

Offensive behavior towards female politicians in social media

How does it affect to their psychological well-being

Master's Thesis

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The time we spend on different social media platforms is increasing constantly. People have political discussions with other users, but also with politicians. Politicians have always been subject to social criticism, and politicians are aware of the criticism directed at them, including negative criticism. But with the expansion of the use of social media, unwanted phenomena have emerged in the form of various types of bullying and offensive behavior. In social media, you can make comments anonymously, and this has given people the opportunity to behave offensively towards female politicians, which is a very unpleasant phenomenon. People usually think that anything can be said in social media in the name of freedom of speech. But according to Human Rights freedom of speech is not an absolute right, and it does not justify discrimination, incitement to violence or insult to another person.

This thesis explores the ways female politicians face offensive behavior in social media and how does it affect to their psychological well-being. The three forms of offensive behavior are studied closely: hate speech, targeting and misogyny. The research was executed among ten female politicians as qualitative research and the responds of the research were studied and analyzed based on Ryff's six dimensions of well-being (1989). Hopefully this thesis would raise questions about the treatment of female politicians in social media and would spark a social debate that would lead to a common understanding of respectful behavior in social media.

Keywords: social media, female politicians, hate speech, targeting, misogyny, well-being

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1 Introduction

The name of this thesis is “Offensive behavior towards female politicians in social media – how does it affect to their psychological well-being”. The idea for this thesis began on author’s notifications of the behavior of some people in social media. People seem to think that, in the name of freedom of speech, they could say all kinds of offensive and abusive things to other users. Usually, the comments did not have any other purpose than to hurt and bully other people. People do not seem to understand, that freedom of speech does not allow you to behave badly in social media. Freedom of speech is not an absolute right, nor does it justify discrimination, incitement to violence or insult to another person. For example, censorship of internet discussion platforms to prevent racist or harassing messages is not against freedom of opinion and expression. (Human Rights 2020).

Freedom of speech on the internet can be divided into two perceptions: individual and community perceptions and values. Proponents of individual freedom of expression, or proponents of the liberal view, want individuals to set standards for appropriate online behavior. According to this view, people need to define in discussion boards what is in accordance with Community rules and standards. Many forums rely on the skills and ability of the interviewers to regulate their own comments, distinguishing others inappropriate messages and report them to the moderators of the forum on their own initiative. Representatives of the community view on freedom of expression expect broader community values, such as laws, forum rules, and their moderators to set the rules for online discussion. According to previous studies, the active participation of moderators in the discussion has improved the level of discussion. (Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 51-52).

In this thesis this unwanted phenomenon, offensive behavior on social media, is studied and explored, and ten female politicians were interviewed of their experiences about social media. Hopefully, this thesis will help people understand their responsibility on their own behavior on social media platforms, as well to pay attention to the painful experiences of offensive behavior towards women in politics.

1.1 Background to the study

Our society needs people who take responsibility for common issues. We vote for politicians to represent ourselves in parliament and in various councils, and we give them a mandate to decide on matters that concern us, such as education, health care and care for the elderly. But why are these very politicians we choose causing so much annoyance to some people? Even to the extent that these politicians are subjected to various forms of harmful behavior. Finland is known for advancing women's status in the society and has been statistically one of the leading countries in equality between men and women (stat.fi).

Finland was the first country to give complete political rights to women in 1906. For more than 100 years women have had active roles in decision making and working life (igep.fi). Despite the statistics, Finland cannot be declared to be an equal country, therefore there is a major issue of violent behavior against women that results from an unprivileged status of females. Hate speech against women has been particularly visible among women politicians leading the Finnish government, and it has inspired to study more about this phenomenon.

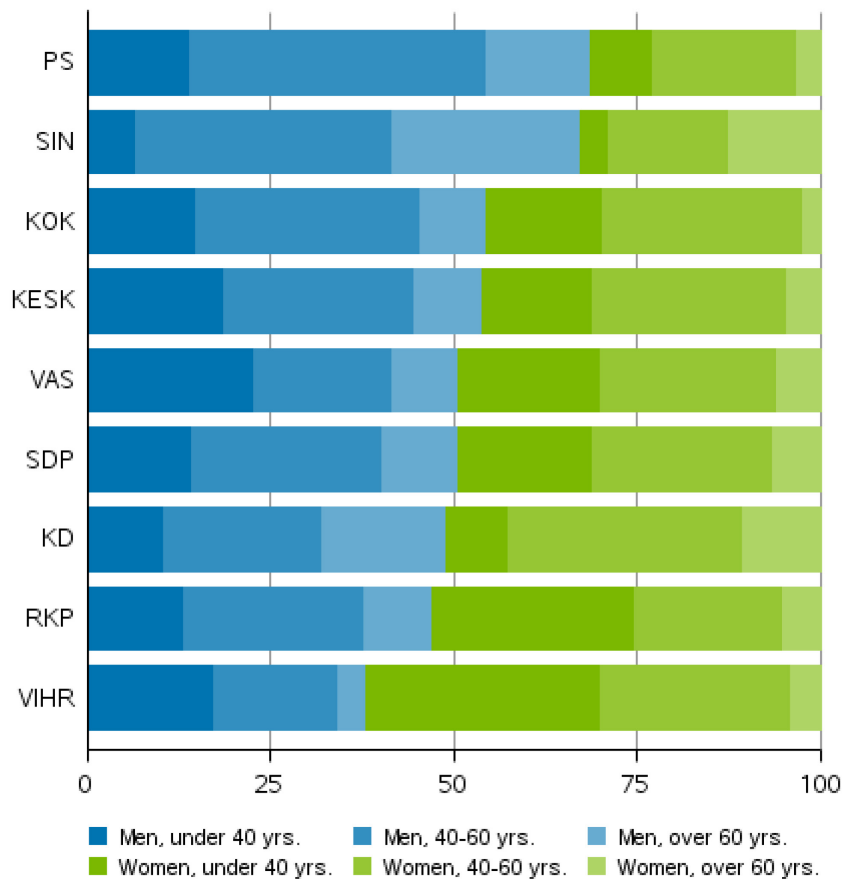
Most of the candidates in the Parliamentary elections have always been men. In the Parliamentary elections 2019, in all 1,432 of the candidates were men and 1,036 women. Women's percentage of candidates was thus 42.0 %, which is 2.6 percentage points higher than in the last Parliamentary elections in 2015. (stat.fi)

If we look at the following picture (Picture 1), we can see the age and gender distribution of the candidates in the last parliamentary elections in 2019. As we can see, of all parliamentary party candidates, the percentage of women candidates is smallest for the Finns Party (PS=Perussuomalaiset 31.5 %) and biggest for the Green League (Vihreät 62.0%). Among all parties, the percentage of female candidates is highest in the Feminist Party (Feministinen puolue 81.6 %) and lowest in the Communist Worker's Party (Suomen kommunistinen puolue 6.3 %). Men account for 53.1 % of all parliamentary parties' candidates. (stat.fi)

Although men have been in majority in the Parliament, is the number of women politicians growing all the time. Can this be also one of the reasons why the offensive behavior is becoming more and more common in social media and in society in general?

This thesis is trying to find out the reasons for the growing problem of offensive behavior towards female politicians, and the reasons for this behavior began to be studied from the misogyny that manifested itself in the Middle Ages.

Share of men and women among candidates by party and age in Parliamentary elections 2019, parliamentary parties (%)



Picture 1: The age and gender distribution of the candidates in the parliamentary election in 2019.

Social media has changed the way we communicate in just over a decade. Elected officials and citizens operate on social media channels side by side and communicate daily with each other. However, with the increasing use of social media and as it becomes more commonplace, unwanted side effects also become more common. One of these regrettable side effects is harassment and bullying faced by elected decision-makers and politicians in their work.

The aim of this thesis is to find out what kind of offensive behavior female politicians face in social media and how does it effect to their psychological well-being, The research is executed with qualitative method by interviewing ten female politicians. The purpose of this thesis is to bring the prevalence of offensive behavior on social media to public awareness, and to make people understand the consequences of their own behavior. Hopefully, this thesis will spark a general discussion of social media behaviors, and potentially lead to the development of communication regulations for different social media platforms.

2 Theoretical backgrounds

In this section the theoretical background for this thesis is studied and clarified. The theoretical background is divided in three sections as follows:

1. psychological well-being
2. social media
3. hate speech, targeting and misogyny.

In the first section psychological well-being is defined and explained; what does psychological well-being mean and how does it appear in people's lives? In the second section social media is being studied as a phenomenon. What platforms can be called social media and how does these platforms work. In the third section these modern phenomena are examined: what kind of forms of offensive behavior are there in social media in general.

