

**”In the past few days, the Prime Minister
seems to have gotten a superwoman’s cape
on her shoulders”**

A thematic analysis of representations
of Sanna Marin in Finnish news media

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide new insights and add to existing knowledge regarding how news media represents female politicians. Previous studies across the world have shown that throughout decades and still today, women tend to be underrepresented in political news or be heard only in regard to ‘feminine’ issues like education or family. Additionally, when it comes to female politicians, the focus is more often on their physical appearance, than it is with their male colleagues. In this thesis the focus is turned to Finland and the election of the country’s current Prime Minister, 34-year-old Sanna Marin. By conducting a thematic analysis, informed by the perspective of framing and representation theory, of news articles published around Marin’s election, this thesis explores the re-occurring themes regarding her representation in these articles and places these themes in a wider context of the media representation of female politicians. Framing theory helps to highlight the role media has in constructing reality whereas representation theory adds to the understanding of how people interpret the world, in this case the news, and helps to further argue why these presented representations matter. The analysis shows that the performance of a young female politician might seem accepted at first glance and doubtfulness is only found after one takes a look under the surface. Even though Finland can be considered a fairly gender equal country, gender stereotypes are still subtly reinforced by the media. Ultimately, it is not about how someone is represented, but rather what is left out. All this indicates that gender representations continue to be a salient issue and that female politicians like Sanna Marin still need to constantly prove their ability and competence as political subjects.

Keywords: Gender representations, media representations, politics, performance, thematic analysis, Finnish media.

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“I’m always rather nervous about how you talk about women who are active in politics, whether they want to be talked about as women or as in politicians.”

John F. Kennedy speaking to a United Nations delegation of women, December 11, 1961.

1 Introduction

December 2019 began dramatically in Finland. Differences in opinions related to collective agreements within the state-owned postal service and a 2-week postal strike had culminated into a situation where the incumbent prime minister had lost support of one of the coalition partners and had to resign. Social democrat Sanna Marin, 34, was selected as the succeeding prime minister and the world got curious: Who is this new leader who is now carrying the title of world's youngest prime minister? For instance, Spanish newspaper El País called Marin a 'millennial' prime minister and BBC in the United Kingdom a 'rising star'. News agency AFP wrote that despite her age, "she is far from lacking in political experience" (AFP, 2019, December 10). In January 2020 Austria's Sebastian Kurz, 33, returned to office as chancellor and thereby replaced Sanna Marin as the youngest head of government but at the time of writing this, Marin is still the youngest serving female prime minister.

Having a woman as a political leader is not necessarily new in Finland: before Sanna Marin, the country has had two female prime ministers and one female president. What sparks curiosity in Marin's case is her young age, and especially her age combined with her gender. Marin is the youngest prime minister the country has ever had but she has gained a lot of political experience despite her age. She became the chair of the city council of Tampere at the age of 27 and a year later was selected the second vice chairman of her party the Social Democrats. She has been serving as a member of parliament since 2015 and was the Transport Minister before becoming the Prime Minister. Finnish news media has described Sanna Marin as firm, ambitious and systematic – although according to Marin herself, she does not recognize the latter description (see for example Muhonen, 2019). This can be difficult to believe when looking at her quickly ascending path to power. However, she has always said her rise to power has not been particularly planned but rather a sign of stepping up when needed. This was probably one of the reasons why Marin was seen as a front-runner for the race to become the new prime minister and hence Marin's election was anticipated – despite the unorthodox progression of the events.

This research is a contribution to academic scholarship concerned with critical questions around media representations of female politicians. Even though a great number of scholars have already explored this topic, their results show that it is important to keep researching and highlighting these issues: Time and time again studies show that female politicians are either underrepresented, presented in a negative light or get their voices

heard only regarding ‘feminine’ issues like education or family (see for example Hooghe, Jacobs & Claes, 2015; Kahn, 1994; Ross, Evans, Harrison, Shears & Wadia, 2013). Furthermore, female politicians often face the so-called gender double bind (Jamieson, 1995), a contradiction between how women are expected to perform in leadership roles and how they are supposed to act as a woman. Since our culture sees the model of a politician rather more masculine than feminine, van Zoonen (2005) argues that gender constitutes a more important feature for female politicians and performing successfully as a politician becomes more difficult for women than what it is for men. This contradiction provides an interesting background for my analysis.

The aim of this thesis is to explore how the performance of yet another, this time exceptionally young, female politician is portrayed in media. I examine articles about Sanna Marin published in December 2019, right before and immediately after her election as the prime minister of Finland. I gather my data from Finnish mainstream media, including morning and evening newspapers and the national broadcasting media. The research questions I have formed to guide this research are following:

RQ1: How is Sanna Marin represented in Finnish media in the weeks surrounding her election as the country’s new prime minister?

RQ2: What are the implications of these representations to how Sanna Marin is positioned as a legitimate political authority?

The first research question is developed to form a basis to this study; to explore and find descriptive answers for later discussion. Following this, the second question is derived from the findings gotten from the data and aims to interpret what the news representation of Sanna Marin, whether she is portrayed as a credible and competent politician by the news media, suggests in a larger context of female politicians’ representation.

Casting a light to the layout of the study, chapter 2 is devoted to providing background to this subject. The chapter gives a quick overview to how Finnish women have entered politics and how they got suffrage almost accidentally, since gender as an attribute was not in focus until only later. Thereafter, I introduce three of the key female politicians Finland has had in the 21st century: the former President Tarja Halonen and the two former Prime Ministers Anneli Jäätteenmäki and Mari Kiviniemi. I then proceed to introduce the main subject of this study, Sanna Marin. Chapter 3 dives deeper into the

issue by introducing some of the most central previous research surrounding female politicians' representation on media, both in an international context and within Finland. In the literature review I show how, despite different national contexts and eras, certain themes keep recirculating in media's representations of women in politics. In chapter 4, the focus shifts from background to this particular research and presents the analytical focus of this study, ergo the theories of framing and representation. This chapter also contextualises the study in terms of two key concepts, gender and public sphere. Here, I focus on gender representations and politics as public sphere to lay ground for later discussion around what it means to perform one's gender "correctly" and who has the right to participate in political decision-making in today's world. Chapter 5 presents the research design: thematic analysis as my choice of method, the chosen approach and paradigm, the strategy for conducting the sample of news articles as well as some of the limitations of this study. Chapter 6 then outlines some of the ethical considerations regarding this study. Lastly, chapters 7 and 8 are devoted for analysis, discussion and concluding remarks. With these chapters I want to argue that at first glance gender might not seem like an important factor in the media but rather that the ways in which Marin's gender is framed is much more subtle and continue to reinforce the existence of gender double bind for female politicians – and therefore, despite the excessive amount of previous research, gender representation continues being a salient issue.

2 Background

The purpose of this section is to provide background insights to the issue at hand. I start by explaining how women have entered the political arena in Finland and gained more responsibilities throughout the decades. I then proceed to introduce the previous female politicians in Finland who have served in top-positions (i.e. the former president and two former prime ministers) and lastly shift focus to the main topic of this study: Sanna Marin and her background.

2.1 Women in Finnish politics

When Finland's unicameral parliament convened for the first time in March 1907, there were nineteen women among the newly elected MPs. [...] The nineteen women comprised less than ten percent of the total of 200 MPs. Nevertheless, they were exceptional in that they represented the first women in Europe to obtain both the vote and the right to stand as candidates in parliamentary elections. (Sulkunen, 2009, p. 83)

When it comes to gender equality in politics, Finland has a history as a meritorious country. In 1906, Finnish women were granted full rights to vote and stand for elections, first in Europe and second in the world. First female governmental minister served 1926–1927 as the Minister of Social Affairs. However, it was not until the 1990s when the proportion of female ministers began growing and the roles started to extend from the traditional positions of education and social affairs to ministers of trade and industry, justice and foreign affairs (Parliament of Finland, 2016). Additionally, Finland's first female president was elected in 2000 and the country experienced a historical moment briefly in 2003 when both the president and the prime minister were women.

Gender has not always played a significant role in Finnish politics. Before the universal suffrage, voting was possible for only a small group of citizens and, according to Irma Sulkunen, the right to do so was rather a question of class than gender: "Certainly, there was talk of the 'natural' attributes of women, but there was hardly any reference to their having a restricting effect on political activity" (Sulkunen, 2009, p. 91). It was not until after the democratic parliamentary system got under way that gender became politicized and "the kind of divided gender system that had become common in Western countries began to appear as a major factor in the Finnish civil society as well" (ibid., p. 103). Today, in 2020, women have increased their percentage in parliament. In fact, in the previous parliamentary election, the number of elected women was record high: 94

out of 200 members of the new parliament were women (“Parliamentary Elections 2019 Result Service”, 2019). Currently, 11 out of 19 ministers are women, including the Prime Minister Sanna Marin.

