he is no longer a person who stands for something, but he stands

for a person who stands for something. The “representative of the people” (about whom others ask, “Who is this?”) is also always a self-representative, and it is for exactly this reason that Mr. Franke has to “make [himself] into a product” and to make others perceive him as a “top bloke.” Furthermore, he is very aware of what he has to offer (as “a product”): the habitual character that he acquired whilst studying mathematics and which took him so far as an entrepreneur in the field of applied science, and which he now represents in politics as a person. We can hence detect in this passage the process of generalizing and idealizing the self that, in the context of politics, makes the self into an object and “product.” This process also becomes clear when Mr. Franke discusses his first year as a MP. He saw himself confronted with the pressure to relate to the public, the electorate, in a particular fashion. At first, and for many months, his political expertise wasn’t questioned at all. Rather, at all manner of political events, he was strictly advised to talk about himself, how he was doing as a new member of parliament, how his private life in the capital (Berlin) was going, and so on. Only having gained experience could he free himself from the pressure of these expectations.

The normative demand for an authentic self, therefore, is linked to one fundamental task of parliamentarians: to communicate with the voters, not least in order to establish a link between the parliament (where decisions and laws are being made) and the people/the electorate (whose will shall be manifested in these laws and decisions) – to be a “representative” after all. In this respect, there is a striking accordance to the results of the initially mentioned study of Fenno on the “home style” of U.S. House Members. If Fenno in his final considerations differentiates two forms of how congressman “reach” their constituents (“learning who they are” vs. “making themselves visible,” Fenno, 1978, p. 237), he frames that as an attempt to rehabilitate political communication (with the electorate) as one very important aspect of MPs’ (representative) work, namely against the backdrop of the initially mentioned depreciation of “symbolic politics.” Furthermore, Fenno points out that we may have to re-think the category of responsiveness as the only measuring unit for successful or unsuccessful representation and address the question, how a representative gets his political support – and to answer this question “we shall need to consider more than policy preferences and policy agreements. We shall have to consider a broader range of house member behavior – the sorts of behavior we have summed up under the rubric of home style” (Fenno, p. 240). Fenno makes an important point that is highly relevant to the results presented in this article, as he draws the attention on the MPs’ lifeworld beyond parliament, that is, beyond their roles in committees, the plenary session, etc. He further states that in focusing the efforts, MPs make to win the electorate’s support, it becomes obvious that although the voters are interested in the presentations of policies on certain issues, they are “equally interested in using issue presentations as an opportunity to judge their representative as a person” (Fenno, p. 241). This of all points, the importance of enabling “the people” to trust their representatives, is a re-occurring issue in our interviews (and in the focus groups as well, see Amling and Geimer, 2018). Being a MP, therefore, essentially is about presenting oneself as someone who is trustworthy or rather: as someone who provides an orientation that is coherent and congruent and who is therefore reliable. As our empirical reconstructions show, the MP stands not (only) for values or policy positions but for himself, as a person who stands for something (some political content) – thus, the representatives do not establish the link between the parliament and “the people,” but in a way, they are the link.

In particular in the light of the interviewed MPs’ very different backgrounds (see variations in the sample), their increased self-awareness, as documented in their self-idealizations, can be understood as originating in the historically generalized rules of the field of action of parliamentary politics and representative democracy. In the following, we want to give some ideas on how these functions (to represent) and the normative pressures (to be authentic) evolved. Here, von Loewenberg’s (2007, p. 817; von Loewenberg, 1966) social-

historical reflections on the development of contemporary/modern parliaments are enlightening. Loewenberg points out that, owing to increasing democratization and the growing influence of the upper and middle classes on the politics of bodies advising the king (which above all sought to secure the rights and privileges of the powerful), parliaments increasingly turned into decision-making bodies whose members were supposed to represent the people – and as such had to reveal themselves to the people, show “their true colors” and present themselves on a “electoral market” (Weber, 2012, p. 39). This is accompanied by the problem that one not only has to appear as a (“real” and “authentic”) member of a class, acting both in one’s own interests and those of the class, but that one must also appear as an authentic personality, worthy of trust, since one primarily represents the interests of (significant but widely unknown and anonymous) others. It is for this reason, Wentz (2005, p. 30) claims that “political representatives can only be conceived in relation to their authenticity.” And one can assume that – against the background of the emergence of modern parliaments—there arose a “tradition of mistrust of performance,” in which political-strategic presentation was to be seen as “the opposite of the ‘real’ and ‘authentic’” (Dörner, 2012, p. 123; see also Laux & Schütz, 1996; Schicha, 2002). As Imhof (2005, p. 287) claims, political positions today are generally connected with concrete persons, hence are “increasingly assigned to individuals, rather than parties or organizations and are connected to representations of character as a performance of authenticity and integrity,” such that contemporary politicians cannot escape from the norm of having to be authentic; yet at the same time cannot give the appearance that they are strategically polishing their image. The empirical results presented in this paper therefore raise the question of the characteristics of the relationship between citizens and MPs.