Hate speech, targeting and misogyny are unfortunate common phenomena in our society. These unwanted side-effects have been increased during last decade, while social media has become a major communication channel between citizen and decision makers. This development and operating side by side in social media can be positive for democracy; in addition to exposing abuses, it can bring political decision-making closer to the citizen and open cabinet influence in a completely different way than in previous decades.

However, as the use of social media becomes more widespread and more commonplace, so do the disruptive side effects become more common. The line between

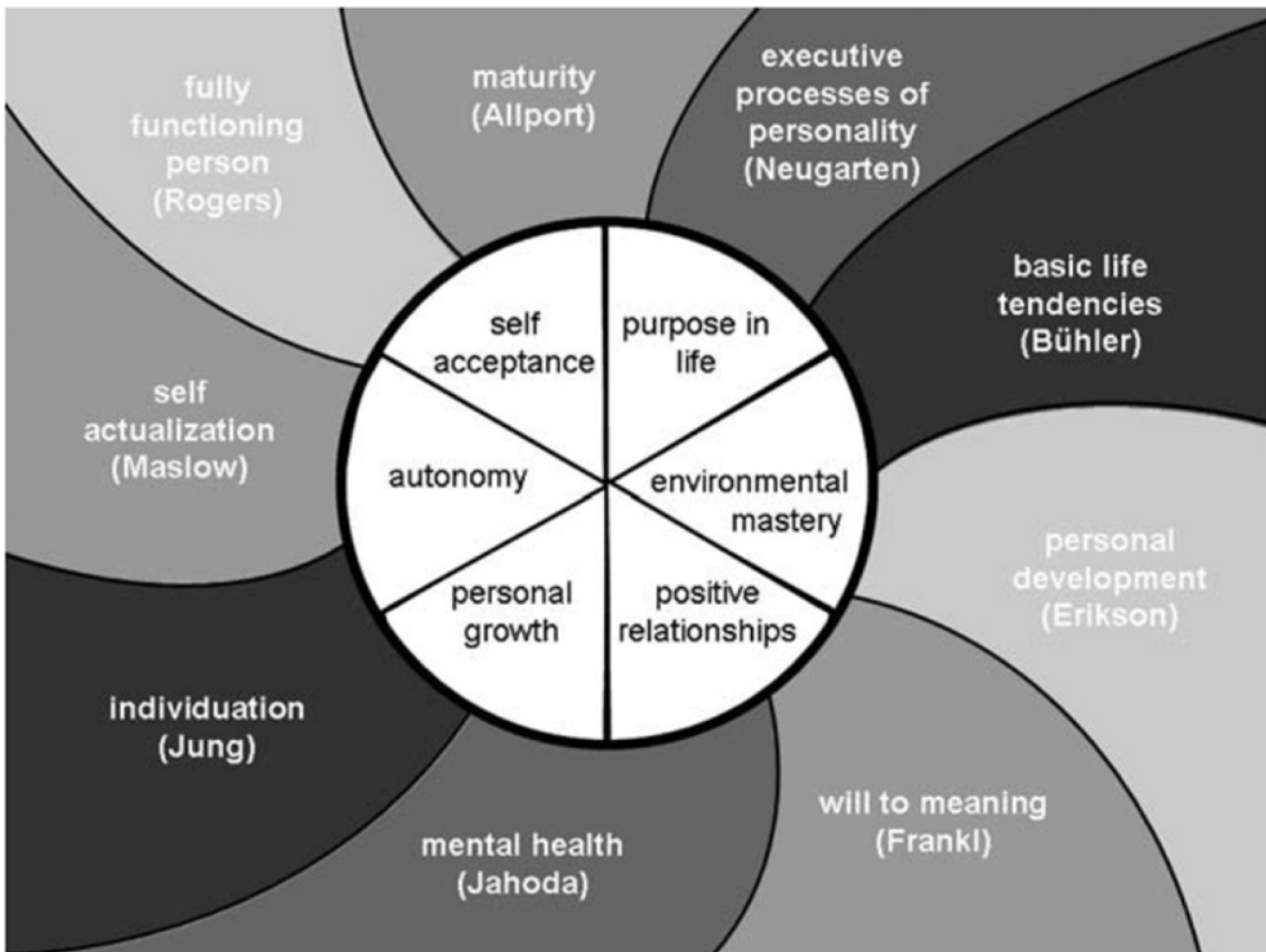
privacy and publicity blurs and shapes people's perceptions of the differences between allowed and unauthorized communications. A study of equality in parliamentary work, published by the Office of Finnish Parliament in 2018, shows that most Prime Ministers have received even direct threats on social media. (Björk, Paavola & Vainio 2018).

2.1 Psychological well-being

What kind of behavior can be described as an offensive behavior? According to Burney (2009) anti-social and offensive behavior occurs where behavior by individuals in an area, or in this case social media, threatens the mental health or physical, security or safety of other individuals. Behavior that unfairly interferes with other people's rights to use and enjoyment of their home, community, or other people in social media is defined as anti-social behavior. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who seem not to care about other peoples' rights or well-being and carry on with bullying and bad behavior.

Well-being, on the other hand usually means a positive mood, happiness, and satisfaction a sense of life. Theoretically, it is defined as good self-esteem, positive mood, or self-realization. Important areas of mental well-being include life satisfaction and cognitive assessment of positive and negative emotions and life situations. In addition, the positives are important for well-being the prevalence of emotional states, interest, and challenges. (Vahtera 2007, 31-32.)

According to Ryff (1989, 1071), in his model of psychological well-being, as seen in Picture 2, has six basic dimensions, which include self-acceptance, positive relationships with other people, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Well-being is born meeting the demands, adversities, and challenges of life. Happiness and positive moods are essential in measuring mental well-being.



Picture 2: Ryff's six basic dimensions of well-being (1989).

Taken together these six dimensions encompass a breadth of wellness that includes

- positive evaluation of one's life and oneself (self-acceptance)
- a sense of continued growth and the belief that life is meaningful (purpose in life)
- development as a person (personal growth)
- the possession of good relationships with other people (positive relationships)
- the capacity to manage one's life and the surrounding environment effectively (environmental mastery)
- a sense of self-determination (autonomy). (Ryff 1995).

Mental well-being affects motivation, which contributes to later well-being. A person feels well when he or she has achieved the goals he or she has set and works to achieve them. Improvements in human well-being are often associated with an

increase in comfortable events or expectations for the future, as well as an improvement in the sense of internal control. (Vahtera 2007, 34.)

According to Minkkinen (2011) well-being as a whole is divided into four main groups, which are physical, mental, social, and material well-being. Physical well-being includes physiological needs, health status, and psychosomatic feelings. Social well-being consists of all an individual's social relationships and social behavior. Materialistic well-being is related to various material resources. Mental well-being, on the other hand, is in constant interaction with other aspects of well-being because through one's own mental well-being, the individual encounters experiences and sensations that emerge from the environment in different ways. Mental well-being itself is built on emotions, cognitive assessments, and mental functioning. (Minkkinen 2011.)

This thesis focuses on psychological well-being, when dealing with digitality and social media. Therefore, it is important to reflect the impact of social media in person's life and psychological well-being. Digital well-being describes the relationship between well-being and digital media. At its simplest, it means capability to balance media in our everyday life. Fostering digital well-being requires an understanding of the relationship between the media and its effects on social, mental, and physical well-being. The concept of digital well-being can be linked to issues of time management, self-regulation and understanding of media-mediated interaction and the specific features of social relationships, brain well-being, and understanding of social norms related to media use. (Takala & Takala 2019, 28.)

2.2 Social media

The concept of social media is not unambiguous. The media itself means the media and those who implement it. Sociality, on the other hand, means inclusion as well as community spirit. Social media refers to the various online communication platforms that a user is exposed to user profile and account and provided information about themselves. On these web sites, an individual interacts with other users, but the interaction can also target the group.

To define “social media” for this thesis purposes, the definitions were synthesized and presented in the literature. The following commonalities were identified among current social media services:

- social media services are Internet-based applications
- individuals and groups create user-specific profiles for an application or site designed and maintained by a social media service
- users generate the content in social media
- social media services facilitate the development of social networks online by connecting a profile with those of other individuals and groups. (Obar & Wildman 2015).