2.1.1 Female prime ministers in Finland

The glass ceiling for female prime ministers in Finland was broken by Anneli Jäätteenmäki in 2003 when the Centre Party won the election and Jäätteenmäki became the new prime minister. According to the new Constitution, as the Chair of the winning party, Jäätteenmäki was automatically the one to conduct government negotiations, and since they were successful, she became the new Prime Minister. However, the government of Anneli Jäätteenmäki soon faced issues as a public debate that had begun during the election campaigning heated up, and Jäätteenmäki was suspected of having misled Parliament about how she had got hold of certain documents regarding discussions of Iraq. She resigned as Prime Minister in June 2003, her government term lasting only 69 days. The charges of incitement and aiding were later acquitted by a court and instead the leaker of the documents was sentenced. Jäätteenmäki was elected to the European Parliament in 2004 and kept her seat until her retirement in 2019. (Finnish Government, 2017; Anneli Jäätteenmäki’s home page, 2019).

The second woman in Finland to act as a Prime Minister was Mari Kiviniemi, also from the Centre Party. Kiviniemi was serving as the Minister for Public Administration and Local Government when her predecessor stepped down in the middle of a parliamentary term in June 2010 and Kiviniemi was elected as his successor. Since the Centre Party was the Prime Minister party, Kiviniemi took over the position and thus became the second female Prime Minister of the country. However, the party suffered a historical fall in the parliamentary elections next spring and lost their position as the Prime Minister party. Kiviniemi conjectured that she no longer had the support of the majority of the party members and decided to not run for the Chair of the party anymore in 2011, meaning that her role as both the Prime Minister and the Chair of the party ended after one year in office. (Finnish Government, 2017.)

Even though the focus of this thesis is on the current Prime Minister of Finland, Sanna Marin, it is impossible to discuss the representation of women in Finnish politics without bringing up Tarja Halonen, the first and so far only female president Finland has had. Whereas Jäätteenmäki and Kiviniemi only held office for a fairly short period of time, one resigning after a scandal and other feeling obliged to step down after a loss in

an election, Halonen enjoyed great popularity throughout her time in the presidential position. Her impact on how women are perceived as politicians is significant, as the literature review will later exhibit. Halonen is known for breaking multiple glass ceilings in her career, for example by being the first female lawyer in the of the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions as well as the first women to serve as the Minister for Foreign Affairs and finally, the first female president in the Finnish history. She was the 11th president of Finland and held office for two terms between 2000–2012.

2.1.2 The Case of Sanna Marin

Sanna Marin was born in 1985. Her parents separated when she was a toddler and she grew up with her mother and her mother's same-sex partner. Her family had economic problems when she was growing up, and she was the first in her family to go to university. She has a master's degree in Administrative Science. During her studies Marin worked as a cashier to afford her living, since she did not dare to get a student loan as she did not think she would be able to pay it back. Today, Marin lives in Tampere with her fiancé and their two-year-old daughter. (Marin, 2016.)

Sanna Marin is a fairly new face in the Finnish political scene. What is considered her first political success can be traced back to 2013 when she was 27 years old and ran Tampere's city council. The council was torn over whether to build a high-speed tram in the city and Marin got them to go for it. There is a famous video clip from one of the conventions regarding the tram where the members want to discuss things outside that particular project and Marin puts them firmly in order. As a politician she is known to support equality, freedom and global solidarity. On her website she also lists environmental issues and sustainability as important topics to work for.

In 2015, Marin entered national politics and became a member of the parliament. Four years later in the latest elections, she gathered over 19 000 votes, being one of the biggest vote-pullers in the country and beating the erstwhile chair of the party, and the future prime minister, with approximately 7000 votes. In a way her path to politics is very traditional, but the speed of the progress is often referred to as unusually ascending. She had only been a member of her party Social Democrats for little over a decade before becoming the Prime Minister of Finland. Marin herself has always said none of this has been particularly planned but rather a sign of stepping up when needed. After the parliamentary election in 2019, Social Democrats become the Prime Minister party and Sanna Marin was chosen the Transport Minister. Then, in December 2019, when the

postal strike culminated in her predecessor resigning, Marin did not hesitate to step up and tell she would be willing to become the next Prime Minister. Soon, there was to candidates for the position: Sanna Marin and Antti Lindtman, a 37-year-old member of parliament and the chairman of the Social Democratic Parliamentary Group. Marin won the election narrowly (32–29) and was officially appointed the Prime Minister of Finland on the 10th of December 2019.

3 Literature review

Gender bias towards female politicians in media is a phenomenon that has interested numerous researchers for decades. Next, I will present some of that research that I see as most valuable for providing background for the analysis of Sanna Marin. First, the focus is on women's representation in general and in other countries such as Sweden, Denmark and the United States, moving then to take a closer look at Finland, focusing on the top-politicians introduced in the previous chapter: former president Tarja Halonen, and former prime ministers Anneli Jäätteenmäki and Mari Kiviniemi.

3.1 Media representations of women in politics

Many scholars have studied gender representation in media and noted that female politicians are approached differently in news media than their male counterparts. For example, women tend to generally get less attention, and if they do get it, the focus is often on their looks, age or family relationship (see for example Hooghe, Jacobs & Claes, 2015; Kahn, 1994; Ross & Sreberny, 2000; Ross, Evans, Harrison, Shears & Wadia, 2013). Women are associated with being more empathetic, compassionate, moral, hardworking and liberal, and less decisive, competent and experienced than men, whereas men are perceived more rational, assertive, tough, emotionally stable and conservative (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Men and women are also perceived to have different areas of policy expertise: women are thought to do better with issues of 'compassion' or 'expressive strengths' like education, healthcare and childcare, and men with 'masculine issues' like crime, military and terrorism (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Dolan, 2010; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). When it comes to performance, Deaux and Emswiler (1974) theorise that when men perform successfully – especially in masculine tasks – their success is attributed to skill, whereas women's succession in the same task tends to be seen as luck.

Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) have studied the political impact of gender stereotypes by examining the importance of "male" and "female" personality traits and areas of issue competence for 'good' politicians, concluding with following definition:

Typical male strengths were considered advantageous for more prestigious and powerful kinds of political office. Typical masculine or instrumental personality traits, such as assertiveness and toughness, were considered strong prerequisites for good national and executive-level politicians and "male" policy issues such as the military and economy were seen as more likely to arise at higher levels of office. Local and legislative

politicians, on the other hand, were seen as more likely to confront traditional “female” compassion issues but were not seen as more warm or expressive. (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993, p. 512.)

Female politicians are often expected to do well in both being a politician and a woman, thus trying to find balanced performance in these two. Liesbet van Zoonen (2005) argues that this performance needs to happen on several stages: the stage of political institutions and processes, the stage of private life and the stage of the public and the popular. The first two are explicit and stable, performance being related to what the name implies: political decision-making, negotiating and exercising administrative power, or family life, leisure preferences and lifestyle in general. The third stage is the one that connects these two stages and presents them to a wider public; a stage where the politician’s “persona must fit both the cultural model of ‘politician’ the diverse audiences have and their diverse ideas of what a celebrity, male or female should be” (van Zoonen, 2005, p. 75). Since “the cultural model of politician is much closer to masculinity than of femininity” (ibid.), performing successfully as a politician is more complicated for women. Staunæs and Søndergaard (2008) phrase this balancing act as female politicians needing to “walk a delicate path between being “too feminine” and thus seen as too weak and being “too masculine” and thus seen as not enough of a woman” (p. 18). This creates a so-called gender double bind, that is the contradiction between how women are expected to perform in leadership roles on the one hand and how they are supposed to act as a woman on the other hand. According to Jamieson (1995), the power of the gender double bind lies in its capacity to simplify complex issues. When facing a complicated situation or behaviour, humans tend to simplify and “dichotomize its elements. So we contrast good and bad, strong and weak [...] and in so doing assume that a person can’t be both at once – or somewhere in between” (1995, p. 7). This double bind, according to Jamieson, “expects a woman to be feminine, then offers her a concept of femininity that ensures that as feminine creature she cannot be mature or decisive” (ibid., p. 120).

Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen (2013) analysed the newspaper coverage of Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the first female prime minister in Denmark, to see how the Danish newspapers received, evaluated and communicated her performance as politician in a high position. She noticed that Thorning-Schmidt’s gender was paradoxically seen as an unimportant and outdated political issue on the one hand, and, on the other hand, her femininity as something that required management. Nevertheless, media was mostly

satisfied with Thorning-Schmidt's "perfectly balanced" and "coherent performance" as a female politician (2013, p. 170).

Another example, albeit of a less well-balanced and correctly performing female politician, is a Swedish politician Mona Sahlin who became unpopular after being caught using her official credit card for personal purchases, later known as the Toblerone Affair. Mia-Marie Hammarlin and Gunilla Jarlbro (2012) analysed the ways in which Swedish newspapers represented and interpreted Sahlin as a politician. The articles focused on her "normalness, folksiness, lack of both political and linguistic skills, and her lack of credibility inside and outside the party" (Hammarlin & Jarlbro, 2012, p. 131). She was presented as a mother, a wife and a politician – but not a very good one in any of the roles since she could not handle neither her personal finances nor was able to keep her home clean and tidy. Thus, she was perceived as failing both as a woman and a politician. When she stepped down, she was finally, according to the media, "doing the right thing" (ibid.).

