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EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES OF HATE SPEECH

Finnish Activists' Experiences of Hate Speech and How it
Affects their Agency

ABSTRACT

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One of the most frequently discussed threats to contemporary societies' democracy is hate speech. An extensive amount of literature suggests that hate speech is apt to cause withdrawal from public discussion and decrease willingness to participate societally. Despite the extensive literature, research focusing on activists' experiences of hate speech is limited. As activists have a unique position in society to compensate for political marginalization and work as governments and markets "watchdogs", their importance as civic participators are relevant. Moreover, as activists are known for their high-risk activities, it can be assumed that they are more resilient against hate speech, which is why it can be assumed, that hate speech targeted at activists, could have unexpected consequences.

This research aimed to discover whether activists are affected by hate speech as presumed: withdrawing and being silenced. The research problem was approached by thematically analyzing data from interviews that examined Finnish activists' experiences of hate speech. The objective of the research was to increase understanding of the phenomenon that is societally relevant. The research method was qualitative. Empirical data for the research was collected with semi-structured interviews with 8 activists living in Finland. The activists' experiences were analyzed with inductive thematic analysis. The research frame for this study was conceptual.

Results from the empirical analysis indicated that activists are not unaffected by hate speech. However, the consequences of hate speech are often experienced at a personal level, while activism is continued despite personal costs. It was also noticed that reasons for activists' resilience were their emotional energy and activist identity, which included features like innate characteristics of a sense of justice, headstrongness, and responsibility, which were amplified with peer support. Hate speech was often used as a tool for mobilization and demonstration of the cause – and was significantly considered a factor in the increasing determination.

Thus, unexpected consequences from hate speech were confirmed. However, it was also noticed that activist identity and emotional energy could precede activist burnout, which is why more research should be done to investigate the reasons for such a paradox. Moreover, as the sample size of the research was small and had demographic limitations, more research should be conducted to generalize the findings.

Keywords: Hate speech, Activism, Political marginalization, Citizen participation, Institutional democracy

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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FOREWORDS

When I started making this thesis, the first thing I remember my supervisor telling me was that I need to be prepared to become a target if I decide to study hate speech. That comment provides a view on how the topic is not only sensitive but inflammatory. As an activist and the know-it-all that I am, I have been putting myself out there for being targeted before. In fact, I never feared hate speech, because it only pushed me forward. But what really got under my skin, was the possibility of hate speech becoming a factor that disrupts activism. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that retrospectively, activists have always faced threats that affect their mental and physical security, yet often they do not seem to care. I got interested in how people usually become activists and how our activist identity shapes us – because, from my own experience, we seem to be more resilient to threats than expected.

However, it is not only inflammatory to study the effects of hate speech, but it is also inflammatory to come up against the assumptions that the consequences are always as expected – and for a good reason too. The people who experience hate speech are often told to thicken their skin or not to care about it: 'in from one ear and out of the other' feels like a lot of belittling, especially if there are death threats flooding from hundreds of faceless people. Moreover, I need to emphasize, that none of this thesis is implying that the negative effects of hate speech are not real, but to understand the mechanisms of activists' who turn that hate around to fuel the engine.

I believe that sometimes collective acceptance of assumptions can create understandings that are fulfilled in our everyday lives. Those understandings are not created in a vacuum, but they are always accumulated reciprocal effects that shape our future interactions and behaviors. Those co-created understandings have the potential of becoming enabling or constraining factors in our actions. Thus, I believe that if we start believing that hate speech is silencing us or depriving us of our agency; we could create a collective understanding that is a drastic simplification of a complex ensemble; a reduced reality that disregards motivation, intrinsic longing for justice, our identities, and collective sense of responsibility.

Often activists act based on their own experiences – but a lot of them are not doing it for their benefit, but for the benefit of their peers. They more likely belong to a historically oppressed group and hate speech could be something they come across a lot. Thus, there is without a doubt a ton of cumulated hurt, that is triggered every time a new threat or slur is thrown. There could be, however, something more powerful within these activists than their hurt: their profound sense of justice, vigorous values, and collectives to support their battles.

1 INTRODUCTION

Most of the challenges met today have resulted from choices made in the past. Those choices have accumulated into complex structural realities where people have different positions of power and unequal resources for making an impact. Activism is one of the most relevant tools of civic participation to overcome the structural realities of imbalanced power and to change the course of events that the governing bodies are not prioritizing. Furthermore, civic participation can be seen as a crucial way to expand democracy, as elected leaders' position can affect their willingness to take or propose controversial actions because of the concern of losing their legitimacy. Therefore, activists have a unique role in meeting complex challenges and constructing contemporary society.

1.1. Research background

One of the trending issues of the last decade concerning democracy and participation has been hate speech. It has been identified that experiencing hate speech could have personal and societal consequences, f. e. withdrawing from public spaces physically and intellectually, experiencing adverse effects on psychological well-being and lowered self-esteem and dignity (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017; Siegel, 2020). Furthermore, hate speech could negatively affect intergroup relations at a societal level, and its worst be an incitement to assault the targets (Siegel, 2020). Hence, hate speech could substantially risk the development of legitimate, representative democracy.

It is rather safe to assume that individuals would not be keen on becoming targeted to hate speech and could easily withdraw from participation as a result. Similarly, as online platforms, such as social media and newspaper comment sections provide endless possibilities for harassment, hate speech has become a commonly recognized phenomenon. Witnessing hate speech often, even as a bystander, could cause boundaries for participation (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017, p. 47).