Social media users are both a recipient and a sender of information and content. In many cases, the use of social media also includes user-oriented services and websites. As a phenomenon, social media is post-industrial. It has provided people with a new way to see the world and interact with others because since the birth of social media, traditional communication has taken on new forms as well as channels. Interactions between individuals and leisure activities are also therefore modified. (Pesonen 2013).

As early as the 1990s, Jones (1997) defined four online community criteria that should be met in order to speak of an online community

- a community must have more than two members
- there must be enough interaction between members
- the community must meet in one of the public spaces of the network
- members must have a minimum number of lasting memberships. (Jones 1997).

There are two different challenges associated with conceptualization of social media. First, the speed at which technology is evolving and expanding, challenges our ability to define clear-cut boundaries around the concept. Social media technologies include a wide range of mobile- ja PC-based platforms, that continue to be developed, launched, re-launched, and abandoned every day around the world. Secondly, social media services facilitate various forms of communication that are similar to those supported by other technologies. (Obar & Wildman 2015).

As the word already says, social media is the method to interact socially. They use web-based technology to quickly publicize information and details to a wide array of users. Social media platforms allow development and return of user generated material. Facebook, Tweets, Hi5, Instagram and other social media websites are collectively referred social media. Social media symbolizes low-cost resources that are used to combine social connections and technology with the use of terms. (Sajid 2016).

2.3 Hate speech, targeting, misogyny

The communication capabilities of the internet and social media have implemented the main idea of freedom of expression to present, disseminate and receive information and opinions without limitation. Offensive behavior, such as hate speech, targeting and misogyny are the disadvantages of this open, unobstructed communication. Such disadvantages also include the systematic harassment and verbal abuse that has become increasingly common in recent times. (Ilman 2020).

The increase of hate speech and offensive behavior in social media was thought to be because online chat was a new form of communication. And that some groups of people, like older seniors in particular did not have the capacity for smooth online communication. Younger generations have a different media audience and media users than the older people. (Huovinen 2017).

However, unfamiliarity with online communication has not been a cause for hate speech and offensive behavior in internet, as the phenomenon has grown while online chat as a form of communication has become commonplace. It is to be feared, therefore, that hate speech will begin to institutionalize into online communication and that people will become accustomed to being able to offend others and break the law in their own name online. (Huovinen 2017, 34). In the next chapters these unwanted forms of behavior are defined and studied, in order to clarify what kind of phenomena are being studied in this thesis.

2.3.1 Hate speech

There has been hate speech long before internet era. Therefore, it can be claimed that hate speech is not a new phenomenon. As long as man has been able to speak as a species, man has also been able to produce hate speech about another group or individual that is separate from itself, competing, or defined as the enemy. Hate speech and the alienation of difference can therefore be understood as an innate trait in the human species. The importance of hate speech as a social issue has grown especially since World War II. Hate speech against different ethnic groups as a media phenomenon is also an old phenomenon. Most of the legislative action on hate speech dates to the last 60 years, and especially to the past 30 years. (Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 27-28).

The identification of the personality behaviors associated with the producers of hate speech has created a triadic association between the different personality traits, including psychological attributes of narcissism (the passionate fixation on oneself), psychopathy (lack of empathy) and Machiavellianism (the enjoyment gained from manipulating the behavior of others). (Jakubowicz 2017).

According to Erjavec & Kovačič (2012) the producers of hate speech use various strategies, mostly rearticulating the meaning of news articles. The producers either are organized or act on their own initiative and motives. The producers have been divided into four groups

- soldiers
- believers
- players
- watchdogs. (Erjavec & Kovačič 2012).

The main motive of soldiers and believers is the mission; they share characteristics and personality of an authoritarian person. The key motives of the players are excitement and fun. They are getting satisfaction on confusing and harassing certain groups, for example “White Power” groups. The watchdogs are motivated by drawing attention to social injustice. The last two groups share the characteristics of a liberal personality. (Erjavec & Kovačič 2012).

Hate speech and offensive behavior on social media can be based on a variety of purposes, goals, and forms of action. Producers of hate speech can also seek to influence societal decision-making, the goal may be to prevent the political participation of certain individuals, or it may be a means of influencing individual political decisions. The threat of hate speech can also have a silencing effect and escalating the debate can impair people's willingness to participate in social activities and public debate. The silencing effect can lead to certain views and researched information not being consulted when deciding on common issues. The goal of hate speech is often to provoke a reaction on the part of the other party that reinforces the claims made about them. (Knuutila et al. 2018, 14-15).

Hate speech is a widespread concept used in many contexts and meanings: in political debates, in media debates, in the everyday speech of citizens. In the debate on hate speech, the concepts are confused, mixing legal and punitive hate speech with sharp and stigmatizing critical language against good manners in everyday language. From the point of view of the realization of freedom of speech, the attitude of hate speech emphasizes the weaker part of the responsible and unlimited freedom of speech, in which only direct threats are moderated. (Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 8-9).

The 2017 Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (R 97 20) defines hate speech as "any form of expression which spreads, incites, promotes or justifies ethnic hatred, xenophobia, antisemitism or other hatred based on intolerance." The concept of hate speech is not defined in Finnish legislation, and there is no general internationally accepted definition of hate speech. Therefore, the nature of a particular type of activity has been used as one definition. Acts of a racist and hostile nature are understood internationally as violating human rights and threatening the rule of law and democratic foundations. Hate speech also has many manifestations that often depend significantly on the frame of reference; an expression construed as hate speech in certain circumstances may be in different situations fully acceptable. (Neuvonen 2015, 19, 28).

2.3.2 Targeting

The word “targeting” comes from military language, where it means "the mapping of potential targets for hostilities." Enclosed the definition states that targeting is associated with systematic harassment, such as hate campaigns on social media platforms in which followers are persecuted against a targeted group. Harassment and intimidation are, in some cases, certain organizers. Even when targeting by an individual, the action is systematic and repetitive. (Kotimaisten kielten keskus 2020).

Targeting is a relatively new, but growing and harmful phenomenon that has become the subject of social debate. In a broader context, it relates to hate speech and hate crimes, but still contains differences. In recent years targeting seeks to affect the core of a democratic society and justice system, official activities, prosecution, and the judiciary. Targeting takes form of, for example, intimidation, harassment, presentation, and dissemination of false claims. (Lakimiesliitto 2019).

Targeting is usually an activity in internet and social media where an individual is threatened or insulted, for example by disseminating information about her private life or presenting false or otherwise offensive information about her. One purpose for this kind of activity is intended to silence the person or otherwise affect her actions. Fear of targeting affects many people, which topics can be discussed in public and which topics we choose not to. (Ilman 2020).

Targeting violates the right of freedom of expression and certain other fundamental and human rights. Public authorities must ensure that these rights are exercised. Combating staining is a fundamental right issue. Targeting is damaging to the rule of law because it seeks to influence decision-making in administration and the judiciary. Targeting is more dangerous to a democratic society because it reduces people's willingness and courage to participate in democratic activities and to take a public stand on social issues. Targeting also reduces the public's right to be informed about what is happening in society. (Ilman 2020).

Many people may take part in sending inappropriate messages due to their malaise, thoughtlessness, or frustration. The actions against targeting and hate speech in general, taken by the online platforms and their wider responsibilities, are important actions

to respond to such organized activities. In 2016, the European Commission, together with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Microsoft, published a code of conduct to combat online hate speech. In them, companies undertook to develop their internal policies to ensure that appropriate reports of illegal hate speech by users are inspected within 24 hours. And, if necessary, the content is removed from all social media platforms. (Mäkinen 2019, 42).

2.3.3 Misogyny

The term “misogyny” is originated from the Ancient Greek word “mī̄sogunī̄ā” which simply means hatred towards female gender. Misogyny exists in various forms such as male patriarchy, privilege, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, violence against women, belittling of women, and sexual objectification (Srivastava et al. 2017). The word misogyny was seldom used until it was popularized by second wave feminism in the 1970’s. According to Code (2000, 346) misogyny is defined as contempt, anger, or prejudice against women. It manifests itself in numerous ways, such as social exclusion, sexual discrimination, men’s privilege, hostility to women, violence against women, and sexual objectification of women.

The goal of misogyny is to silence, but it can also have political goals, such as spreading old-fashioned values (Vainikka 2019, 7; Kimmel 2013, 31). Misogyny takes a woman as a victim and threatens with hostile acts unless that woman bows to the expectations or norms set for her gender. These expectations often include presumed rights on the part of the man and responsibilities on the part of the woman. Often misogyny also refers to the category of victim; different social classes have different expectations (Manne 2017, 14.) The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines misogyny as simply sensitizing hatred towards women. Sexism as a term means discrimination and hatred based on gender but is most often also seen as hatred towards women.