A bit further away from home, Hillary Clinton has been under a magnifying glass more or less since her husband Bill Clinton became the president of the United States in 1993. Hillary Clinton has been perceived in media as a polarizing figure. As a first lady, she was seen to break stereotypes of "the traditional role of first lady as national comforter" (Walsh, 1996, cited in Brown & Gardetto, 2000). As a first lady, Clinton was the first to clearly have a separate career of her own. Her being a lawyer and a public policymaker *as well as* a wife and mother sparked a lot of discussion since these two roles were seen as conflicting. Clinton challenged several "taken-for-granted dichotomies" such as public-private, state-family and citizen-wife (Brown & Gardetto, 2000, p. 27). Controversially, when she was running to become the Democratic Party candidate in 2008, she received negative and sexist coverage where media was questioning her suitability for office because of her gender (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). Her emotional displays have been perceived as insincere and undermining her capability (Harp, Loke, Bachmann, 2016) on the one hand and fitting the female stereotypes of emotional women (Falk, 2009) on the other. All in all, Brown and Gardetto (2000) suggest that the way news tend to personalise or individualise creates an impression as Clinton being "the most salient news issue rather than the underlying problem of women subordination she represents" (p. 22).

Another interesting aspect of representations of female politicians is how their ambition is approached in media. Hall and Donaghue (2013) conducted a research regarding Australia's first female prime minister Julia Gillard and presented three key

themes of how Gillard's ambition was framed: a key element of describing her, being downplayed by journalists, and obvious and unremarkable. Her ambition as a description of her personality and performance was both positive and negative as well as focusing on how it fits with expectations of her gender.

Overall, when studying media representations of female politicians specifically, it seems like gender is a more important feature for women than it is for men. The studies concerning Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Mona Sahlin, Julia Gillard and Hillary Clinton all suggest that a woman is on a dangerous territory when leaving the private sphere and stepping away from the traditional role of a mother and a wife. It is certainly more acceptable for women to pursue their own careers nowadays – but, it would seem, only as long as they keep performing well as housekeepers too.

3.2 Previous research on Finland

When Finland's first female Prime Minister Anneli Jäätteenmäki resigned, media tried to avoid making it a question of gender, rather hiding than highlighting the fact that she was a woman (Virkkunen, 2005). However, scholars have found gendered notions in the way she was described after the scandal. For instance, ambition and persistence, normally seen as good qualities in a politician, were seen as negative for Jäätteenmäki, and issues regarding her credibility as a politician did indeed surround her gender (Mäkelä, 2018; Virkkunen 2005). She was represented as strong and aggressive, but mainly through a negative lens, though that seemed to apply for the voters as a positive thing. Media also tried framing her as a soft female leader, which ended up seeming fake and forced: She would not fit next to president Tarja Halonen in the picture as the mother of the country. Elina Havu (2013), who studied articles written about Anneli Jäätteenmäki in 2003 starting from the election campaigning and ending three months after her resignation, noticed that the way media approached her as a political leader changed after the election: her determination was seen as a good personal trait before the election but negative and disturbing after. Additionally, in question of credibility and competence, her gender was seen as an issue.

The second female prime minister, Mari Kiviniemi, was appointed seven years later after her predecessor stepped down in the middle of the parliamentary season. She served for one year from June 2010 to June 2011. Unlike with Anneli Jäätteenmäki, media paid extensive attention to Kiviniemi's physical appearance. For example, an evening

newspaper Iltalehti published a spread-long article introducing “things you did not know about Mari Kiviniemi”, accompanied with a picture of Kiviniemi walking up the stairs in a magenta cocktail dress, her backside facing the camera. This sparked a discussion of whether such articles would be published from male politicians, especially with such picture where the persons face is not even shown. In another context another person also suggested that instead of “Prime Minister” (fin. pääministeri, “the head minister”), Kiviniemi could be called “the body minister” based on how physically attractive she was. (Talvitie, 2013.)

If Jäätteenmäki and Kiviniemi were both criticised and questioned and their looks received quite extensive attention during their political careers, Tarja Halonen, who served as the first female president of Finland between 2000–2012, was considered one of the most popular politicians at the time and very successful in her position. Even though she appeared fairly ordinary-looking and did not seem to care too much about her looks, it was accepted. Halonen successfully combined masculine and feminine traits in her persona: She was both a strong woman with knowledge from the social sector and long experience from the top of Finnish politics, culminating in the possession of the power the (traditionally male) president held (Railo, 2011, as cited in Mäkelä, 2018). This, Railo concludes, presents exceptional competence and appreciation towards female politician’s public persona, which renegotiates the position of female politicians in Finnish politics in general (ibid.). Unquestionably, Halonen did smoothen the path and altered the attitudes toward female political leaders who are to follow her. Yet, even though Finnish women have long had the possibility to participate in politics, politics in Finland is still a fairly masculine field and leadership skills are viewed as masculine (Mäkelä, 2018). Also, when women become ministers, they tend to get less publicity than men and are criticised for different areas, such as their dressing or family – issues that are familiar from studies all around the world, thus suggesting that this topic still needs highlighting in Finland as well.

4 Theoretical framework

In the analysis, I draw on theories of framing and media representation to explore how constructions of performance are discussed in articles written about Sanna Marin right before and after she became the Prime Minister of Finland. Both framing and representation help to unpack the constructions of reality presented in media, and also to reflect on what effect these constructions might have on stereotypes people have about female politicians. In this chapter I also present the key concepts of this study: gender representation and the notion of politics as public sphere.

4.1 Framing theory

Framing is a popular area of research in communication. It has its roots in sociology and was first introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman (1986), who saw framing as something that helps us observe, recognize and name issues, and thereby makes human interaction easier. Likewise, William A. Gamson and Andre Mondigliani (1994) define a frame as a central organizing idea that gives meaning to issues or events, “weaving the connection among them” and suggesting “what the controversy is about” (p. 376). It expands the metaphor of medium as a neutral messenger, simply holding or sending important information for audiences to receive (Meyrowitz, 1999).

From the viewpoint of media studies, framing is related to agenda-setting theory (sometimes even referred to as second-level agenda-setting) but instead of only concentrating in what topics are covered in media and to what extent, framing theory focuses on the essence and presentation of the issue (Gamson & Mondigliani, 1994; de Vreese, 2005, Scheufele, 1999). According to de Vreese, the process of framing consists of stages of frame-building and frame-setting, as presented in figure 1. Frame-building includes both the practices of how journalists frame issues and how external factors like the relationship between journalists and elites (e.g. political actors) influence the process. Frame-setting, on the other hand, has to do with the individuals’ prior knowledge and predispositions when they encounter news frames (de Vreese, 2005). In this case, I am interested in framing as a concept that helps to unpack the themes and language invoked in media coverage, hence focusing on the stage of frame-setting by identifying frames appearing in news.

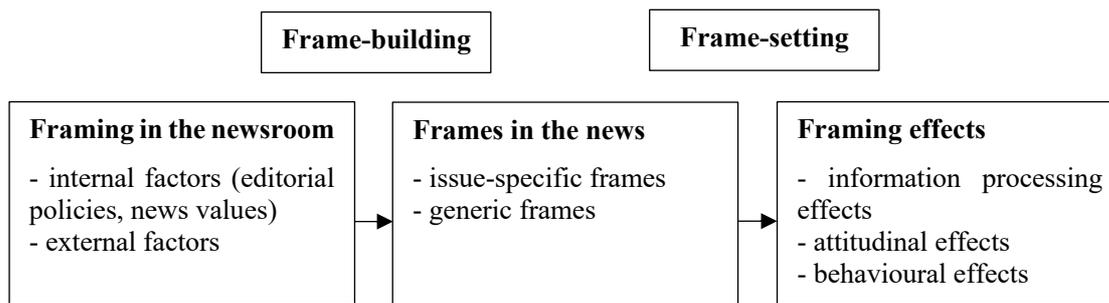


Figure 1. An integrated process model of framing by Claes H. de Vreese (2005).

Like agenda-setting, framing theory provides a way of indicating the power media has when it comes to defining public themes of interest. As figure 1 showcases, the process of framing is linear, and the practices of framing in the newsrooms thus may end up shaping not only individual's attitudes but also societal processes such as collective actions or the development of political values (de Vreese, 2005). Frames are parts of both political arguments and journalistic norms, and present alternative ways of defining issues (ibid.). According to Wright and Holland (2014), frames are ways in which different topics are linguistically packaged "to encourage specific interpretations while discouraging others", thus helping to shape the constructions of certain issues (p. 460). Robert Entman (1993) highlights the process of selection and salience in framing: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (p. 52). And so, frames both draw attention to some aspects of the issue at hand, and thus, direct it away from other aspects.

When it comes to political journalism, many scholars have noted that metaphors of game and war are increasingly used in this type of news. Aalberg, Strömbäck and de Vreese (2011) compared several studies to conceptualise the media coverage of politics as game or strategy frame, concluding with such definitions: the game frame is centred around winners and losers whereas the strategy frame focuses on candidates' or parties' strategies and motives for actions. It has been suggested that this type of language might both boost cynicism and draw attention to political drama – away from the actual issues – but also increase audiences' interest towards politics (ibid.). However, since I will not be studying audiences in this thesis, this kind of interpretation would be unnecessary.

It is important to note that since I am only doing external analysis on news articles (as will be explained in chapter 5) and not discussing the process of framing neither with journalists nor audiences, this study should be viewed as only providing exploratory analysis of media frames around Sanna Marin, rather than focusing on the inputs and

outcomes by journalists and audiences. It is therefore the mid-section of de Vreese's model that I will be drawing on in my analysis.