Moreover, the rise of social media as an effective tool of mobilizing like-minded is an enabler for an unforeseen antagonism between dissidents, creating striking polarization. Polarization caused by social media has been considered to form through "echo-chambers" (Bail, et. al., 2018). Social media business models are based on platform user's data as the product and their algorithms are built to recommend content that keeps the user engaged, which is why the content is corresponding to user's interests (Cinnamon, 2017). Thus, users could be less exposed to content that conflicts with their interests or is not rewarding, resulting in development of an echo chamber. However, as there are differences in how different platforms work, there could be differences in the mechanisms of polarization. Despite beliefs that the mechanism in which social media creates polarization is echo-

chambers, it has been noticed that exposure to opposing political views in Twitter could even increase polarization, instead of decreasing it (Bail, et. al., 2018). However, Twitter also recommends content according to popularity, which is why extensively retweeted content has high visibility, caused by mobilization of relatively small groups (Siegel, 2020). Thus, hate content could be more visible to its users despite personal preferences.

Polarization is a significant threat to democracies as it decreases citizens tolerance of different views and impede compromises (Axelrod, et. al., 2021). Moreover, when manifested as harassment and hate, it could lead to decreased participation, resulting in increased underrepresentation of those, who are politically marginalized to begin with. Hence, visible juxtapositions and rising contempt to each other could result in sustenance of underrepresentation of women and marginalized, as hate speech is often targeted at historically oppressed groups or individuals (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017, p. 51).

Although hate speech has been extensively studied and its effects are acknowledged, research on its influence on civic participation is not substantial. Some research on the topic has considered, for example, Finnish politicians (Knuutila, et. al., 2019); disabled Norwegians (Vedeler, et. al., 2019); and researchers (Doerfler, et. al., 2021) that has addressed how hate speech disrupts willingness to participate. Knuutila, et. al. (2019) noted that online harassment and hate speech could affect the eagerness to participate in politics and Vedeler, et. al., (2019) discovered that experiencing hate speech affects the willingness to participate in relevant social or political discussions due to a fear of adverse social reactions.

Even though the existing literature is substantial, there still is a research gap in studying how hate speech affects civic participation and precisely activists. Activism is a crucial factor in the development of representative and diverse democracy as some of the structural inequalities could be barriers to the formal participation of the underrepresented and marginalized groups (Brady, et. al., 2020; Marien, et. al., 2010). Thus, understanding the phenomenon is important. I believe that activists could be exposed to hate speech to a greater extent because it can be triggered by events and is often targeted at the public or visible agents (Costello, et. al., 2019; Siegel, 2020). Thus, activism or protest can be a trigger as such, but if it receives publicity, it is even more likely to activate a counteraction.

Furthermore, assessing the difference between activism and conventional participation is relevant to understanding the phenomenon. For example, initial motivations for the activity could differ between activists and politicians and have an effect to consequences from hate speech. Especially as activists are considered to cede their lives for their objectives, despite of the hardships of opposing normative

systems and structures. Thus, if activists are more willing to risk their physical, psychological, and material safety for change – could they be more resilient against hate speech?

1.2. Research aim and questions

Activists over the course of time have always been known for their improvident actions and resilience – and a majority of the uprisings have not happened without (expected) individual damage. Activists have always been at risk of legal repercussions, physical and mental distress, and even death; and have done it willingly. Therefore, I have a reason to believe that activists as civic participators may not be as straightforwardly affected by hate speech. Furthermore, I argue that because collective understandings produced by our interactions in social life can shape our interactions and behaviors, it is important to investigate societally relevant topics from multiple perspectives. It is crucial that our understandings are sometimes assessed critically to avoid making drastic simplifications of human agency; especially, as those understandings have the potential of becoming enabling or constraining factors of our actions (Putnam & Banghart, 2017). Therefore, I believe it is important to study the activists' experiences of hate speech and whether the consequences are as expected: becoming reluctant or withdrawn from participation. Hence, my first research question is: *could hate speech have unexpected consequences for activism?* Furthermore, if unexpected consequences would be recognized, assessing their connection to activism or being an activist is necessary. Thereby, my second research question is: *how can unexpected consequences be explained by analyzing activists' experiences?*

1.3. Structure of the thesis

This thesis begins with an introduction to the topic, including background information, justification of its importance, and research aim and questions. In the following chapter, I introduce the key concepts for the analysis: activism as deprecated part of democracy, activist identity, and activist burnout, hate speech ill-defined, consequences, targets, and people behind hate speech, and contextual features of the research. In methodology chapter, I guide the reader through methodological decisions and justifications, and introduce the data, participants, and interview guide. Finally, I explain the process of coding and theme creation and conclude the chapter with ethical considerations. The empirical analysis chapter starts with short recap of the final themes. The themes provide the structure for the analysis. The observations, findings, suggestions for future research and limitations are discussed in chapter 5.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The non-conventional ways of participation, such as activism have become popular in the turmoil of the modern world. Environmentalists have been pressuring elected officials more than ever, and the underrepresented have started using their voices louder than before. Additionally, the importance of activism has been increasingly legitimized as a crucial part of governance and representative democracy. Alongside the uprising of diverse opinions, the effects of hate speech on democracy have started to gain curiosity and several researchers have concluded that hate speech has the potential of silencing people and disrupting participation.