In the next few years, there has been growing concern about online harassment of women online. Misogyny, sexism, and harassment control women’s online self – regulation. Simply having other people online considering a user’s gender to be a woman,

leads more likely to harassment and violent messages. (Eckert 2017, 1284.) Misogyny online is seen to have grown, but also to become more visible.

Misogyny has been studied, among other things in the world of video games, Twitter, news article comment boxes, men's rights activists' websites, and men's humor sites. (Thompson 2018, 73). The study found that women experience more than twice as much gender-based harassment online as men. 21% of women aged 18-29 report experiencing online harassment. A survey conducted by the European Union (2014) found that one in ten women in the European Union report experiencing online harassment since they were 15 years old.

The lack of a precise definition of hate speech and the differences in definitions make policy-making more difficult and confuse public debate; the term is used loosely on social media. The Council of Europe's definition (R 97 20) strongly steers the term in the direction of racist language, but other definitions suggest that hate speech may also target a larger group, such as women. On the other hand, different definitions of hate speech also show a confluence between misogyny and racism. Often there are alliances in the terminology of the two ideologies, and the supporters are the same group. Online misogyny is seen to be partly emerging and partly fully intertwined with transphobia, homophobia, and racism. (Sunden & Paasonen 2018, 644).

At this very moment (2022) we have a government of five leading parties in Finland. Every party has a female party chairman, which can cause anger and negative emotions in certain people. Consensus is developing that offensive behavior and violence against women in politics is a serious threat to human rights, democracy, and gender equality all over the world. It cannot simply be dismissed as 'normal cost' or 'politics as usual' the of political contribution (Krook, & Restrepo Sanin, 2019).

Interesting coincidence in Finland for this study is that especially our Prime Minister, Sanna Marin seem to polarize the opinion of the nation. Her recent behavior with partying and dancing has sparked a lot of opinions for and against: is it acceptable for the Prime Minister to party with her friends in the Prime Minister's official residence? Has she been ready to work if the situation required it? And has she behaved in a manner befitting the prestige of the Prime Minister?

All these questions are relevant: how has the partying affected in her ability to take care of her responsibilities? But the bullying is another thing. There have been extremely many tweets, articles, social media conversations about her as a person. She has been accused of being a liar, bad mother, bad role model for other mothers, and her willingness of spending her summer holiday with her child has been questioned as we can see in Picture 3.



Picture 3: A tweet from Twitter about Sanna Marin's partying Aug 28th, 2022.

This incident of Prime Minister Sanna Marin fascinated people enormously worldwide, and even a former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton gave her support to Sanna Marin. As Hillary Clinton posted her tweet, where she was dancing and partying, even then certain people considered it to be shameful and arrogant of Sanna Marin to thank for the support (Picture 4).



Minna M. @MinnaMkinen6 · 28. elok. ...

Pääministeri haluaa jatkaa kansan provosoimista tällä ylimielisellä asenteellaan. Häpeä, **Sanna Marin!** Sinulla ei ole mitään vastuuta näköjään mistään. Miksi olet pääministeri? Olet valmis myymään Suomen kansan.



Sanna Marin  @MarinSanna · 28. elok.

Thank you @HillaryClinton  twitter.com/HillaryClinton...

Picture 4: Sanna Marin's reply to Hillary Clinton Aug 28th, 2022.

It seems, that whatever she does, there are people who continuously behave offensively, basing their hatred on Sanna Marin's personality, gender, age, or other factors.

History has created a culture of privilege for certain groups of people, and this same culture is also affecting the conversations on the internet. The Internet is also currently being created in a way that allows for hate speech, misogyny and targeting and their dissemination without any consequences. Adrienne Shaw (2014) claims that certain people behave offensively, whatever the condition, if only they can do it without punishment. (Eckert 2017, 1286.)

3 Previous studies

Social media and its' impacts to our psychological well-being has been researched a lot. Quite many of these studies concentrate on young people and the effects of social media to their well-being. The time spent in social media is significantly growing all the time, and it has substantial impacts on peoples' lives. According to Noppari (2014, 14-17, 49), also the media environment of Finnish families has changed significantly in recent years. For example, in 2010 only a few children in families had a data package on their mobile phones, and the internet was used only on a table computer. According to Noppari's (2016) latest study, mobile phones and data packages are now commonplace, and a phone with a mobile connection is standard equipment for young people.

Misogyny, feminism, and sexual harassment has been researched over the decades. For centuries women's rights were neglected as a human being, they have been suppressed and treated as a lower part of the society. Their roles were restricted to birthing

and household chores. Prolonged domination of men raised many voices and collectively led to a concept of feminism. Feminism is the longest movement in history which continues as long as there is injustice between genders. (Srivastava et al. 2017).

There are also studies of the online harassment towards female politicians. Quite often these studies were executed in a certain country, and that way they might not be relevant in Finland. For example, Collignon & Rüdiger (2021) studied the harassment of female Parliamentary candidates in UK. Their research emphasizes that while women may be more frequently abused, not all incidents of harassment against women in politics are of a gendered nature. Their findings prompt further questions such as are women more often targeted because they are women and does such targeting prevent women from fully participating in political sector?

The media expands the worldview, forms an important source of information, and empowers people different emotional experiences as well as manipulating moods and levels of activation. It shapes perceptions of different social groups and people about themselves. The strongest are attitudes, patterns and stereotypes that occur repeatedly in different media channels. Media can shape attitudes also in a negative way and thus adversely affects the somatic as well as the mental well-being. (Salokoski & Mustonen 2007, 46, 53; Paavonen 2011, 1564.)

4 The aim of the research

The research of this thesis focused on female politicians and the offensive behavior that they have to face every day in social media. The purpose is to find out what kind of offensive behavior female politicians face on social media platforms, for example hate speech, targeting or misogyny. In addition, the goal of this research is to find out how does offensive behavior affect to the psychological well-being of the female politicians in their everyday life. This thesis concentrates on psychological well-being of female politicians, and therefore it does not take a position psychological well-being of male politicians. Although physical well-being is not in center of this thesis, the physical symptoms are studied in the research that was executed among female politicians.

We know that female politicians face offensive behavior in social media every day, for example hate speech, targeting and misogyny. Hate speech and targeting are phenomena, that have become more common while social media have taken place as modern platform of discussion. Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas (2021) have claimed, that as social media have come to dominate socio-political landscapes in every corner of the world, old and new racist practices and hate speech increasingly take place on social media platforms. Hate speech thrives in social media, including through covert tactics such as the weaponization of memes (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas 2021; Lamerichs et al. 2018) and use of fake profiles to provoke racist hatred (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas 2021; Farkas et al. 2018).

This potential of social media systems raises a difficult challenge. Mondal et al. (2017) claims, that social media platforms provide space for discourses that are damaging to certain groups of people. This challenge manifests itself with many variations, including offensive content, bullying, and hate speech. Specifically, authorities of many countries today are quickly recognizing hate speech as a serious problem. Especially because it is hard to create rules and regulations on the Internet to avoid the dissemination of hate across minorities or countries. (Mondal et al. 2017).

Misogyny, on the other hand is an old phenomenon (Code 2000), which have been studied a great deal. For example, misogyny occurred in the Medieval as witch-hunts and women were hunt and burned at the stake based on fear and various claims about connections to demons (Block 1987). Later misogyny has been research in connection of the online world. Ging & Siapera (2018) tried to identify and theorize the complex relationships between technology, online culture, and misogyny. They asked how the internet's anti-woman discourses have been transformed by the technological affordances of new digital platforms.

Based on this background information, the research questions of this thesis are as follows:

1. What kind of offensive behavior female politicians have to face on social media?
2. How does offensive behavior affect on psychological well-being of female politicians?

In addition, the purpose of the research of this thesis is to find out what kind of psychological and physical symptoms offensive behavior causes. The goal of this research is to find the actual offensive behavior what Finnish female politicians are facing on social media today, and how does it affect to their psychological well-being and everyday life. Also, the symptoms what offensive behavior causes are explored, and conclusions are made on basis of the respondents' answers.

5 Data collection and methodology

In this thesis qualitative research was used as a method for answering the research questions, analyzing the results, and conducting the research in general. In this study was used open-ended questions as an interviewing method and thematic analysis for analyzing the responses (Denscombe 2010, 175).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006, 53), the qualitative research methods are more valid in studies that describes and analyses the so-called "little-known phenomena". Based on this information, the qualitative study methods were suitable for this research, since the number of respondents of this research was quite small. In addition to that, the qualitative research methods are more appropriate for the existing research since there will be recommendations for future research and the findings may differ on different respondents (Denscombe 2010, 298; Silverman 2013, 14).