4.2 Representation

Like framing, representation is a key concept in the field of media and communication studies. One of the most popular theories about representation comes from Stuart Hall, on which I will also be building my analysis on. Hall has simplified the definition of representation as following: "Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people" (Hall, 1997, p. 13). On one level it means the use of language, signs and images that "stand for or represents things" (ibid.). Representation is therefore, as Hall puts it, "the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to [...] world of objects, people or events" (ibid., p. 16). On another level, it also helps to reveal how meaning is both produced and exchanged between people. Representation enables people to interpret the world, and also to expect that others probably interpret the world in more or less the same ways. When looking at representation more closely in relation to this particular research design, it is the constructionist approach to representation, as Hall calls it, that is crucial to understand here. Again, to put it simply, constructionist approach suggests that meaning "does not inhere in things [...] It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice – a practice that produces meaning" (ibid., p. 23). To see representations as meanings produced by people and between people means that the meaning is not fixed but rather open for interpretation and that it can change over time.

The constructivist idea of representation also appeals to media practices. Media is not simply just portraying or reflecting reality – in fact, it can never offer the whole reality of the reported event, and therefore should be regarded as providing only mediated versions of reality (Fürsich, 2010). This is where representation connects to the practice of framing: Like representation theory, framing also acknowledges the viewpoint that media coverage is not only simply describing reality, but rather helps to constitute it (Wright & Holland, 2014). By selecting and accentuating news content, journalists participate in constructing representations of certain events or issues. Moreover, Fürsich argues, the representations in the media also help normalising certain worldviews or ideologies. Stereotypical media representations play a part in the process of reinforcing hegemonic power relations (Hall, 1997) and are therefore important to recognise.

4.2.1 Gender representation

Zooming in from the theory of representation, it is crucial to unpack the concept of gender representation, and what it means in terms of this study. First, it is important to understand how *gender* is approached here. I rely on West and Zimmerman's (1987) definition, according to which gender is not something we *are* but rather what we *do*. Their view is that gender is an idea constructed through attitudes and activities that are considered appropriate to each sex category, and through social interaction. 'Doing gender', therefore, means acting out so that the performance is seen as 'gender-appropriate' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 135). It also "renders the social arrangements based on sex category accountable as normal and natural" (ibid., p. 145). An example of this is the idea of gender equality in the 1950's, when men and women were thought to simply do "what they were best at" (Sreberny & van Zoonen, 2000, p. 4). This meant that men and masculinity were linked to working in the public domain whereas women and femininity meant working in the private domain. Since society valued these roles equally, gender equality was thought to happen. It was not until late 1960's when the discussion over the concepts of masculinity and femininity began. The argument was that women had same ambitions and competences as men, and thus were not that different from men as society had suggested by moulding them into their "appropriate genders" (ibid.).

Following this, it is equally important to understand what masculinity and femininity mean in the context of (political) leadership. Studies exploring gender-stereotypic notions of leadership have noticed that male leaders are often expected to be 'agentic' and achievement-oriented whereas female leaders are expected to be 'communal' and service-oriented (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Thus, men are more often considered to see power as individual and women as intermutual endeavour. Male leaders are described as aggressive, independent, rationalist, and competitive and female leaders as emotional, kind, sympathetic and nurturing (Hines, 1992; Marshall, 1993; Heilman, 2001). As Heilman points out, not only are these descriptions different but often completely oppositional, "with members of one sex seen as lacking what is thought to be most prevalent in members of the other sex" (2001, p. 658). Based on these characterizations, I have formulated a table distinguishing some traits and attributes considered stereotypically masculine or feminine, which I will be utilizing later in the analysis part of the study.

Stereotypical masculine attributes	Stereotypical feminine attributes
Tough	Kind
Independent	Interdependent
Controlling	Caring, acceptive
Competitive	Cooperative
Rational	Emotional
Analytic	Intuitive
Self-asserted	Nurturing
Ambitious	Receptive

Figure 2. Gender-stereotypical attributes, based on Marshall (1993), Hines (1992) and Heilman (2001).

The attributes in figure 2 are not all necessarily paired to be each other’s opposites, though some, like tough/kind and rational/emotional, clearly are, but rather providing some guidelines for my analysis later on. I will be first and foremost focusing on the gendered descriptions of Sanna Marin in general, i.e. whether she is described with masculine or feminine words and what is the ratio between these two. I will also discuss the tone of the more specific choices of masculine or feminine words and what these choices might indicate.

4.3 Politics as public sphere

In the discussion of why gender representation matters to begin with, the debate over who has right to participate becomes central. The main framework for this discussion in the light of mediated political processes is provided by Jürgen Habermas and his concept of the public sphere. In short, public sphere means a community, real or imaginary, that is open to all and provides a chance for public discussion (Habermas, 1964). Habermas has been criticized for having a bourgeois viewpoint, since his concept of public sphere excluded for example workers, people of colour and women. Building on these critiques, political theorist Nancy Fraser (1990) developed a *feminist theory of public spheres*, where she argues that in order to a public sphere to work democratically, it needs to be truly open to everyone, regardless of backgrounds or identities. To Fraser, the bourgeois public sphere of Habermas was an arena where social inequalities were only bracketed,

not eliminated: “This public sphere was to be an arena in which interlocutors would set aside such characteristics as differences in birth and fortune and speak to one another *as if* they were social and economic peers” (Fraser, 1990, p. 63, added emphasis). According to her, this bracketing mainly works for the benefit of the elite (i.e. men), and is still true today, like feminist research has later documented: Men still “tend to interrupt women more than women interrupt men; men also tend to speak more than women, taking more turns and longer turns; and women's interventions are more often ignored or not responded to than men's” (ibid, p. 64).

Furthermore, as Sreberny and van Zoonen add, there is still no such thing as equality in public sphere. Even though the access to different public spheres is no longer formally blocked, “institutes of the public sphere, such as political parties, are dominated by white heterosexual middle-class men” (Sreberny & van Zoonen, 2000, p. 7). Slow and steady, some progress is still made, and today, on a worldwide average, every fourth member of parliament is female, when ten years ago women had every fifth seat (United Nations, 2010; United Nations 2020). The Nordic countries stand out with almost half of the members of parliaments being women. This implies that in the Nordic countries, women have a decent stand amongst that strong public of politicians who operate as powerful actors in making decisions and forming public opinion (Fraser, 1992; Sreberny & van Zoonen, 2000).

These perspectives will provide grounds for identifying the constructions of gendered stereotypes in Finnish media around the election of Sanna Marin as the prime minister of Finland. Following Nick Couldry, who defines frame-setting as “the process of determining who is represented as within, or beyond, the boundaries of citizen membership for political purposes” (Couldry, 2008, p. 18), my focus will be in exploring how this is approached in media and what kind of a role gender plays in this process.

5 Methodology

In this chapter, I first account for the choice of method, thematic analysis, and argue for the chosen approach and paradigm. Furthermore, I unfold the process of data collection and the chosen strategy for the analysis of the data, and finally discuss some of the limitations of this particular research design.

5.1 Thematic analysis

In this study, I will be looking into news articles to explore the constructions of the political and gendered performance of a young female politician. This will be conducted with the help of a thematic analysis, which is a qualitative method “for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). According to Braun and Clarke, there are two primary ways of identifying themes or patterns within data in thematic analysis: inductive or theoretical. Since inductive analysis is often linked to less-researched topics where themes are identified from data collected specifically for the research and are not driven by the researcher’s theoretical interest to the topic, theoretical approach was more suitable for this study. A theoretical analysis is more analyst-driven and usually provides “less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With theoretical approach, the researcher is interested in how previously identified themes appear in the data and focuses on these particular features when coding the data.

Additionally, there are two different levels of identifying themes: semantic or latent. I will be focusing on the latent level, since it goes beyond the semantic surface and “starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (ibid., p. 84), thus believed to provide better tools for my study. Finally, it is worth noting that even though the paper by Braun and Clarke contextualises thematic analysis more specifically in relation to psychology research, it provides clear and systematic explanation of the method in general and has commonly been used as the main source in media and communication studies as well.

5.2 Approach and paradigm

Thematic analysis is considered to be fundamentally independent of theory and epistemology, therefore providing a flexible and useful research tool that can be applied

to a range of different approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it is nonetheless a qualitative approach and therefore has some key features to keep in mind. The most crucial of them is probably the role of the researcher, which in thematic analysis is extremely active. Braun and Clarke (2006) point out the controversial way of writing about themes as ‘emerging’ or ‘being discovered’, thus downplaying the active role of the researcher. They stress the importance of matching the theoretical framework and method with what the researcher wants to know – and that the researcher acknowledges and recognizes them as *decisions* they have made themselves.

Latent thematic analysis is often combined with constructionist paradigm that believes that “meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced” and seeks to “theorize the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). However, since I will be examining data as an outsider and not for example interviewing journalists who write about the topic, I wanted to choose a paradigm that is more suitable for observation. In Blaikie and Priest’s (2019) view on critical rationalism, observations are not seen as ‘pure’ but rather to be made with certain expectations in mind. Since I would be building on previous research and themes found in those, the critical rationalist paradigm came across as the most suitable paradigm for my research.