As we have argued the MPs do not only “act for” (Pitkin, 1967) or instead of the people or in their interests, but just as little they merely re/present (descriptively or symbolically) a certain position or attitude (“standing for”). They present themselves as authentic, that is as an inseparable unit of politician and person, thereby guaranteeing (to themselves and to the citizens/voters) the coherence and congruence of their (often contradicting) actions and (inevitably changing) testimonies. With reference to recent considerations in studies and theories of political representation (Rehfeld, 2006; Thaa, 2008) one could argue that MPs by habitually presenting themselves (as public-politician-private-person-amalgams) they constitute a realm of the political in which the voters can held “private politicians” accountable.

Conclusion

In this article we presented insights on the knowledge of MPs (members of the German Bundestag). By taking up their perspective we could show the relevance of normative demands for authenticity in professional (German) politics and a common way of dealing with these demands: various *self-idealizations* that are to understand as idealizing reflections of dimensions of the representatives’ own habitus. That is, our work has provided empirical evidence that the MPs’ self-idealizations are not just rationalizing fictions about themselves (applied to legitimize their positions or policies), but idealizing reflections of dimensions of their own habitus. In other words (and referring to the Thomas theorem): *These idealizations should be understood as fictionalizations bearing real consequences in the professional life of the politicians.*

Additionally, we presented some ideas on the *genesis* of the pressure of being authentic in contemporary, professional politics. Subsequent studies should further explore the conditions of this genesis via a (genealogical) discourse analysis of the constitutive logic of the political field (not least taking up the aforementioned perspective of the governmentality studies on public discourses): *Firstly*, by a systematic, methodological combination of qualitative inquiry and discourse-analytic approaches (the latter could also operate in the

framework of the documentary method; see Nohl, 2016). Such a combination would allow politicians' grappling with norms of authenticity to be related to contemporary documents in which identity norms circulate, for example, the newer advice literature or journalists' accounts and conflicting ascriptions of (in)authenticity. Such an approach could be applied to conduct an international comparison in order to differentiate between national varieties between norms of authenticity and forms of self-idealization (or even other forms of coping with these norms). *Secondly*, a genealogical perspective could also trace the development and interaction of discourses leading to the hegemony of the authentic self in politics, as well as fault-lines and transformations that are not detected by a synchronic and actor-focused perspective. *Thirdly*, a detailed socio-genetic analysis of the biographic and milieu-specific contextualization of people's interactions with norms of authenticity *outside* of professional politics is a promising possibility. See, for example, works on demands of authenticity in contemporary, professional arts (Geimer, 2019; Geimer & Amling, 2018), current capitalism and related labor relations (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) or on widespread excessive demands of being authentic, which lead to a "weariness of the self" (Ehrenberg, 2009). Such an analysis should have to maintain the methodological perspective of not reifying the theoretical difference between explicit and implicit knowledge and of being sensitive for potential contextual modifications of the ideal-typical distinction between forms of knowledge of oneself.

At the end of our article we would like to highlight that we are aware of the borderline between the reconstructed techniques of self-idealization (which seem to be unavoidable in order to find/create a supportable, sustainable and accountable self-understanding in professional politics) *and* a narcissism that tries to instrumentalize and control the perception of others. Albeit, there is at least some evidence (see Geimer, 2017) of the latter in single cases, such an evaluation can't be conducted 'objectively' in our methodological framework and is a normative question that engages in politics by judging performances as more or less authentic (instead of analyzing political engagement in relation to ideals of authenticity). This could be seen as a shortcoming or a benefit of our methodological perspective.

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