This chapter provides a background for understanding why civic participation, namely activism, is a crucial part of democracy. First, I argue the importance of activism to viable democracy by discussing political self-interest and the position of bureaucracy in the democratic system. I attempt to explain why elected representatives in parliamentary, nor government institutions, are adequate in fostering the power of the people. Next, I define activism and activist identity, and examine contemporary conflicts in their conceptualization. Moreover, I briefly discuss activist burnout due to its conceptual relevancy in understanding how activism may become disrupted.

Next, I discuss the ill-defined nature of hate speech and attempt to conceptualize it adequately for this research. Finally, I introduce the empirical context of the study – activism in Finland. The subjects of this chapter create a conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon – and studying how activists are affected by hate speech and if unexpected consequences can result from being targeted.

2.1. Activism – deprecated part of democracy

Democracy, in its simplest form, is defined as the power of the people (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). It refers to the system of governing society directly or representatively. However, the definition of democracy goes beyond its original terminology when used in different contexts. Dalton, et. al. (2007) suggested that the definition of democracy bears contextual differences, depending on the focus of perspective, f. e. institutions, and procedures of democracy; or its outcomes. The scholarly definitions and the governments and international NGOs' activities often focus on institutions and procedures of democratic governance: such as promoting the basic principle of free and fair elections that steer the actions of governments. Moreover, the focus of outcomes is considered by people, whose place in society is to trust that the democratic institutions achieve essential goals like freedom and liberty, or in social democracies, the essentiality of equality and social rights. (Dalton, et. al., 2007.)

While the democratic system is generally perceived in a positive light, there are differences in how people perceive its functionality, which could be a threat in the long term. Several authors during decades have discussed civil participation as a strengthening factor of democratic governance (Arnstein, 1969; Putnam, 1995; Fung, 2015). Respectfully, the issue of political marginalization has been acknowledged as an impairing factor of democracy (Marien, et. al., 2010; Young, 2002, p. 34). Therefore, if conventional participation is inaccessible for some, a justifiable critique of democratic governance requires addressing. Specifically, if the importance of non-conventional modes of participation remains neglected. Thus, in this section, I discuss the importance of activists (or civic participators in general) as crucial partakers of institutional democracy by arguing how non-conventional participation strengthens democracy by compensating for political marginalization.

2.1.1. Political marginalization – impairing factor to democracy

One of the main goals of democracy is equal changes of freely existing in the world and being able to impact society. However, even though the majority agrees that democracy is working and should be protected: opinions of what counts as a strong democracy are interpreted through plural values and ideas of fairness and freedom. For example, Besir & Magalhães (2016) discovered that those possessing more privileges in society are more likely to consider that viable democracy is consistent with the status quo. Thus, for some, democracy is strong enough if the election procedures are fair, accessible, and follow good conduct. Yet, if voting behavior or running as an electorate are considered as sole determiners of a strong democracy, should most societies be worried about the state of their democracies – especially as political marginalization is a well-recognized issue?

Marginalized people are less represented in democratically elected positions, meaning, that consideration of their needs is missing from the decision-making (Gherghina, et. al., 2021, p. 160). Political marginalization can result in increased instability and social and political conflicts (Hedström & Smith, 2013). According to Brady et. al. (2020), the alienation of marginalized and disadvantaged youth from civic and political life is particularly concerning. They argued that structural barriers like inequality, disadvantage, and discrimination have lifelong effects on attitudes, beliefs, and skills – and recognized them as necessities for future citizen participation and demand for their needs. Brady, et. al.'s point underlines the effect of not being represented in decision-making: if the ones who are making the policies are not informed by those who are affected by them, the abyss of political marginalization could deepen.

The increasing concern of political disengagement of youth relates to the widely recognized issue of voting apathy: referring to increasing passivity in seizing the legal right to vote. However, because it

has been recognized, that the younger generations are more likely to engage politically through non-conventional modes of participation (Marien, et. al., 2010; Brady, et. al., 2020; Bennet, et. al., 2011), it is crude to equate voting activity as disengagement. Therefore, instead of scapegoating younger generations for weakening democracy with their indolence, and by disregarding the possibility that the disinterest is a genuine response to defective institutions themselves (Farthing, 2010, p. 185); should the gaze be shifted to decision-makers habitually infantilizing the younger generation by disregarding their ideas (Brady, et. al., 2020)?

Accomplishing an inclusive society is deemed impossible if structural imbalances of power and resources are not compensated – or if non-conventional modes of participation are not legitimized. The strength of democracy should be rated according to its least active agents, as every opted-out individual is another crack to its apparatus. However, as participation and disengagement are sometimes perceived drastically narrow in institutional democracy, the first step to its redemption should be a paradigm shift, where the logic of politics (exclusion and refusal) was balanced with the logic of citizenship (inclusion and participation) (Barney, 2010).

2.1.2. Politics and bureaucracy: inadequate in fostering the power of people

Alongside the elected actors in democracy, bureaucratic institutions have an impact on decision-making, politics, and the evolvement of societies. Bureaucracies are often considered as conflicting with democracy, as their institutional forms are based on different values. While politics is considered to represent the citizens' power and popular control directly or indirectly, bureaucracies strictly emphasize efficiency, effectiveness, and expertise. The common critique against bureaucracies is that they are a coercive tool of governments, as they hold power to make decisions or restrictions that are often considered political: f. e. “who gets what – when – and how” (Meier & Jr. O’Toole, 2006, p. 2). However, to answer that critique, it must be noted, that bureaucrats are granted their power because of their expertise, which is why they have more capacity to analyze and solve complex challenges of society. (Meier & Jr. O’Toole 2006.) Furthermore, Raadschelders (2019, p. 564) claimed, “with regard to politics ... bureaucracy is less a threat and rather a benefit to and guardian of democracy”; referring to public bureaucracies’ part in providing products and services to citizens and being so diversified in power that its dominance or abuse would hardly be possible. Additionally, he suggested that instead of considering bureaucracies as a threat to democracy, the cast should be shifted to markets if they were left unsupervised by the governments:

“One can argue that where deregulation reduces government oversight, citizens are placed in an iron cage of the desires dictated by big corporations and legislated by those in public authoritative positions. Indeed, democracy is in jeopardy when private interests manage to “capture”

government regulation via financial support of electoral campaigns of political officeholders [...]”.
(Raadschelders, 2019, p. 565).