5.3 Data collection process and sample

I collected the data by using a data analysis tool provided by Retriever Mediearkivet. I first did a search that covered all Finnish media sources, narrowing the time frame down to the entire month of December 2019. The search with “Sanna Marin” provided nearly 3000 hits, which made me realize I needed to narrow my search down more. Therefore, I decided to focus on the five top sources that gave the most hits, as they happen to represent the most widely circulating news outlets in Finland (Reunanen, 2019). These included two tabloid newspapers Ilta-Sanomat and Iltalehti, the Finnish broadcasting media Yleisradio, a morning newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, and MTV Uutiset, an online news site of a commercial tv-channel MTV3. These five were the five most used sources for online news in Finland in 2019, in this order, reaching around three million visitors every month. Their print, tv and radio news made into the top eight sources, where local, regional and city papers climb ahead of Helsingin Sanomat and the tabloid papers (Fiam, 2019; Reunanen, 2019). I wanted to focus on the most popular outlets since they reach

largest audiences and therefore can be assumed to have the biggest influence in Finnish people. I left out opinion pieces and articles written by Finnish News Agency STT in order to be able to focus on material provided by these five particular editorial offices. After this refined search, I was left with a sample of 589 articles. Following this I went through a manual selection process selecting articles that described Sanna Marin as a person and a politician. I filtered out articles where she is only mentioned briefly by name or that only refer to her government, and eventually was left with 27 articles divided into four categories as following:

1. Articles describing Sanna Marin *before* she was elected as Prime Minister.
2. Articles describing Sanna Marin *after* she was elected as Prime Minister.
3. *Feature articles*, where Sanna Marin herself is interviewed.
4. *Analyses*, where the journalist describes and evaluates Sanna Marin.

There were eight articles in the first category, six of them comparing Sanna Marin to her counterpart Antti Lindtman. The second category consisted of seven articles. Only one of the articles was a feature, thus located in the third category. The fourth and final category included ten articles, three of them analysing both Sanna Marin and Antti Lindtman before the election and seven focusing on Marin's performance alone. In the next chapter, I provide a more detailed description of how the articles were analysed to find reoccurring themes in them.

5.4 Strategy of data analysis

In order to describe, compare and explain my findings, I had to be able to identify themes from the data corpus. Ryan and Bernard (2003) introduce a set of different theme-identifying techniques from which I will be selecting the ones that fit my study the best. To recognise themes in the first place, Ryan and Bernard advice to ask oneself: "What is this expression an example of?" (2003, p. 87). When that question can be answered, a theme has been discovered. Ryan and Bernard also introduce twelve different scrutiny techniques for theme development. I first introduce five of them here since they were the ones I found the most useful for my analysis. Some of them are more basic and more helpful in the beginning of the analysis, whereas some come more in handy later in the process. Overall, these are often the most useful in textual data that is rich in narratives, as I had reasons to believe journalistic articles would be. Here is what I was looking for in the texts:

1. *Repetitions*, meaning that the more the same topic occurs in the data, the more likely it is a theme. In terms of this study these repetitions included topics such as parenthood, political experience and political interests.
2. *Indigenous typologies*, referring to terms that were used in unfamiliar ways (more unlikely to appear in my data but worth looking for).
3. *Metaphors and analogies*, to understand what the audience was assumed to know.
4. *Transitions*, such as new paragraphs in text, to recognise changes in topic (helpful in the very beginning of the analysis).
5. *Similarities and differences*, to notice themes that were perhaps articulated differently but meant all the same in the core.

Following Ryan and Bernard's guidelines, I used a technique of 'cutting and sorting' to further process the themes. This basically means cutting out quotes from the text and sorting them into categories or piles. After naming them you have your themes. One must then decide which themes are most important, and also if some are perhaps irrelevant for the analysis. (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, pp. 94–96, 103.)

5.5 Limitations

The limitations of thematic analysis lie mostly on the interpretative nature of the method. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis can turn out poor if the analysis is badly conducted, the research questions are inappropriate, and the analytic claims are not placed within an existing theoretical framework but rather left floating unanchored. Another disadvantage of thematic analysis is that it is a fairly simple method that does not allow the researcher to make claims about language use (*ibid.*). Therefore, thematic analysis does not really give tools to answer questions about *why* certain events or persons are presented to the general public in a certain way, but then again that would also be outside the scope of this thesis. The flexibility of thematic analysis can also become a disadvantage as it can lead to inconsistency and lack of coherence when the themes are derived from the data (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

It is also important to keep the general nature of newspapers in mind when discussing media influence and the effects of news in audiences. For example, one should not assume that mass media has automatic influence on public opinion. On the one hand this is because majority of people are not that interested in news and therefore do not pay extensive attention to media reports of current events, and thus it is impossible to provide

general claims about media effects on audiences in this matter. On the other hand, journalists are not always neutral in their reporting, and their larger political and ideological agendas have an impact on the reporting of events – and therefore mass media does not have influence on public opinion they perhaps ought to have (Hall & Donaghue, 2013; Keppinger, 2008). All in all, this should be kept in mind before drawing conclusions about the influence of mass media on reinforcing stereotypes.

6 Ethics

With every research, there are principles and practices to follow in order to conduct the study ethically (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Ethical issues arise especially when the research involves human participants or deals with highly political and controversial issues (Sieber, 2016). Unless ethical issues are recognised and respected, Sieber writes, “it is likely that research questions may be inappropriately framed, [...] and findings may have limited usefulness” (ibid., p. 106). However, as my research did not involve collecting primary data of human participants, their ethical treatment was not something that had to be taken into consideration. Confidentiality was not an issue either, since I would be collecting and analysing publicly available data of a public figure.

However, to ensure that this study is ethically appropriate, I made sure that the sources were credible, reliable news sites, and that the source material was treated in a respectful way. To avoid problems regarding internet research, such as copyright or authorised access to certain websites, I only used data that is available to all the public and made sure all articles were referred to correctly and that links to original articles could be found in the appendix. However, it turns out that the articles by Helsingin Sanomat were later placed behind a paywall which is very unfortunate in terms of the reliability of this study. I have therefore tried to be as explicit as possible to ensure that all the necessary information from the articles is included in the analysis chapter.

In qualitative textual analysis, researchers take an active stand and “bring their own interpretive strategies to their work” (Brennen, 2012, p. 205). Therefore, the knowledge gained with qualitative research is not to be considered a universal, generalisable truth but rather as one possible interpretation of the issue. In order to stay unbiased, qualitative researchers are to draw on relevant contexts (social, historical, political and/or economic) to understand how these texts fits into “the dominant worldview of a culture” and further construct “their most likely interpretations of the relationships between a text and the larger society” (ibid.). As a researcher who has background in journalism and has grown up in the Finnish society, I had to be aware of both my pre-existing knowledge of Finnish (journalistic) culture and especially any underlying prejudices towards either journalistic practices or politics. This is why I relied on Brennen’s advice and considered previous research as only a provider of some guidelines for the themes I were to conduct, so that I was able to stay open to discovering unknown themes, instead of sticking strictly to those I thought I would find.

7 Analysis

Analysing news articles published around Sanna Marin's election as the Prime Minister of Finland in December 2019 provides a window onto considering how young female politicians, like Marin, are represented in Finnish mainstream news media. From the analysis of these articles I was able to identify and distil several themes which are presented next in the results. These themes evolve around her gender, age and performance as a politician in a high position.

7.1 Performing young woman

If one were to describe the demeanour of Sanna Marin, a fitting description could be *classy*. She appears stylish and neat, often wearing modest dresses or pantsuits, her hair in waves either open or in a side ponytail and has modest makeup with a somewhat signature black eye lining. She is not a very colourful dresser but wears mostly black or red, the latter underlining her status as a social democrat. In pictures she is often posing with her hands in front of her, holding her left hand with her right – a habit of a mighty politician, like Helsingin Sanomat wrote, comparing her to Angela Merkel and Theresa May who also have a signature way of positioning their hands (Nykänen, 2020).

In interviews Marin is often expressing her wish not to focus on her gender or age but actions and competences. This wish seems to be granted, partly, since only one of the articles in the sample pays any attention to her appearance, and more specifically the colour choices of her clothing:

The colour of the social democratic labour party is rose red, but the colour of power is black. On the 26th of January Sanna Marin was wearing a dress in dark red and held a passionate and blazing speech in the opening event of the election campaign of the Social Democrats. [...] On Sunday, in the Finnish Parliament Annex, Marin was dressed in black pantsuit. She was displaying the colour of power. (Nurmi, 9.12.2019, author's translation.)

Following Hall's (1997) constructivist approach to representation, a colour alone does not carry a specific meaning, but it is the context that makes people understand how to react to that colour. In this case, the focus is in the relation between the sign (Marin's clothes) and the signifier (the colour of the clothes): When holding a speech in a campaign event, she wears red, a colour that symbolises both her party the Social Democrats as well as left wing in politics in general. On the latter occasion, when competing over the position of prime minister, she is wearing black, that the journalist describes as colour of

power. There are several interpretations to draw here: Is it an allusion of Marin's confidence that she would win the vote? Or the possibility that she is distancing herself from being only a passionate Social Democrat (wearing a red dress in a campaign event) but also a Prime Minister who can get along with other parties and is able to compromise (wearing an ideologically neutral, yet bold colour)?