This data was collected in the beginning of 2022 and the database of this thesis was gathered by SurveyPal -questionnaire. The research questions were open-ended questions, and the respondents were able to write the answers with consideration and in contemplative way. The SurveyPal -questionnaire was sent to several political parties and members of the city council of Vantaa, Kauniainen and Lohja.

In the end, ten female politicians answered the questionnaire, and the results and conclusions are based on responses of these ten politicians. The aim of this research is to obtain as individual reports and experiences as possible. From the research point of view, this is also the best method when the respondents present their experiences without the interviewer guiding the course of the answers. The methodological advantage of the qualitative research is that individuals known to have experience are selected for interview the phenomenon or topic being studied (Puusa & Juuti 2020).

The background data was analyzed first by Surveypal -analyzing system. The program provides graphics about the data, and the given data easily revealed the respondents' age range, level of education and activity in politics. The open-ended questions were analyzed by categorizing the answers of the respondents by the Ryff's six dimensions of well-being. The answers of all ten respondents were attached to a table (appendix 4-8), where each answer was categorized under Ryff's six dimensions of well-being. After categorizing, the answers were analyzed, and results were drawn as to why they affected that particular dimension.

For the background knowledge there will be studying of the political system in Finland: statistics of the division of female and male politicians in parliament, number of candidates, elected members of parliament and the age distribution of the members of the parliament (stat.fi).

The results of the research are exposed in the thesis, and they are for use in order to pay attention to the offensive behavior toward female politicians, and also to start a public discussion to prevent this kind of behavior. Politicians should also be supported against this kind of behavior, and their psychological well-being should take to an account when offensive behavior occurs.

6 Analysis of the database

In this part of the thesis the data of the Surveypal -questionnaire is analyzed according to Ryff's theory of six basic dimensions of well-being (1989) Picture 2. The six dimensions of well-being are

- self-acceptance
- positive relationships with other people
- autonomy
- environmental mastery
- purpose in life
- personal growth. (Ryff 1989).

The answers of the respondents will be categorized under these six dimensions, either in a positive or negative point of view. That means that respondent may have

experienced that they have been treated well or they have been mistreated on social media platforms. The questionnaire included background information of the respondents followed by deeper open-ended questions about offensive behavior the female politicians have experienced. Only the open-ended questions were categorized under the six dimensions of well-being.

Negative aspects of social media include, for example, negative comments about people, bullying and hate speech. These things affect on people's self-acceptance and self-esteem, and internet bullying is more common than we might realize. Internet bullying means, among other things, stealing passwords or identities, threatening, making fun of people, leaving outside of the group, spreading lies and gossips, and sending or receiving negative and offensive comments. (Sievers 2017, 2–3.)

Ryff's six dimensions of well-being was used in processing and analyzing the data. Every open-ended answer was categorized under one or more dimension, based on what dimension that particular answer was affecting on either in a positive or negative way. For example, to the first question "What kind of offensive behavior you have faced in social media (hate speech, targeting, verbal abuse, misogyny)?" one of the respondents have answered "General female hatred". This answer has been categorized under the self-acceptance -dimension because it affects on respondent's self-acceptance and self-esteem in a negative way. After categorizing the answers are analyzed in a deeper level and conclusions are made based on the respondents' experiences.

6.1 The responds to the background questions

In the next chapter the background information of the ten respondents is introduced. The number in parentheses indicates the number of respondents.

Age

The age groups of the ten respondents

20 – 30 years	(1)
31 – 40 years	(0)

41 – 50 years	(3)
51 – 60 years	(4)
61 - years	(2)

1. Education

The education level of the respondents

Student	(0)
High School or vocational college	(3)
Bachelor's Degree	(1)
Master's Degree	(6)
No Degree or studies	(0)

2. Activity in social media

The activity in social media of the respondents was as follows:

Multiple times a day	(7)
Once a day	(2)
Couple of times a week	(1)
Couple of times a month	(0)
More rarely	(0)

3. Used social media platforms

Facebook	(10)
Instagram	(8)
LinkedIn	(7)
Twitter	(5)
TikTok	(1)
Snapchat	(1)
Other	(2)

The respondents were also asked about their political activity, such as political party, position/duty in the party and the length of their political career. The respondents are categorized as R1, R2, R3 and so forth the last respondent being R10.

4. What is your political background? Party, position in your party and the length of your political career?

- R1 SFP (Svenska Folkpartiet i Finland – Swedish national party in Finland). I have been as a candidate in couple of elections, I have had positions of trust on the local government board and on the umbrella board for 45 years. Now I have been a member of Liike Nyt -party (a right wing -party) for 3 months.
- R2 SFP (Svenska Folkpartiet i Finland – Swedish national party in Finland). I have been in a position of trust for 15 years.
- R3 Liike Nyt (a right wing -party). I have been a city councilor and regional councilor for 3 years.
- R4 Kansallinen Kokoomus (The National Coalition Party). I have been a city councilor and regional councilor, chairman of the board and I have been active and working in politics over 10 years.
- R5 Keskusta (Centre Party). I am a city councilor and have been active in politics since 2013.
- R6 Kansallinen Kokoomus (The National Coalition Party). Secretary of the local association. I have been active in politics about 10 years.
- R7 Social Democratic Party, city councilor since 2021.
- R8 Kansallinen Kokoomus (The National Coalition Party). city councilor, first chairman of the board, member of the board of Helsinki University Hospital, member of the regional council. I have been active in politics since 2017, when I was elected to the city council.
- R9 Social Democratic Party, city council, municipal council, provincial government. I have been active in politics about 10 years.
- R10 Kansallinen Kokoomus (The National Coalition Party).

6.2 The responds to the open-ended questions

In the next chapter the open-ended questions of the research are analyzed. Ryff's (1989) six basic dimensions of well-being is used as a scientific background, and the answers of each respondent were categorized under the six dimensions of well-being. There could be more than one dimensions that was affected by the answers of the respondents in a positive or negative way. All the answers were put to a table (appendix 4-8) in order to make the analyzing easier.

6.2.1 Offensive behavior in social media

The first open-ended question was "What kind of Offensive behavior you have faced in social media (hate speech, targeting, verbal abuse, misogyny)?" With this question the researcher wanted to find out what kind of offensive behavior female politicians experience in social media. All ten respondents answered the question and all of them had experienced at least some stupid comments, but also very serious and abusive behavior was experienced, such as targeting, sexist talk and general female hatred. (Appendix 4).

6.2.2 Respondent's reactions to offensive behavior

The second open-ended question was "How do you react to the offensive behavior, that you face in social media?" All ten respondents answered to this question and reactions varied from "I try to be neutral about it" or "I delete messages" to "The first time I was confused and upset, and I deleted the worst messages". With this question the researcher wanted to find out the reactions to offensive behavior, whether it was ignoring the messages or trying to think them through and learning from them. (Appendix 5).

6.2.3 Physical symptoms

The third question was “Do you get any physical symptoms when facing offensive behavior? Describe the symptoms.” To this question four respondents answered that they don’t get any symptoms and one respondent did not answer. But five respondents had got physical symptoms and they were such as dizziness, difficulties to breath, dry mouth and blurred vision. (Appendix 6).

6.2.4 Psychological symptoms

The fourth question was “Do you get any psychological symptoms when facing offensive behavior? Describe the symptoms”. To this question three of the respondents answered that they had not got any psychological symptoms and one respondent did not answer. But six of the respondents had got psychological symptoms and they were such as depression, anxiety, nervousness, discomfort and bad mood. (Appendix 7).

6.2.5 Effects on everyday life

The fifth and final question was “How does offensive behavior affect to your everyday life in general?” Three of the respondents answered that it does not affect them. The rest of the respondents felt that the offensive behavior have at least some kind of affect on their lives. It could be such as they start to think about the messages, and it takes away their energy and resources. The respondents also started to think that some people in social media are unhappy. But offensive behavior affected on some respondents on very serious way: they started to be careful what they say on social media platforms and that is a alarming thing in democracy. (Appendix 8).

7 Results

In this chapter the results of the data will be analyzed. All the open-ended questions will be carefully studied, and the answers will be reflected to six dimensions of well-being (Ryff 1989). The number of affected dimensions of the answers is marked in the parenthesis. The respondents were asked about physical and psychological symptoms based on bullying or abusive and offensive behavior in social media. Violence against women in politics involves all forms of intimidation, aggression, harassment and bullying against female politicians simply because they are women (O'Connell & Ramshaw 2018).