Hence, imposing justified regulations and taxes can be validated in attempts to serve the greater good and regulate the markets.

While the importance of bureaucracies is evident in compensating for the gap between the democratically elected government and the effects of political marginalization, it is not and should not be the sole solution. Bureaucracies as institutions are inflexible, which is why they are often seen as estranged from citizens and human struggles. The inflexibility of bureaucracies is also critical in times of crisis or unexpected events, which is why they are inefficient in tackling global issues such as climate change. There are also challenges in using bureaucratic authority transnationally related to transparency, trust, and sovereignty.

As toleration of bureaucratic authority requires transparency and trust, it challenges its use transnationally. And even if it could potentially have a transnational reach, it can be restricted by political influence in practice. For example, Hoppe, et. al. (2013, p. 290) argued that despite the EU's adoption of a leading position in combating climate change; or its pride in its bureaucracies following scientific advice; in the assessment of climate policies the bureaucracy's decisions were politically influenced, because market-driven policy instruments were favored. It was argued that the national sovereignty of member states' taxation was valued over scientific expertise and recommendations.

While bureaucracies are often scolded for being undemocratic, the risk becomes greater if the bureaucracies end up politicized. Elected politicians are essentially self-interested (see f. e. Bowler, et. al., 2006), which is why their willingness to take, approve or propose disputatious action could be affected by fear of losing their legitimacy and power. Hence, party-political conflicts and decoupling of social/environmental and economic impacts could result in decision-making that is not evidence-based (Elomäki, 2021; Extinction Rebellion Finland, n.a). On the other hand, sometimes social movements are appropriated to gain status or an image (f. e. Feminist leader) which incurs in co-opting the social movements by the governments or politicians' principles that are hardly in line with the movements' initial purpose (Stoltz, 2021, p. 28-35). Such appropriation not only waters down the movement if partial wins are approved by the activists but also has the potential of producing false promises that become compromised for other party-political wins. Thus, regarding politics as the sole attempt to democratically develop society can be seen as inadequate. Specifically, because compromises in politics often reflect the existing structural power imbalance.

Therefore, neither politics nor bureaucracies are apt to represent the power of people. Consequently, the importance of citizens as part of governance has been addressed in literature for decades (f. e. Arnstein, 1969; Putnam, 1995; Fung, 2015), and recently by organizations as well (OECD, 2020; United Nations, 2018). For example, in the OECD report (2021), citizen participation was considered central in improving Finnish citizens' trust in democracy. The report stated that policymakers should focus on creating policies enhancing the engagement of groups with lower trust in political discussions. Moreover, it was suggested that empowerment could potentially foster genuine representation and diversity, which aligns with the perceptions of Marien, et. al. (2010). Furthermore, Asaduzzaman & Virtanen (2016, p. 2) have stated that governance should not be considered as a synonym for governing but rather as the: "creation, execution, and implementation of activities backed by shared goals of citizens and organizations, who may or may not have formal authority or policing power"; which emphasized citizens as central in governance: not only through inclusion but integration. Hence, activism should be considered a profound part of governance and central to solving wicked problems such as climate change or social justice issues. Activists at best can be the watchdogs of government institutions and a valuable asset to democracy.

2.2. Contemporary activism

Activism is used for shifting opinions and redistributing power traditionally held by those who possess resources that are not available to all. It is used to pressure powerholders into considering multiple perspectives and claiming a voice for those who have not been traditionally heard or represented. It has a unique position in meeting complex challenges and constructing contemporary society by tackling political marginalization nationally and globally.

However, activism and activists, as in every other part of modern society, have gone through rapid changes as a result of digital technologies. The change has not been straightforward, and it has challenged one of the most important assets of activists: their identity.

2.2.1. Activism and its latest developments

Activism can be defined as "a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action, especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue" (Merriam-Webster, 2022a); or "the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Furthermore, Fisher and Nasrin (2021) in their research of climate activism outcomes, discussed civic engagement as an umbrella term that includes activism. They describe civic engagement as:

“The manifold ways that citizens participate in their societies with the intention of influencing communities, politics, and the economy ... that involve citizens working directly to change their individual behaviors, along with those that involve indirect efforts to bring about change through the political and economic systems” (2020, p. 1).

There is some divergence between the encyclopedia definitions and the literature. A possible reason for the difference could be the rapid evolution of activism in the era of social media. The developments of digital technologies have caused changes in the everyday lives of people and also the nature of activism. While digital technologies connect cultures and countries, they are also an extremely inexpensive method to spread awareness of grievances in the world and participate (Fisher, & Nasrin 2021; Kopacheva, 2021).