Karen Ross and Annabelle Sreberny (2000) interviewed women MP's in Britain about media's portrayal of politics, noticing that most of female politicians believe that their outward appearance gets considerably more media attention than their male colleagues. The interviewees also mentioned how the media "always include the age of women politicians, what they look like, their domestic and family circumstances, their fashion sense and so on" (Ross & Sreberny, 2000, p. 87). One possible explanation for the lack of focus on Sanna Marin's physical appearance might be that women already have a pretty established position in the Finnish political scene, and therefore there is no need to underline Marin's gender alone. Another explanation could be that Marin 'does' her gender correctly: she always looks feminine and professional but not too girly. As previous research has noted, when it comes to female politicians, their unkempt appearance might cause questioning of their ability and proficiency to serve in politics, thus suggesting that female politicians need to have a certain look in order to be respected. Elina Havu (2013) noted that in the coverage of Finland's first female Prime Minister Anneli Jäätteenmäki: if she were to seem tired and unkempt media would ask about it, but the same did not apply to men in Havu's sample. On the other hand, Finland's first female president, Tarja Halonen, was seen as a successful politician despite her ordinary-looking style and assumed disinclination to care for the outer appearance (Railo, 2011). This sample of news covering Sanna Marin suggests that her looks is not an issue of focus in her case. But even though Sanna Marin's gendered competence is not questioned because of her style, it does not mean it is not questioned at all, the focus just appears to be elsewhere.

It is no surprise that Sanna Marin's age sparked discussion in media at the time of her election. She is, after all, both the youngest Prime Minister Finland has ever had and also world's youngest head of government at the time of her election. In the sample news coverage of this study, her young age was often coupled with the astonishing speed of her career progression. *Iltalehti* describes how Marin has "risen up to the sharpest peak of politics like a rocket" when five years ago she was not "even a member of the parliament" (Lehtonen, 8.12.2019, author's translation). *Helsingin Sanomat* pointed out

how, despite her young age, she has “plenty of political experience after all” (Hiilamo, Sutinen & Nalbantoglu, 8.12.2019) and *Ilta-Sanomat* wrote how Marin “has managed to increase her popularity” in a fairly short period of time (Lapintie, 3.12.2019, author’s translation). The incredulous tone implies that media is underestimating her and her recently attained status as a prime minister, following the systematic way female politicians have previously belittled by the media (Ross & Sreberny, 2000).

Another thing indicating Marin’s young age could be found in articles talking about her social media appearance. Yleisradio published a comparison between Sanna Marin and her predecessor Antti Rinne and called the change in power a change of generation. Similarly, *Iltalehti* referred to *British Daily Mail* who placed Sanna Marin in an Instagram-generation.

Rinne is a foster child of cabinet politics, what his background in labour union movement highlights. Marin, on the other hand, is at home in the time of quick and open public conversation and social media. (Seuri, 8.12.2019, author’s translation.)

In Britain *Daily Mail* has inferred that Marin represents a politician of the Instagram-generation. [She] is not shy to share pictures of her breastfeeding or participating in social evenings. (Nurmi, 12.12.2019, author’s translation.)

With the average age of the Finnish Prime Ministers being 52 at the time of their appointment (Finnish Government, no date), 57-year-old Rinne surely represented the older generation. Marin, on the other hand, being significantly younger but also belonging to the same generation as three other party leaders in the government at the time (Li Andersson, 32, Maria Ohisalo, 34 and Katri Kulmuni, 32, who has later resigned) could be seen as the final variable in the process of generation change in the government. One way the media points this up is the reference to social media savvy Sanna Marin confidently sharing glimpses of her private life, especially on Instagram. Interestingly, both Marin and Rinne focus on their professional lives on their Instagram profiles. Marin used to share a lot more content regarding her private life, including her daughter, but climbing up the ladder seems to have reduced this and nowadays the posts are strictly about politics – very similar to the presence Rinne has, with some exceptions here and there with him cutting the lawn or posing with his family. However, no headlines can be found announcing what kind of a father Rinne is when he is posting pictures including his family members on social media. In a way, the way media is approaching Marin’s social media presence suggests that Marin, a woman, is expected to show herself not only

as a politician but also as the private person she is, a mother and a partner, which in this case happens to take place in social media.

7.2 Modern mother

The fact that Sanna Marin is a mother of a two-year-old is not left uncommented in the articles; it hovers in the back of the reporting both when she is a candidate and after being elected prime minister. Helsingin Sanomat is the most straight-forward by including the question in an article: “Can being a parent of a small child affect the performance of Prime Minister’s duties?” (Hiilamo, 5.12.2019, author’s translation.) The paper published profiles from both Marin and her counterpart Antti Lindtman four days before the election. Lindtman, also a parent of a toddler, was asked about the same issue, but his parenthood is framed quite differently. This is a theme reoccurring in many of the articles: Lindtman appears as a father who *wants*, and thus actively makes the decision, to have time for his family, whereas Marin’s career seems to be an equally active decision not to be with her daughter. She answers the question by Helsingin Sanomat in the following manner:

My situation is in a way very lucky since I have a wonderful spouse and Emma has wonderful grandparents who are present in our everyday life. It did feel comforting, when this situation showed up all of a sudden and my partner texted me that he and my mother had already agreed how they would handle all the practicalities. (Hiilamo, 5.12.2019, author’s translation.)

The quote is also an example of the modern mother Sanna Marin is representing according to media. In their family it is the father who takes most of the responsibility to take care of the child: picking her up from day care and looking after her when Marin is being interviewed. This is not necessarily the picture of a sacrificing husband waiting for his wife to come home after a long day in politics, but nevertheless it is in disharmony with the common gender norms (van Zoonen, 2005). In other articles Marin is presented as a more stereotypical mother in politics: She “admits” that life gets busy when you are juggling being a minister and a mother of a toddler (Laurila, 10.12.2019), and is excited and happy to be able to take a long Christmas break with her family after “having to work long hours and be away from home” (Nurmi, 23.12.2019, author’s translation).

Additionally, Marin is often presented as a young, liberal mother, who shares glimpses of parenthood on social media. MTV Uutiset devoted an entire article for Marin’s motherhood with a headline “This is how our future Prime Minister is like –

Sanna Marin boldly shares pictures of breastfeeding and bits of motherhood on social media” (Haili, 9.12.2019, author’s translation). The article presents selected posts from Marin’s Instagram profile – about her pregnancy, the tiredness of a parent of a new-born and later having her daughter with her at the parliament. Even though there is very little text written by the journalist, the message of the article is clear: This is a non-traditional mother – and a non-traditional politician at the same time.

According to van Zoonen (2000, p. 117), the attention media pays for female politicians’ family lives is “a continuous reminder of women’s odd position in politics”. This odd position can be appreciated, admired and envied – not only questioned and astonished. The way Finnish journalists are approaching Sanna Marin as a mother seems quite appreciative and admiring; It is accepted that the father takes care of their child while Marin is focusing on her career, and when Marin is presented as sacrificing family time for her career, it is her who says that in a quotation, not the journalist. The impression one gets is that the picture of a modern mother and modern day family dynamics is already well established and is accepted as long as the guilt of not having enough family-time is expressed – like Marin does by constantly underlining that being a top-politician is not something she would see as glamorous, but rather a job like any other, and that she still wishes to spend as much time with her daughter as possible (see for example Nurmi, 23.12.2019).

Additionally, instead of highlighting motherhood specifically, journalists have taken a more neutral approach. For example, instead of asking Marin how she balances between being a politician and a mother, the question is framed through a more neutral wording of parenthood. The question also seems to more often regard her performance and experiences alone, and not how her child copes without seeing their mother so often. Comparatively, this picture is very different than the one their colleagues in Sweden painted from Mona Sahlin, where journalists were one minute being empathetic towards her and condemning in another. The media expressed concern about how Sahlin’s children, husband and home will cope when she works in such a demanding position, the journalists urging her to make a choice between politics and her family (Hammarlin & Jarlbro, 2012), something that is basically absent in Sanna Marin’s case in the sample.

7.3 Performing politician

As a politician Sanna Marin talks often about environmental issues, human rights and education. She has made statements arguing for a shorter workweek and prohibiting the use of combustion engines. She is considered to bring new energy to politics, both on national level and especially on party level – although this energy is also seen as a possible “creator of tension” (Lapintie, 3.12.2019). The issues she has been focusing on so far are generally considered as feminine, and this is often framed a salient aspect in her political persona. For example, in an article analysing the speeches Marin and Lindtman held for their fellow party members before the vote, Lindtman is described as talking “a lot” about economy and entrepreneurship, whereas these themes were “conspicuously absent” from Marin’s speech (Koskinen, 9.12.2019). The article includes three long quotes from Lindtman’s speech, following with a short chapter summarizing Marin’s speech:

In her speech, Marin did not mention businesses or discuss economy but instead focused on other themes such as the welfare state, climate change, the leading of the government as well as her own leadership style. This created an impression that Marin does not care much where the money to run the welfare state comes from. (Koskinen, 9.12.2019, author’s translation.)