Question 1: What kind of offensive behavior you have faced in social media (hate speech, targeting, verbal abuse, misogyny)?

For the first question, the respondents experienced the most negative effects on self-acceptance (6), environmental mastery (5) and personal growth (4). For example, the respondents had got very harsh comments about their gender or appearance, such as “fucking bitch” or “a blonde’s ability to think was questioned”. All the respondents had faced direct and very personal verbal attack. Some of the comments were perceived as very sexist, when their appearance was praised, and they received dating requests. In addition, environmental mastery was affected negatively. The respondents had received pictures of men’s private parts into their emails, and some of the respondents had to block commentators.

R4: “Especially on Facebook, I have received offensive comments, particularly during the election. Female hatred in which a man calls you a “fucking bitch” or other inappropriate. There have also been calls and text messages, but they are not social media. In addition, I experienced a lot of abusive behavior face-to-face during the election campaign.”

R6: “Sexist talk - when you have put yourself pretty for a photoshoot, you have received comments that beauty is not a policy. So that kind of harassment.

When a blonde does that, the blonde's ability to think far-reaching or sensible is questioned."

Some of the respondents had been experienced political background belittling, snarling emojis and accusations of someone else's wrong decisions and actions. All this kind of behavior affects negatively in personal growth. Personal growth is the process of developing as an individual. The term can be used to describe personal development in several areas such as physical, mental, and emotional health. As personal growth should improve your life and lead to a greater satisfaction in life, all this kind of belittling and disparaging is preventing a person to develop and grow as human being. (Saad & Gupta 2014).

R7: "Political background belittling, snarling emojis, accusations of someone else's wrong decisions and actions."

Some of the respondents seem to have understanding to offensive behavior. The commentators were believed to be writing while being drunk or having mental issues or simply don't know how write correctly. The respondents also believed that especially politicians should have the ability to tolerate offensive behavior better than other people. There are studies where this kind of behavior (i.e., defending bullies and justify their behavior) is studied. For example, if the social skills of victims are worse than that of bullies and bystanders, or bully's social status is greater to that of a victim, people may stand by bullies, even when they know it is wrong (Wu et al. 2016).

Female hatred, misogyny is an unfortunate common phenomenon in our society. In 2017, the late chairman of the women's network in Finnish Parliament told to Finnish News Agency (STT) that she had to tolerate, for example, unpleasant hints and comments about their appearance on the ground and continued:" People seem to feel that Prime Ministers are free to exploit, that anything can be said to them."

With the increase in online communication, it is extremely important to understand that communication can also be offensive and harassing. Hopefully this thesis will help people understand how to behave on social media: what is right and how to give constructive statements about things. I also wish that this thesis will open discussions about offensive and abusive behavior: why does it occur and what do the people who behave badly, get from it.

Question 2: How do you react to the offensive behavior, that you face in social media?

For the second question the respondents showed in most of the answers that they wanted to be above the offensive comments. As many as nine answers were divided under personal growth (9). The respondents ignored the offensive comments or tried to reply with facts. Although the offensive comments hurt their feelings at first, the respondents tried to think them through and in the end, they thought the offensive comments belonged to freedom of speech. The respondents felt that politicians should be able to tolerate critical, or even offensive commenting, although it might hurt their feelings.

R6: "I think them through, I might respond with my comments and let the comments be. This is because there is freedom of speech in our country and every comment must be explored and something new is learned from them as well. Yes, politicians need to learn to filter out comments and tolerate a bit of verbal commenting."

Personal growth was shown in cases, when respondents say that they think through the comments, and even try to learn something about it. Also, when the respondents say that they defend themselves or other politicians, if they feel that they have been treated unfairly in social media.

R7: "I try to be neutral about it, but sometimes I react by defending another politician, if I find her receiving unfair treatment in social media."

In some of the answers the offensive comments affected the respondents' environmental mastery (2) and autonomy (2). In some cases, the respondents didn't answer to offensive comments, deleted the comments, or they blocked the commentators. Holding back to one's own opinion or being scared of responding to offensive behavior is an undesirable outcome in free society, where freedom of speech prevails for everybody.

R8: "It is very subjective perception of what is offensive behavior to some people. In the case of clearly offensive behavior, I will either hide or delete the comment and block the person."

One problem in offensive behavior in social media is, that bullying is belittled by saying that it is just a joke. There is also a common opinion that offensive comments should

not be taken too seriously (Nauha & Käkelä 2019, 27). It has also been suggested, that if you want to use social media, you also have to endure possible good and bad comments.

In general, there are many studies made about cyber bullying, and the responses of the research reflected that bullying is so common nowadays that it is no longer interesting and does not arouse emotions. (Nauha & Käkelä 2019, 27). In this way the responsibility is put on the shoulders of the receiver of the offensive comments. It is suggested that you do not have a sense of humor, or you take these stupid comments too seriously.

In research executed by Kinnunen & Mattila (2018, 21), people were asked about intervening in bullying, the answers were very similar. According to them, other social media users, adult authorities, service administrators, and professionals should intervene in online bullying. According to this research, the entire social media community is responsible for how social media user are behaving in different platforms. (Kinnunen, Mattila 2018, 21.)

Question 3: Do you get any physical symptoms when facing offensive behavior? Describe the symptoms.

To the third question many of the respondents answered, that they have not got any physical symptoms (4 respondents - no symptoms and 1 respondent - no answer). But five of the respondents had got physical symptoms, such as physical disgust, anxiety, dizziness, stomach symptoms and difficulties to breath. Sometimes the respondents were left with the feeling that they had done something wrong in order to get offensive comments, which affects to their autonomy, self-acceptance and environmental mastery.

R6: "I get stomach symptoms and I've been left wondering have I done something, so the commentator can justify his/her words."

Sometimes when bullying happens online, people may feel like they are being attacked everywhere, even in their own home, and the person often feels that there is no way to escape. Bullying affects a person in many ways and often the effects are long-lasting. Many studies show that this type of behavior can cause a variety of physical

symptoms: The victim may feel tired and has difficulties to sleep or they can experience physical symptoms such as stomach aches and headaches. (unric.org)

Some of the respondents' autonomy and environmental mastery were invaded by comments, that they had no control of. For example, when the respondents got pictures of men's private parts, they experienced physical disgust (R7).

Being bullied always leaves a mark on a person (Kaski & Nevalainen 2017, 18). It is particularly traumatic for the victim if bullying is a permanent situation and continues for several years (Salmivalli 2003, 19). Lämssä (2009) points out, that in the worst case bullying can leave fear and scars on the victim for the rest of her life.

Question 4: Do you get any psychological symptoms when facing offensive behavior? Describe the symptoms.

To the fourth question the respondents felt that the symptoms affected to their self-acceptance the most. As many as five respondents said that they had got psychological symptoms when they faced offensive behavior. The symptoms were such as depression, annoyance, angry state of mind, nervousness, and anxiety.

R1: "Depression and reluctance to face those people."

R7: "Yes, an annoying and angry state of mind when I get the pictures of men's penises."

Also, the respondents' autonomy was invaded when they felt that they felt reluctance to face bullies (R1). This can lead to isolation and loneliness, which can be the first steps to, for example, depression and anxiety.

The evidence suggesting a link between social media and depression is significant because depression is an ongoing public health problem affecting people who use social media frequently. In 2011, the American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment, reported in their health survey, that assessed a wide variety of health topics, that about 30% of the persons participating the study reported feeling "so depressed that it was difficult to function." (American College Health Association, 2012).

There were also answers, where the respondents did not feel any symptoms because of bullying. This can refer to a very good self-esteem, when people know what they are capable of and they know who they are, they do not have to react to these kinds of comments.

R3: No, I don't. At first those comments were a little annoying but nothing serious.

The high self-esteem, considered positive self-esteem, is characterized by the accepting and valuing oneself, without arrogance and without needing to diminish the others or to feel better than other people. This type of self-esteem encourages self-confidence and offers the bravery to face the problems and keep the balance even when having difficulties in life. (Darjan & Negru 2020).

Question 5: How does offensive behavior affect to you everyday life in general?

Many of the respondents felt that offensive behavior has not affected their everyday life in great deal. Five of the respondents said that offensive behavior has not affected them at all or has not affected them very much.

R7: It doesn't affect me very much, but it concerns me every now and then. The bar to participate in discussions on social media is increasing, because it's t's too tiring to argue about insignificant things.