The emergence of digital technology and its utilization in activism has also raised critique. Online activism has been denounced as “slacktivism”, i. e. “feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact” (Morozow, 2009-05-19). Cabrera, et. al. (2017) discussed the differences between activism and slacktivism in the context of contemporary student activism. They discussed activism as an inherently collective activity, meaning, that activist identity as a term, is in essence, an oxymoron. Moreover, they stated that despite social media being a tool for bringing together collectives, it should not be considered an effective platform for social change. However, emphasis in differentiating when social media is used for activism, and when activism is used for social media, underlined their main message: “the more public a display of support for a cause online, the more likely the action represents of self-serving slacktivism as opposed to socially transformative activism.” (Cabrera, et. al., 2017, p. 406). Hence, the key features of slacktivism are individual gratification and its political ineffectiveness (Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Morozow, 2009-05-19).

Some of the literature suggests that participation online reduces participation in person through the replacement of the activity’s nature (Cabrera, et. al., 2017); or by increasing participation, but “lessening the level of motivation that participation requires” (Gladwell, 2010-10-27). Moreover, Kopacheva (2021) suggested that sometimes the aim of participation in online activism could radically differ from seeking social or political change, and be motivated by attention, a sense of fulfillment, or even marketization of the cause. In fact, the co-optation of social movements for commercial purposes could be a significant reason for generalizing slacktivism, as the difference between activists, influencers, and content creators is sometimes subtle and intersecting. As the market value of influencer marketing has doubled from 2019, amounting to 16.4 billion USD in 2022 (Statista Research Department, 2022), appropriation of movements for bigger audiences can be expected.

The critique of online activism and slacktivism is justified. However, it has also been noted that online activism is an effective tool for the mobilization of new groups to political activism (Kopacheva, 2021, p. 74). Moreover, online activism is also important in expanding the participation of females and working-class, as it provides a possibility to participate despite burdens of responsibilities (f. e. reproductive labor, multiple jobs, inconvenient shifts, or lack of options to combine work and participation) that decrease the available time for conventional activism (Craddock, 2019). Thus, online possibilities to mobilize and make a change could enhance the participation of the politically marginalized, as education, class, gender, and age correlate with political participation (Marien, et. al., 2010, p. 189).

Therefore, even though online activism is not sufficient to replace conventional activism, it must be noted that offline and online realities are nowadays somewhat interchangeable and merged. Such development is apparent in how elected officials nowadays are pressured by public relations catastrophes online (Koponen, et. al., 2022). Therefore, even if it seems impossible that individual online activists would be able to mobilize to accomplish systemic or structural changes, it is possible to create visibility for the grievances and demand for legislative changes or new policies very effectively. Hence, any pressure or visibility for the cause is better than nothing.

The importance of online activism has also been noticed in transnational protests or campaigns like Black Lives Matter, or Me-too, which first received attention to express support and solidarity, but started movements of their own around the world. Furthermore, the importance of online activism can be observed from a more recent example as well; in October 2022 Iranian women uprising to oppose the government's orders of mandatory hijab. The protests started when a young Kurdish woman Jina Amini (Masha Amini) was assaulted by the Iranian moral police for not using the so-called appropriate hijab. Jina died three days later in a hospital because of the injuries. After the protests started spreading, social media inflated with videos of Iranian women pleading for worldwide attention to the crisis because of the risk of connections being shut down and the conflict being hidden from the rest of the world. As expected, the Iranian government restricted the availability of internet connections to block the spreading of information about protests to prevent them from expanding but also to hide human rights violations from global leaders. (Vaarakallio, 2022-09-21; Pennanen, 2022-09-22.) Hence, at its best, online activism can be used to overcome and oppose state-provoked human rights violations happening in conflict zones by mobilizing transnational visibility.

In this study, activism is considered as any visible and determinant activity of non-conventional participation that strives to change the systemic, structural, or institutional imbalances of power and

representation. In the empirical part of this research, activism challenged social norms like heterosexuality, gender binary, or fatphobia. Additionally, systemic, and structural oppression was mentioned, f. e. racism, misogyny, patriarchy, capitalism, materialism, and elitism.

2.2.2. Activist identity

An activist as a label is, without a doubt, a value-laden title. Depending on whom you ask, activists are described either as self-centered and irrational fussers or noble/altruistic change leaders who work for the greater common good. Sometimes the descriptions clash, and an activist is considered an arrogant and self-centered snob because of their self-sacrifice, making them seem self-important (Bobel, 2007). The official definitions of the activist are, for example, the following: “a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue” (Merriam-Webster, 2022b); and “a person who works to achieve political or social change, especially as a member of an organization with particular aims” (Oxford University Press, 2022).

The term "activist" requires examination as a label appropriated from the outside, but an identity adopted by the individuals themselves as well. In social psychology research, activist identities are commonly considered collective and based on group identification, emotional energy resulting from group-based injustice, violations of groups' or individuals' moral beliefs: and beliefs of group efficacy (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020). Sometimes collective identity and action are even argued to be exceptionless determinators of being an activist, claiming that individual activist identity as a term is an oxymoron to start with (Cabrera, et. al. 2017). Nevertheless, even if collective identity in social movements is often considered central in the development of pragmatic needs such as organizing and cooperation, it is also recognized to be an expression of selfhood (Stuart., et. al., 2013). Thus, despite the social movement's foundation in collective identity, some sense of an individual expression is included as well.

Moreover, consideration of individual activist identities in social movements is important to understand if, and how, identity factor partakes in individuals' engagement in social movements. For example, Horowitz (2017, p. 1-2) examined activist identity through a lens of role-based activist identity and category-based activist identity to enhance understanding of the micro-mobilization and tactics of social movements. He found out that activists often show identification through both; social roles and categories but noted that the two modes were still distinctive. Role-based activists were driven by role responsibilities and expectations they had internalized from their community, while

the category-based activists were motivated by collective identity categories determined by three different injustice frames: legacies, boundary adjustments, and conscience constituents.