This lack of statements considering for example economy politics is brought up in other articles as well. This proves that stereotypes related to female politician’s competence are still visible in media. The above quotation is a case in point of how highlighting typically masculine subjects, such as economy, that female politicians have not yet familiarized themselves with but not doing the same for their male counterparts (Havu, 2013), and thus portraying women as lacking of what is considered as the most common interest of men (Heilman, 2001), media ends up favouring male politicians and reinforcing gender stereotypes.

In another analysis, the journalist believes that Marin has more understanding of “the components of economic growth” than her political rhetoric has implied so far. It is unclear, though, where the journalist is basing this argument on, as he continues:

With gallows humour one might say that Marin is fine with [...] the National Coalition Party’s slightly megalomaniac plan for an ice rink, that will be built on top of the tram’s main line, as long as the tram will be red – and obviously it will be. (Nurmi, 9.12.2019, author’s translation.)

Again, there are different ways to understand what this excerpt means to say. The tram could be seen as a reference to Marin’s political profile; of course a green- and left-leaning

politician like her wants the city to build a new public transportation option, and is thus willing to co-operate and compromise – and in a town where the Social Democrats are the biggest party, the colour should be red. However, if the reader is not familiar with all of this background, especially the notion of the colour might remain unclear and thus be interpreted differently, for example portraying Marin as a stereotypical woman buying a car, where other features are less important as long as the colour is right.

Nevertheless, the above excerpt is framing Marin as an ambitious politician: if she wants something, that will happen, whether it is getting a tram to your hometown or the position of a Prime Minister – despite the fact that the tone in the above example is much more sarcastic than in some other articles. For example, MTV Uutiset included an excerpt from an old article from 2014, where Marin was asked which political position she would be the most interested in, revealing her interest towards challenging positions:

In May 2014, when a journalist asked, “Which minister would she most preferably be?” Marin answered: – Prime Minister of course. Minister of Local Government would also be quite windy and interesting. (Lepistö, 21.12.2019, author’s translation.)

In another article from *Iltalehti*, Marin is also described ambitious but modest: She does not seem like a political climber but rather a person who humbly does one’s bit in carrying responsibilities within the party. Therefore, her ambition seems to be rather communal than self-interested, and thus more acceptable. This fits with one of the strategies of how a female politician can present ambition without violating feminine stereotypes that Hall and Donaghue are discussing in their study about Julia Gillard; ambition can be acceptable if the ambition itself is “exercised on behalf of a broader collective” (2013, p. 643), not to benefit women themselves.

Apart from Marin’s feminine interests, her professional personality seems to be constructed more of masculine traits. Building on figure 2 presented in chapter 4, I have divided adjectives used to describe Sanna Marin in the articles of the sample to stereotypical masculine and feminine attributes. Naturally, these adjectives are overall categories formed based on a collection of different descriptive words signifying the same trait. The words I have selected may not be the exact same ones than in figure 2, since not all of them were used to describe Sanna Marin in the sample. I have then counted how many times these words appear in the data to see which of the attributes are the most dominant in this particular case. These observations show that there was more than twice as many masculine attributes to be found in the articles compared to feminine ones.

Stereotypical masculine attributes		Stereotypical feminine attributes	
Operant, quick-witted	8	Cooperative	5
Tough	6	Calm	4
Serious	5	Friendly	3
Smart	4	Kind	2
Affective	4	Idealistic	2
Pragmatic	3	Passionate	1
Ambitious	3	Invigorating	1
Negotiation-skilled	2	Immaculate	1
Independent	1		
Total	38	Total	17

Figure 3. Sanna Marin's personal attributes following the categorisation of Marshall (1993), Hines (1992) and Heilman (2001).

The most common-used adjectives to describe Sanna Marin are quick-witted, tough, serious and cooperative. The first three of these are considered stereotypical personality traits for men, which also suggests that she often appears more masculine in her personality. However, the masculine attributes presented in figure 2 that were missing from the descriptions of Sanna Marin (such as controlling, rational and self-asserted), suggest that her masculinity is not the traditional aggressive kind. Her ambition, much like in the case of Julia Gillard, is presented as an anticipated characteristic of a leader. There are a lot of connections to the construction of Gillard's interpersonal style Hall and Donaghue (2013) identified, as both Gillard and Marin are presented as ambitious and competent as well as warm and communal at the same time. This androgynies ambition as a key characteristic of a politically successful woman; her ambition is accepted as long as it is combined with communal aspects.

7.4 Incorrect Social Democrat

In her party the Social Democrats, Sanna Marin sits tightly in the liberal red-green wing. This is acknowledged and highlighted in many of the articles as well. MTV Uutiset writes that Sanna Marin's public image is "quite good", even though amongst the social democrats she is partly seen as "too green" (Neihum, 3.12.2019). In other articles she is considered also "too liberal", "too red" and "too much on the left". One article took a

closer look into her answers in a voting advice application and concluded that the answers “paint a picture of a very left-and-green-thinking politician whose biggest values are freedom, equality and solidarity” (Koskinen, 9.12.2019, author’s translation). This, however, is not the most remarkable finding in the answers according to the journalist. The voting advice application also includes a section where the candidate’s answers are put in comparison with other parties. “The result for Sanna Marin is interesting”, the journalist writes, continuing:

Marin’s answers correlate most strongly (84%) with the Feminist party candidates. Next up is the Left Alliance (83%) and the Greens (82%), Animal Justice Party (81%). It is only after these when SDP shows up (79%) and right on the heel of the democrats is SKP (78%). (Koskinen, 9.12.2019, author’s translation.)

This is particularly interesting because the parties she is closer to are representing exactly what she is considered being *too much* of: feminist, liberal, left and green. The journalist also sees the need to point out that the Finnish Communist Party (*SKP, Suomen Kommunistinen Puolue, in Finnish*) is close, only one percentage point behind the Social Democrats, further underlining Marin’s leftness.

All in all, the biggest problem for Marin seems to be that she is not the right kind of Social Democrat. This corresponds with Hvenegård-Lassen’s findings about the Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, who was also seen unfitting as a Social Democrat. In Thorning-Schmidt’s case, her “particular brand of celebrity style” was “expensive and refined” (resulting in a nickname Gucci-Helle) and sat “uneasily with the ideal working-class image of a Social Democrat” (Hvenegård-Lassen, 2013, p. 168). In Marin’s case the problem does not lie so much in her appearance but rather in her young, liberal profile that does not look good in the eyes of the older generation – both voters and party members – of Social Democrats. By portraying Marin constantly as “too left” and “wrong kind of Social Democrat”, media is framing her as a threat to the old party hegemony, much like the Swedish media did with Mona Sahlin, who was considered to pose a threat for the entire “male hegemony of Swedish politics” (Hammarlin & Jarlbro, 2012 p. 133). Sahlin stepped down and thus stopped being a threat, whereas Marin’s future continues being unclear. It remains to be seen whether she will be accepted as bringing new energy to the party – especially if the party continues to do well in opinion polls.

7.5 Discussion

The analysis of news surrounding Sanna Marin's election as the new Prime Minister of Finland has shown that media representations tend to focus on evaluating how well she is performing in this new role. To answer my proposed research questions, I shall next discuss the expectations that are set for female politicians and how Marin is fulfilling them, paying particular focus on what role do her gender and age play in this.

7.5.1 Framing choices

Representations of women have changed remarkably over the last several decades, there is a wider range of options available for enacting gender, and the dichotomization between femininity and masculinity has become more blurred (Hodkinson, 2017; Hvenegård-Lassen, 2013). Simultaneously, the change in political journalism has resulted in personification of political questions, and politics are more often followed through individual politicians. The scope of issues regarded as political has also become broader, and the private life of politicians has become both a public statement and a topic of public discussion (Railo, 2012). For instance, the "intimization" of politics has resulted in the representation of male politicians moving closer to the typical representation of female politicians – but not the other way around. This can be seen in Sanna Marin's representation as well, especially when she is compared to either her predecessor Antti Rinne or fellow competitor Antti Lindtman. When the men, especially Lindtman, are presented as modern men valuing family-time, it is merely a good thing, whereas Marin is portrayed as forced to balance between building her career and in the meanwhile finding time for her family. This showcases that there is still discrepancy between genders today: Men can choose, but for women it continues being a sacrifice.

On the other hand, the personification of politics is an example of a strategic news frame, which according to Aalberg et al. (2011) makes politicians' self-interest and characteristic more salient while reducing focus on substantive issues, hence distracting audiences from the core message of the story. When media grants more visibility on female politicians' dressing style or family arrangements instead of focusing on their political expertise, they end up reinforcing the same old representations and thus not portraying them as legitimate political authorities.

7.5.2 All men (are allowed to) make mistakes

Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community, writes T.H. Marshall (1987), sociologist who came to be known from his conceptualization of citizenship and its three elements: civil, political and social. The one that is central for this study, political citizenship, is defined by Marshall as the rights and duties of citizens to participate in governmental decision-making. Even though Marshall suggested that these elements were built on top of each other, thus only after the previous one had been fully realized, social movements have later pointed out how civil, political and social rights have been excluded from ethnic and sexual minorities – and women (Marshall, 1987; van Zoonen, 2005). This raises a question of who is seen as granted the right to participate – and is there still equality between all the members of society today? In Sanna Marin’s case she is obviously suitable to take part in political decision-making – she was elected the Prime Minister after all – and it is Marshall’s notion of *full* community membership that should be critically reflected on. As the analysis has shown, Sanna Marin’s political performance is somewhat accepted to be correct: She does not appear too feminine nor too masculine as the leader of the country but there are some flaws in her performance as a Social Democrat. Then again, the party has been suffering with low popularity rates and won the national election in 2019 only narrowly, but now after Marin as the head, the popularity of the Social Democratic party has been growing significantly.