In general, the respondents started to think about other people's unhappiness of loneliness. Personal growth and self-acceptance were shown in an answer where the respondents said that she knows who she is, and she dares to defend herself (R9).

There were also answers, where the respondents were very much affected by the offensive behavior. Some respondents felt that their trust in other people has deteriorated (R5) or they felt unsecure, and they wanted to make sure that their door was locked in the evening.

R4: "It takes my resources and time when I start to think about it. In according to that my sense of safety is decreasing. I want to make sure that my door is locked in the evening etc. I don't want to share my personal phone number or address with strangers."

Again, one of the respondents felt that she had to be careful what to say on social media platforms (R10). This kind of result is very unwanted phenomenon when people's psychological security is so low that they do not dare to express their opinion. In a psychologically safe environment, a person dares to be vulnerable and reveals her incompleteness. If there is a lack of trust, the group members start to pursue their own interests at the expense of the other people. (Aro 2018, 127–128.)

8 Conclusions

Firstly, it must be stated that offensive behavior towards female politicians occurs widely and a great deal. Some of our respondents said that they have faced hate speech, targeting and misogyny even from male politicians of their own party. In according to that, our respondents have received offensive and abusive comments from anonymous persons on social media platforms.

8.1 What kind of offensive behavior female politicians have to face on social media

Offensive behavior on social media is very diverse and can be very harsh and abusive. Our respondents felt that they have faced all kinds of verbal violence, which have led to a physical and psychological discomfort. They had faced hate speech, which many had sexist and belittling angle, because of their gender. The respondent felt that they had also faced targeting from the men politicians who belonged to their previous party. This led to attempts to isolate the respondent and even false reports were made to authorities. In addition, general female hatred and misogyny is quite common among female politicians. The respondents have been called harsh names in social media of face to face, or they have received text messages.

Belittling or accusations of incompetence is one form of offensive behavior that the respondents have faced on social media. If a female politician takes care of themselves and they look nice, they have been accused to be “stupid blondes” and men have

assumed them to be incompetent and incapable of managing their job well.

8.2 How does offensive behavior affect on psychological well-being of female politicians

The respondents have got both physical and psychological symptoms when they have faced offensive behavior. Physical violence means injuries caused directly on women, as well as acts of physical harm against their family and relatives. Violence can be such as beating, assault, murder, and even domestic abuse intended to undermine their political participation. Psychological violence often refers to emotional and verbal abuse and acts intended to undermine a person's own safety and security or sense of worth. This includes bullying behavior such as belittling a person's abilities, capability and competency, put-downs, name-calling, insults, constant criticism or focus on physical appearance. Psychological violence can also include acts aimed at instilling fear or creating isolation, such as threats of physical or sexual assault and forms of stalking. (O'Connell & Ramshaw 2018).

The respondents have been scared based on the behavior they have faced on social media platforms. They have felt anxiety, depression, disgust, annoyance, discomfort and many other physical or psychological symptoms based on offensive behavior and abuse in social media. The situation has led into such extension that some of them have removed their contact information from social media. Some of the respondents even feel so afraid, that they make sure that their door is closed properly, and they feel anxiety to meet people face to face. The respondents have also felt that their trust to other people has deteriorated.

However, it should be noted that some respondents felt that the offensive behavior has not affected their everyday life significantly. It can be claimed that some people have such a strong self-esteem, that even abusive behavior cannot shake their self-esteem.

9 Ethical considerations

This thesis is dealing with unwanted side-effects in social media, that female politicians have to face on daily basis. The aim on this thesis is to find out what kind of offensive behavior it occurs on social media platforms and how does it affect to female politicians' psychological well-being. Since the subject is very personal and it can cause negative feelings in the respondents, it is especially important to conceal the identity of the respondents. Therefore, should there be any ethical issues they were reduced in the study with the following arrangements:

- there were only used recruitment methods, which minimized the coercion to participate in the research (Silverman 2013, 161), and
- respondents were expected to give their full and informed consent to answer the research questionnaire (Bryman 2012, 139; Salkind 2012, 86).

The female politicians who took part to this research, stayed totally anonymous. Although there were background questions about the respondents and activity in politics, the analysis and conclusions sections will not identify the persons who have taken a part of this research. The respondents were informed of their rights and how they were going to respected both privacy and confidentiality wise (Kuula & Tiitinen 2010, 450). The respondents were given an opportunity to refuse answering any question without giving a reason. The questions were open questions, and the respondents were able to answer the questions on their own time and in their own privacy.

In the recruitment letter I informed the respondents as follows:

The research of this thesis is a qualitative survey, in which I hope to receive reflective responses from respondents about their own experiences on social media platforms and the offensive situations encountered there. All responses will be treated anonymously and will not reveal any personal or other personally identifiable information about the respondents.

The SurveyPal -questionnaire was sent as a group email to municipal councils of different parties. That means that the respondents' personal information was not known in the first place. The respondents were able to refuse to answer any question they wanted just by leaving the answer field blank. Some of them used this opportunity and

did not answer all the questions. In that case their answer field was marked “no answer” and it was not taken in account in the analysis.

10 Validity and further studies

Qualitative research is empirical and socially located phenomenon, and its' diverse expressions include analytic induction, semiotics, content analysis and for example elite interviewing. Qualitative research should be socially concerned, and above all, objective. (Kirk & Miller 1985). To assure validity in qualitative research can be a difficult topic, as qualitative research involves humans understanding other humans. However, there are some questions the researcher can ask and some techniques a researcher can employ to establish a reasonable level of validity.

One way to ensure validity is to choose a well-trained and skilled facilitator. A professional facilitator can ask the right questions and stay as a neutral participant. Another way to encourage validity is to use a strategy known as triangulation. To accomplish this, the research is done from multiple perspectives. This could take the form of using several facilitators and multiple individuals analyzing the same data. Validity in qualitative research can also be ensured by a technique known as respondent validation. This technique involves testing original results with participants to see if they still ring true. Although the research has been condensed, participants should still recognize the results as accurate and may even be able to enhance the researcher's understanding. (statistissolution.com).

According to Johnson (1997), three types of validity in qualitative research are examined. Firstly, descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of the account as reported by the qualitative researcher. Secondly, interpretive validity is obtained to the degree that the respondents' thoughts, viewpoints, intentions, and experiences are correctly understood and reported by the qualitative researcher. Thirdly, theoretical validity is obtained to the degree that a theoretical explanation developed from a research study fits the data and is as a result credible and defensible.

In this thesis the research was executed with Surveypal – questionnaire. The research included both background questions and open-ended questions, which were prepared

in accordance with qualitative research to be answered in complete sentences and reflecting on respondents' own views. The questions were carefully considered together with the supervisor of the author, both background and open-ended questions were made as clear and simple as possible in order to avoid confusion when answering the questions.

The analysis of the responds was executed by the author and triangulation was not used as an analyzing technique. Therefore, the analyzing could have been confused by the author's own views and experience of social media and offensive behavior on different social media platforms. Also, the database was gathered by a questionnaire, and not by interviewing respondents face-to-face. This can lead to misunderstandings in analysis because interaction between the author and the respondents was missing.

Based on the experience that was gathered during this research, the interviews should be carried out with face-to-face interviews. Since there was no interaction between the respondent and the interviewer, the impact of the interviewer's own experiences and opinions on the final result was possible. Also, a transcription of the interviews and using triangulation in interviews would eliminate the possibility of misunderstandings.

In future it would be interesting to study what kind of offensive behavior male politicians have to face in social media. How does it differ from the behavior that female politicians have to deal with. In addition, it would be interesting to study the internet abuse towards different minorities, such as sexual minorities, immigrants, or disabled people. Social media can be great channel to keep in contact with other people or join the groups with alike people. However, it can be a platform to harass and abuse people anonymously, when it can cause serious problems with mental health, self-esteem, or self-image.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Recruitment letter

Hyvä naispoliitikko,

Opiskelen Lapin yliopiston englanninkielisessä kasvatustieteiden maisteriohjelmassa, ja pääaineeni on mediakasvatus. Teen tutkimusta naispoliitikoihin kohdistuvasta loukkaavasta käytöksestä sosiaalisessa mediassa. Graduni aihe on *Offensive behavior towards female politicians in social media – how does it affect to psychological well-being?*

Tämän tutkimuksen avulla toivon saavani huomiota sosiaalisessa mediassa tapahtuvaan loukkaavaan vihapuheeseen, maalittamiseen ja jopa suoranaiseen naisvihaan. Suomessa on tällä hetkellä useita naisia puolueiden johtotehtävissä, ja tämän kaltainen käytös sosiaalisessa mediassa on valitettava ilmiö, joka vaikuttaa ihmisten henkiseen hyvinvointiin enenevässä määrin.