Horowitz suggested that role-based activist identity is realized through the community by helping each other internalize the tasks and expectations of being an activist. He considered community central in providing emotional support and strengthening shared values but also in encouraging each other to act accordingly. A sense of obligation was involved, relating to the setting in which the community is dependent on the activist's actions and fulfillment of their role. Moreover, Horowitz considered that category-based activist identity reflected the relationship between an activist and their in and outgroups. In and outgroups are concepts to determine to which groups individuals consider belonging and to which groups do not. (Horowitz, 2017.)

The first category, legacies, was a group the activist considered their ingroup, which was also their pre-existing and collective identity. The basis for collective identity was the historical subjection to oppression that the activist will keep fighting. The second category, boundary adjustments, was related to the activists' pre-existing and collective identity, also caused by historical subjection to oppression. In the case of boundary adjustments, the collective identity was not directly classified as an ingroup because of a need to create differentiation between the members of the group. Such differentiation was done because of, for example, not sharing the willingness to fight oppression. Thus, boundaries between the group were re-established to create a new dichotomy of ingroup and outgroup. The final category, conscience constituents, differed from the prior two so that the activist does not share the collective identity of the historically oppressed group but is considerate of their suffering and decides to act in support of them. Conscience constituents stretch the boundaries of an ingroup to those who act out of solidarity rather than experiencing oppression. (Horowitz, 2017.)

Horowitz's analysis highlights the collective nature of social movements and activists' identities. However, even though the community was evidently a contributing factor in the mobilization and persistence of both identity descriptions, he emphasized that contrary to prior views of understanding activists' identities as merely collective, distinguishing them is sometimes needed. Stuart, et. al., (2013) noted self-expression is also central to activist identity. Thus, recognition of individual activist identity could foster an understanding of how the formation and meanings pinned in individual identities (such as innate characteristics or profound values) are linked to the intrinsic motivations of activists to join movements.

Individual identity and its effect on persistence and motivation have been examined by several authors. Kelly & Breinlinger suggested that activists' determination and extent of involvement could connect to their identity as an activist: a person who "gets involved" (1995, 44). Moreover, Kovan & Dirkx (2003, p. 108-109) in their research of environmental activists' transformative learning and commitment noticed that the stories of activists' work are: "directly linked to their passions, to the very being of who they are, and their very sense of identity or self" that helps them sustain commitment. Similarly, Horowitz (2007) suggested that activists with stronger role-based activist identities are more likely to persist than individuals whose identity is not as strong – even if there is a risk for personal costs. And even though peer support and community positively contribute to persistence, role-based activists' identity is not a collective identity per se, as it relates to an individual's sense of responsibility (Horowitz, 2017).

Moreover, Nepstad (2004) described shared value bases and activist identity as relevant factors for an individual's engagement in activism in the long term. She considered individual activist identity as something that is derived through collective action, not only something that exists because of identification with an ideological or political group. Thus, her view of activist identity was not whether it is individual or collective, but its mechanism of being strengthened through collective action. Moreover, Nepstad's views of continuance commitment; meaning that the more an activist becomes invested in their cause, the harder it is to withdraw to avoid the sense of losing the effort for nothing; could refer to both personal and collective's efforts. (Nepstad, 2004.) Hence, activist identity could exist and overlap at both individual and collective levels, but at the individual level it is fostered through collective action or responsibilities to others. Thus, individual activist identity as a term is, in a sense, an oxymoron as suggested by Cabrera, et. al., (2017). Nevertheless, an activist, as a branch of identity that is personally important, and which is used for expressing and describing self, is in practice legitimate, if it supports the movement or collective.

In this research, an activist's definition is any person who actively participates socially or politically; or thrives for changing faults they have recognized at the structural, institutional, or systemic level. The definition is deliberately left ambiguous in terms of identification and methods of activism. It is also more compatible with the label appropriated from the outside than an identity adopted by the individual. Prior literature has identified that adopting an activist identity is not always straightforward, which is why activist identity was not required from the participant to avoid the exclusion of otherwise suitable participants.

2.2.3. Doing activism without identifying as an activist

In principle, any civil advocacy can be considered activism, but not all advocates consider themselves activists. And respectively: not all who consider themselves an activist are doing activism if the critiques of “slacktivism” are considered (Cabrera, et. al., 2017). As this research assumes that activists could be more resilient to hate speech than non-activists, it is necessary to reflect on the relationship between doing activism and identifying as an activist – and doing slacktivism and being a non-activist.

Differentiation between activists and non-activists can be challenging. The difficulties of conceptual clarity are related to various factors from phases of the movement’s lifecycles to collective identities and mobilization. Moreover, if consideration of the online sphere is added to the equation, the challenges become mission impossible. Various suggestions for establishing boundaries between the two can be found in literature, including motivations for action, quality of action, collective nature of action, membership of a collective, degree of risk, psychological ties with the collective, consideration of power hegemonies, etcetera (Kopacheva, 2021; Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Kutlaca, et. al., 2020; Gladwell, 2010-10-27). Nevertheless, the extensiveness of the boundaries could seem counterproductive when the movement’s transformational potential is highly dependent on expansion. Moreover, whereas activists must convince non-activists to join the action they initiated and keep them engaged by creating a positive bond between all the partakers (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020), it could be argued that seeking boundaries is paradoxical. However, some legitimate reasons to protect the activist identity have been discussed in the literature (Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Stuart, et. al., 2013; Snow & McAdam, 2000), which requires special emphasis in the era of social media activism. The reasons are discussed here to clarify the contextual relationship between activism and an activist.