Additionally, even if institutes of public spheres like political parties are no longer blocked from women, they are still often dominated by men (Sreberny & van Zoonen, 2000). My argument is that the biggest blockage is created by the masculine mindset, meaning that when interest in masculine topics such as economy and employment politics is considered providing more competence than topics considered more feminine, like environment, women are automatically downplayed in the hierarchy and are required to prove that they truly are interested in a wide range of issues. Women might be in the sphere, but when they focus on issues women are expected to focus on, they are not considered mature – hence bound by the gender double bind.

The results of this study also suggest that the gender double bind is a construction that does not disappear but rather changes over time, as Jamieson formulates: “[M]uch like the metaphor of a glass ceiling, women’s progress has been thwarted by double binds that, when surmounted, have in fact been replaced by other double binds” (Jamieson, 1995, p. 7). Media produces, transmits and renews the image of women as leaders and acts as a gendered intermediary who maintains the gender double bind, thus sustaining

gender stereotypes (Mäkelä, 2018). If media, then, keeps reinforcing common gendered stereotypes, there is a danger of them circulating back to future representations and thus further reinforcing hegemonic power relations (Hodkinson, 2017; Hall, 1997). An example of this was seen in Finland in the beginning of this summer, when the State Finance Minister, also a woman in her thirties like Sanna Marin, resigned after a scandal involving a misuse of state finances to her own benefit. On the one hand, the scandal is an example of the windy nature of ministerial positions, and one should not read too much into the influence of gender in it, but on the other hand, some questions about honest mistakes and forgiveness can raise when the elected predecessor is a middle-aged man who back in the day has been involved in a monetary scandal as well. Therefore, the impression is that men are allowed to make mistakes, but women, when failing, are portrayed as simply just not being lucky enough to succeed.

7.5.3 Don't shoot the messenger

The role of media where journalists have positioned themselves in constructing the image of Sanna Marin is strikingly detached. For example, as discussed earlier in chapter 7.2, when talking about Sanna Marin's family, it is often done through direct quotes from Marin herself, thereby carefully distancing journalist's themselves. This happens also when the articles discuss the flaws in Marin's image as a Social Democrat. This concern is brought up via an anonymous group of "social democrats" or "her fellow party members" but they hardly ever get connected to a name or a face. Hence, journalists are also distancing themselves from bringing up the problematics of Marin's performance. By doing so, media avoid expressing opinion but simultaneously and ultimately end up doing so by standing behind such a vague group. This is similar to the case of Helle Thorning-Schmidt and the dismissal of gender as a relevant factor in politics, where Danish journalist relied on quotations and expert statements to discuss Thorning-Schmidt's femininity, thus suggesting how unsafe terrain this still was – and is.

Overall, the general tone in the articles analysed in this study suggests that gender is an outdated issue and it should not be given special attention. It is perhaps therefore that media is for example merely nodding acceptably for the untraditional gender roles in Marin's family. By doing so, the impression one gets from media is that journalists intentionally avoid bringing up gender issues in the articles. Similarly, when examining the representation of Helle Thorning-Schmidt in Danish media, Hvenegård-Lassen (2013) contextualised the Danish atmosphere to be 'post-feminist', where "gender equality is

seen as already obtained and therefore outdated as a political issue” (2013, p. 155). This is noticeable in Finnish media as well, where the facts of Sanna Marin’s age, gender and career have to be mentioned, but very little additional analysis followed, much like in the case of her Danish colleague at the time. As Hvenegård-Lassen wrote, the impression is that “who cry out about restrictions and blockages are creating these themselves – they are speaking them into existence” (ibid., p. 165). Perhaps, the decision to step back and let someone else do the commenting, is to prove the journalist’s “wokeness” when it comes to gender issues. Therefore, the focus Finnish media has on Sanna Marin’s political performance rather than her gendered one suggests that gender perhaps is not such an out-of-date issue after all, but that the current status is a fragile construction that one should avoid destabilising. All this makes it seem like rather than perceived as constructors of reality, the media in Finland would rather be seen as neutral and innocent messenger that simply reports what others say about women and their competence as political actors.

However, it is important to keep the ideal of objectivity in journalism in mind before making any bigger accusations. Aalberg et al. (2011) call this a defence mechanism to protect journalists’ autonomy and to avoid taking sides politically; by framing politics as a strategy or game, it is easier to remain objective towards the issue.

8 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore how Sanna Marin, the Prime Minister of Finland, and at the time the youngest female prime minister in the world, was represented in the Finnish news media around the time of her election. Being an interpretative qualitative analysis, the results of this thesis provide yet another angle to the issue of female politician's representation in news media. The results should be approached as one researcher's additional attempt to unpack and analyse the struggle that has surrounded this issue over decades and decades; why is it that women are constantly portrayed differently in news media than their male colleagues and how does this circle back to future representations of female politicians.

Going into this project, I was expecting Finnish media to be more open minded, based on the fact that in Finland women have an established position in the public sphere of politics and the number of women in parliament is high on a world average. However, the results of this study show that there is some subtlety in the way media is framing Sanna Marin as a woman in politics, and one can find quite a lot of prejudices between the lines. In the end it is not about how women are represented, but rather how they are not. To answer the first research question – how is Sanna Marin represented in Finnish media in the weeks surrounding her election as the country's new prime minister – she is portrayed first and foremost as a young woman and a mother trying to balance between her political career and personal life; She is portrayed as not interested in the correct, masculine issues, thus framed as a young politician who needs to prove her ability to successfully perform as the leader of the country. This image of Sanna Marin sits tightly in the one of the gender double bind female politicians often face. Following Jamieson (1995), Marin meets the expectance of femininity in her physical appearance as well as a caretaker of a party in trouble, but when it comes to her political competence, she is questioned whether she is mature enough. Furthermore, in comparison to her male colleagues, it seems that the stereotype of performing in the private stage (i.e. family life) is alive and well; when men choose to devote time to their families, it is applauded, but women cannot choose to focus on their careers without the decision automatically being a great sacrifice in their family lives.

One should keep in mind that the interpretative nature of this study is a significant limitation and therefore it is obvious that this research could not be replicated as such and another researcher would very likely end up with different findings. Even though the

interpretative approach to this study limits the possibilities to generalise the results – especially when it comes to interpreting the decisions behind journalistic practices – this study does however provide new insights into the attitudes of news media. By distancing themselves from describing Sanna Marin, journalists end up reinforcing the salience of gender issues, since many of the traditional stereotypes were still visible in the articles. The concern media raised of Marin’s political performance not appealing to her fellow party members turned out to be particularly interesting, since the media appeared to rather be seen as neutral messenger even though the party members remained a nameless and faceless group, thus raising the question of who actually are the ones thinking Marin would not meet the expectations set for a typical social democrat. Additionally, when looking back, it could have been useful to include another period of time to get more insights on how Sanna Marin is represented outside this month of the exceptionally extensive media attention her election caused.

In order to build on these results in future research, it would be necessary to ask journalists and audiences what kind of experiences they have regarding the issue. Focusing in frame-building and frame-setting would possibly provide interesting insights on how aware journalists are of these frames and on the other hand what kind of effects they have in audience attitudes. On another note, more research should be done considering representations of male politicians and the framing of their masculinity in media. Different models of masculinity have been increasingly discussed in media lately and it would be interesting to see how this appears in the field of politics: What is included in the acceptable performance for male politicians nowadays? What feminine attributes can men adopt to their public persona in order to still seem credible and competent? Lastly, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study between male and female politicians to gain insights to any differences news outlets might have in their portrayals and thus argue for the societal relevance of gender representation.

We should not get comfortable thinking that gender equality has been reached once there is a certain percentage of women in parliaments or other political institutions. Sanna Marin and her colleagues show that there are still prejudices they face, despite having accessed the sphere. Even in the Nordic countries that stand out with almost half of the members of parliaments being women, attitudes in media don’t necessarily meet this image, but instead reinforce the old gender stereotypes. Returning back to the second research question – what are the implications of these representations to how Sanna Marin is positioned as a legitimate political authority – and following Sreberny and van

Zoonen's (2000) argument that certain institutes of the public sphere, like political parties, are still dominated by middle-class men, I suggested that the biggest problem for female politicians and their success is the masculine mindset that expects everyone to perform a certain way, thus creating double binds for women by expecting them to find the balance between acting both masculine and feminine in an adequate manner. However, the focus on Sanna Marin's age and gender is not merely a negative thing: It also tells the world that a young woman *can* lead a country – that a person can be both a woman, a mother and a politician, without needing to compromise in either. Just like Kennedy's quote in the preface – “I'm always rather nervous about how you talk about women who are active in politics, whether they want to be talked about as women or as in politicians” – originally continued: “...but I want you to know that we are grateful to have you as both today”. With more and more women in top political positions, the representations will change over time.

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