Gradun tutkimus on laadullinen kyselytutkimus, johon toivon saavani vastaajilta pohdintaa sisältäviä vastauksia omista kokemuksista sosiaalisessa mediassa ja siellä kohdatuista loukkaavista tilanteista. Kaikki vastaukset käsitellään anonyymisti eikä tutkimuksesta selviä henkilötietoja tai muita yksilöiviä tietoja.

Kysely toteutetaan SurveyPal-kyselynä ja aikaa vastaamiseen on helmikuun 2022 loppuun asti. Graduohjaajani toimii Ilkka Ratinen Lapin yliopistosta (ilkka.ratinen@ulapland.fi). Gradu tullaan julkaisemaan osoitteessa lauda.ulaplandi.fi

Vastaa kyselyyn tästä linkistä:

<https://q.surveypal.com/Gradun-laadullinen-kysely---Satu-Uronen>

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Satu Uronen

satu.uronen@ulapland.fi

Appendix 2 – Background questions

Background questions were as follows: 1. Demography questions

- age
- education
- political activity (party, position, length of political activity)

2. How active you are in social media?

- multiple times a day
- once a day
- couple of times a week
- couple of times a month
- more rarely

3. What social media platforms you usually use?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- TikTok
- Snapchat
- Other

Appendix 3 – Open-ended questions

Background questions were followed by the open questions, as follows:

4. What kind of offensive behavior you have faced in social media (hate speech, targeting, verbal abuse, misogyny)
5. How do you react to the offensive behavior, that you face in social media?
6. Do you get any physical symptoms when facing offensive behavior? Describe the symptoms.
7. Do you get any psychological symptoms when facing offensive behavior? Describe the symptoms.
8. How does offensive behavior affect to your everyday life in general?

Appendix 4 – Offensive behavior in social media

Respondent	Answer	Dimension
R1	Targeting from the men of my previous party.	environmental mastery, positive relationships
R2	General female hatred (misogyny).	self-acceptance
R3	Appearance-related comments that, on the other hand, are positive but not part of the policy. "Is she a model? Even her dog is like a poodle and her apartment is like from an interior design magazine." On the other hand, criticism of our government, for example, is not always female hatred, but quite honestly it is criticism of incompetence and ignorance that has nothing to do with gender. It is wrong to interpret them all as female hatred.	self-acceptance
R4	Especially on Facebook, I have received offensive comments, particularly during the election. Female hatred in which a man calls you a "fucking bitch" or other inappropriate. There have also been calls and text messages, but they are not social media. In addition, I experienced a lot of abusive behavior face-to-face during the election campaign.	self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationships
R5	I have experienced hate speech, female hatred, and direct verbal attack on me.	self-acceptance
R6	Sexist talk - when you have put yourself pretty for a photoshoot, you have received comments that beauty is not a policy. So that kind of harassment. When a blonde does that, the blonde's ability to think far-reaching or sensible is questioned.	self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth
R7	Political background belittling, snarling emojis, accusations of someone else's wrong decisions and actions.	personal growth, environmental mastery
R8	Quite rarely, even though I'm an active and prominent figure in city politics. Just a few comments that were mostly about the party. There have been a few offensive comments showing that the person is drunk or that his or her mental health has been upset. It is also offensive for some people if somebody is writing	environmental mastery, positive relationships

	a comment in a stupid way, people are so different, and some can't write. I get a lot of dating requests from men and a lot of them praise for my appearance, of which the more sensitive women could interpret as offensive and sexist as well. Personally, I don't want to take the stress out of it, I'm just grateful I haven't gotten hate speech, etc. On the other hand, I've found the images of men's penis sent by men very offensive. I don't want to get them and it's extremely insulting.	
R9	Everything mentioned above. In addition to very personal attacks.	self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, autonomy
R10	Very little. Some single stupid comments.	personal growth

Appendix 5 – Respondent's reactions to offensive behavior

Respondent	Answer	Dimension
R1	At first it goes under the skin, but I always try to take the communication forward harmoniously by negotiating.	personal growth, positive relationships, environmental mastery
R2	I try not to answer / ignore it.	personal growth
R3	I haven't faced anything too serious, so with all the humor. For example, to that comment on "whether this is an underwear model", I replied that as an almost 50-year-old woman, I wish. Usually, I don't answer anything, and I don't react in any way. But I have also not experienced any abusive behavior.	personal growth
R4	I sometimes share these as a screenshot on Instagram, where I try to bring out the (female) anger that politicians get. The atmosphere is a more comfortable than in Facebook and people gives you sympathy. On the other hand, I may also be anxious, and my mind will return to offensive words many more times afterwards, although externally I try to show that I don't mind about the commenting.	personal growth, environmental mastery

R5	The first time I was confused and upset, I deleted the worst hate messages. I cried to my husband, who was enraged for me. Now I keep the messages, but I try to ignore them.	personal growth, positive relationships
R6	I think them through, I might respond with my comments and let the comments be. This is because there is freedom of speech in our country and every comment must be explored and something new is learned from them as well. Yes, politicians need to learn to filter out comments and tolerate a bit of verbal commenting.	personal growth
R7	I try to be neutral about it, but sometimes I react by defending another politician, if I find her receiving unfair treatment in social media.	personal growth
R8	It is very subjective perception of what is offensive behavior to some people. In the case of clearly offensive behavior, I will either hide or delete the comment and block the person.	personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy
R9	I try to answer with facts.	personal growth
R10	I delete messages completely (Facebook) or I don't respond to them (Twitter).	environmental mastery, autonomy

Appendix 6 – Physical symptoms

Respondent	Answer	Dimension
R1	I experience fatigue and the intestinal inflammation gets worse when I am facing constant abusive behavior.	autonomy, environmental mastery
R2	No, I don't	
R3	No, I don't	
R4	Anxiety, but I don't know if it's more of a mental than a physical symptom. Maybe I feel physically ill sometimes.	autonomy, environmental mastery

R5	Yes, I do. Difficulty breathing and dizziness. Dry mouth, blurred vision.	environmental mastery
R6	I get stomach symptoms and I've been left wondering "have I done something, so the commentator can justify his/her words."	autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery
R7	If a man sends a picture of his penis, I experience physical disgust.	autonomy, environmental mastery
R8	No, I don't	
R9	No, I don't	
R10	No answer	

Appendix 7 – Psychological symptoms

Respondent	Answer	Dimension
R1	Depression and reluctance to face those people.	self-acceptance, positive relationships
R2	No, I don't	
R3	No, I don't. At first those comments were a little annoying but nothing serious.	personal growth
R4	Bad mood, discomfort, annoyance.	self-acceptance, personal growth
R5	I have been nervous and scared.	self-acceptance, autonomy
R6	Anxiety.	self-acceptance, autonomy
R7	Yes, an annoying and angry state of mind when I get the pictures of men's penises.	self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery
R8	No, I don't	
R9	No, I don't	
R10	No answer	

Appendix 8 – Effects on everyday life

Respondent	Answer	Dimension
R1	When people spread stories, that are untrue and make nasty writings, it seems that, in a small working society, people isolate me and say ugly things when they don't know the truth. False reports were made to the authorities. I got enough and I left the party when I didn't even get any support from the party office.	self-acceptance, positive relationships, environmental mastery, autonomy
R2	It makes me think how many unhappy and lonely people exist in general.	environmental mastery, positive relationships
R3	It doesn't affect me in any way.	personal growth
R4	It takes my resources and time when I start to think about it. In according to that my sense of safety is decreasing. I want to make sure that my door is locked in the evening etc. I don't want to share my personal phone number or address with strangers.	positive relationships, environmental mastery, autonomy
R5	My trust in other people has deteriorated.	positive relationships, environmental mastery, autonomy
R6	It doesn't affect me in any way.	personal growth
R7	It doesn't affect me very much, but it concerns me every now and then. The bar to participate in discussions on social media is increasing, because it's too tiring to argue about insignificant things.	environmental mastery, autonomy
R8	It doesn't affect me in any way.	personal growth
R9	It doesn't affect me in any way. I know who I am and what I think. I dare to defend myself.	personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy
R10	I have been careful what I say on social media. I do not take a position on matters related to immigration, for example. Otherwise, it doesn't affect to my everyday life.	environmental mastery, autonomy, personal growth

Pictures

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