As demonstrated extensively, activists’ identity, whether on a collective or personal level, is a key factor in fostering persistence and engagement in movements. Thus, protecting the sense of ‘we-ness’ by creating symbolic identity boundaries between activists and non-activists could be an attempt to protect the movement (Stuart, et. al., 2013). Snow & McAdam (2000) discussed identity-seeking in social movements. They described identity seeking as:

“Process whereby individuals strongly imbued with particular identity actively search for groups (movements, cults, subcultures) with perspectives and practices consistent with that identity and that allow for its expression” (Snow & McAdam, 2000, p. 48.)

Even though joining movements merely because of identity seeking was considered a rarity, Snow & McAdam (2000) argued that it is generally an efficient and effortless way for movements to gain advocates as actual recruitment is not needed. However, they also noted that the nature and frequency

of joining movements because of identity-seeking represent the phase of the movement's lifecycle. If the movement's lifecycle were to be seen as radical, growing, and bandwagon, frequent identity-seeking would occur in its last phase, where the movement has reached a point of becoming mainstream. In the bandwagon phase, increased public support and demonstration effects lower risks of participation (Snow & McAdam, 2000), making it popular and accessible for virtually anyone.

Paradoxically, the phase that is often beneficial for the movement and desirable for it in some sense: is also the phase where it can be watered down. According to Snow & McAdam (2000), when identity-seeking becomes a significant source for new advocates: the definition of the movement's constituencies is challenged. As a result, fostering tight communities becomes virtually impossible, causing conflicts among the loose collections of people with little concord of the struggles they should be opposing. Furthermore, the next level of issues with the movement's bandwagon phase links to the attractiveness of a collective identity that becomes an overconsumed “public good” that anyone can identify with, without contributing to its production (Snow & McAdam, 2000). Hence, the symbolic identity boundaries have a purpose in the formation of the collective activist identity, which separates the community from the mainstream, but also highlights the demands of the movement to the public (Stuart, et. al., 2013). Therefore, precisely in the phase where movement becomes mainstream, the symbolic identity boundaries could be an attempt to emphasize the difference between supporters and actors. Which in turn, can precede movements fraction to smaller, radical sub-movements.

Symbolic identity boundaries can also be reinforced to protect the movements from the appropriation for individual benefits, such as commercialization of the cause, or attention seeking (Kopacheva, 2021). According to Cabrera, et. al., a crucial differentiator of activism from “public narcissism under guise of promoting social justice” (2017, p. 407) is that the action is guided by a utopian vision. They noted that a vision of what progression looks like guides practice that is consistent with the vision. Moreover, a utopian vision was considered a crucial part of transformative resistance.

To conclude, there are significant reasons for identity boundaries. The reasons should not be confused with a comparison of whether two individuals participating in the same movement are activists or non-activist, but to critically reflect if mainstreaming of the collective identity has the potential to water down a movement that has not reached its purpose. Examples of boundary factors are presented in table 1 to briefly reflect them for this research.

Table 1. Examples of boundary definitions around activism, slacktivism, activists, and non-activists.

Activism:	Slacktivism:	Activist:	Non-activist:
Participation in collective action (Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Kutlaca, et. al., 2020).	Aims to individual gratification or other individual benefit (Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Kopacheva, 2021; Morozow, 2009-05-19).	Driven by collective and moral motivations (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020).	Driven by individual and instrumental concerns (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020).
Engagement in various forms of activity (Kutlaca, et., al., 2020) and behavior over identification (Cabrera, et. al., 2017).	Ineffective (Morozov, 2009-05-19; Cabrera, et. al., 2017).	Participation to collective action, such as protests, demonstrations, building occupation, etc. (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020).	May have some individual engagement aligning to movements cause, but do not engage to collective action (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020).
Challenging hegemony by developing and exercising power (Cabrera, et. al., 2017).	Weak psychological ties among the networks (Gladwell, 2010-10-27).	Have psychological ties to the collective (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020; Gladwell (2010-10-27).	Participation determined by individual cost-benefit calculations (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020).
Degree of a risk involved (Cabrera, et. al., 2017).	Bears no risks (Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Gladwell, 2010-10-27).	Morally obligated to address injustice (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020).	
May seek to change political landscape but is not campaigning or political governance (Cabrera, et. al., 2017).		Membership of an organization (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020).	
Guided by utopian vision or vision of what progression looks like (Cabrera, et. al., 2017).			

As presented in table 1, the distinction between an activist and non-activist, or activism and slacktivism often include the determination of moral foundation, motivation, or reflection of an individual's ties with the collective. Moreover, differentiations are also done with political campaigning and online activism by emphasizing some of its features.

One of the vaguest boundary definitions presented in literature has been the collective identity within a movement. Often movements around the world co-exist without significant connection or cooperation between them. Thus, difficulties in developing a collective identity in such cases could occur. In addition, even though well-established organizations often have resources to act and

mobilize visibly, movements are not solely run by them as there are many small and unofficial collectives contributing to a common cause: not to mention the activists without solid or formal memberships who actively participate with various actions (Bobel, 2007). Thus, I claim that membership is not a sufficient determiner of being an activist, as suggested by Kutlaca, et. al., (2020). Specifically, because young generations are less keen on establishing formal memberships with organizations (Bennet, et. al., 2011, p. 850), including consideration of non-organized activists for research purposes is necessary.

Moreover, collective identity in movements is often considered to be formed in collective action. And although I do believe it is accurate, I think that online realities have partially changed how collective identities develop. Gladwell (2010-10-27) argued that online collectives are not comparable to actual collectives because of their weak psychological ties, which is considered one of the boundary definitions (Kutlaca, et. al., 2020; Gladwell, 2010-10-27). Gladwell also argued that online activism should be perceived as networking, instead of actual participation. And while they raised a valuable concern about the risks of online activism resulting in the decreased motivation of action itself – I suggest that online activism should be considered valid when it is complementary to traditional activism. I also believe that collective identification through online realities is possible and could even decrease barriers to joining a movement.

Online realities challenge how in and outgroups are defined, specifically if founded on ideologies or values instead of pre-existing collective identities. One explanation for such vagueness could be a phenomenon called parasocial interaction, which refers to humans' tendency to (falsely) feel a connection to someone they see frequently, even if it would be through a screen. Sokolova & Kefi (2020, p. 3) discussed parasocial interaction as a factor affecting purchasing decisions in influencer marketing. They suggested that parasocial interaction could foster online social networks, where an audience (followers) who share the same values, beliefs, or interests as the spectator (influencer) could form an online community. The potential for similar formation of online communities is worthy of reflection in the context of activists as well, because their values, beliefs, and interests are likely similar. Thus, parasocial interaction could be beneficial for movements to popularize and it also sheds new light on viewing online activism and how online collectives' psychological ties are assessed.

Finally, one of the significant boundary definitions between activists and non-activists – and activism and slacktivism – was the dichotomy between the collective good and individual gratification and benefit. As stated by Cabrera, et. al. “there is nothing inherently wrong with people in activist circles feeling good about their efforts. The problem arises when the self-gratification becomes an end in

and of itself as opposed to a byproduct of the action” (2017, p. 406). In essence, I believe that this boundary definition is most relevant in practice. While the other defining factors could in some instances be considered as conceited, the motive of collective interest over personal benefit is non-arguable and fundamental in protecting the movement from appropriation.

Finally, this section has discussed the conceptual relationship between activism and an activist by contrasting them to slacktivism and non-activists. However, there are also people who (by definition) do activism but are suspicious about being an activist, or reject the identity altogether (Bobel, 2007; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Stuart, et. al., 2013). For example, Kelly & Breinlinger noted that negative associations with labels could affect an individual’s identification as an activist: “Many people may be reluctant to define themselves as activists because of the unfavorable representations of activists – particularly feminist activists – which are widely available in society” (1995, p.54). Although the world has changed since 1995 and being a feminist or an activist has been mainstreamed, stereotypes still exist. Thus, one of the reasons for not identifying as an activist could be the negative representations associated with activism.

Bobel (2007) in his study tried to discover reasons for individuals detaching from identification as an activist, even if they are doing activism. He suggested that the identity of an activist is widely inaccessible because of extensive demands for claiming it. Moreover, he argued that a “perfect standard” is required to identify as an activist:

“In the most reductive sense, this analysis reveals that an activist is valued for the level of unyielding sacrifice [they] bring to their social change efforts. An activist, in this view, is noted for [their] willingness to go to extremes in the service of the cause – no hardship, no trial is too much. And this, of course, links to the earlier point about arrogance. To duly earn the esteemed title of activist, you must put in your time and demonstrate your commitment.”¹ (2007, p,153.)

Moreover, Bobel (2007) discussed the possible outcomes of activist identity being out of reach. He noted that if the extent of activity or persistence of activists depends on the activist identity, the perfect standard could decrease the movement’s prominence. However, as his findings contradicted the prior views of identity’s importance, he noted that people are also willing to do activism without identifying as an activist.

2.2.4. Activist burnout

When studying any phenomena that could have disrupting effects on activism, activist burnout is a key concept. Activists are often emotionally invested in their work. Similarly, the causes they are fighting for are often the results of decades, lifetimes, or infinite grievances; and thus, complex

¹ Pronouns in original quotation generalized.

systemic issues. Being emotionally invested in gradually shifting change, with frequent backlashes, and solemnly receiving recognition for (unpaid) labour can result in activist burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015).

According to Chen & Gorski (2015) activist burnout is chronic exhaustion that leads activists to lose their idealism and spirit to fight for the issues they once grew fond of. They noted that activist burnout is often recognized in social justice movements, as the pressure and responsibility to change the surrounding world are readily adopted by the activists. In their study, reasons for such a heavy load of responsibility were found in movements' cultures of selflessness and emotional labour emphasizing the activists' situational privileges and utilization of the privileges for the benefit of the movement, compounded with a lack of self-care that was considered a luxury. Symptoms of activist burnout are deterioration of psychological, physical, and mental health, and feelings of hopelessness (Chen & Gorski 2015, p. 374-375).

Rodgers (2010) in their research attempted to conflate the research gap between prior research that suggests that emotional energy is a crucial motivator to social movements and activism, and the new perspectives suggesting that emotional burden could result in activist burnout. Their research setting was in paid occupations at Amnesty International. The findings indicated that while emotional energy is valued and beneficial in the engagement and recruitment of new activists, it also manifests in emotional drainage when employees are morally obligated to work at their limits of physical and psychological well-being. A culture of selflessness was a considerable contributor to the findings. (Rodgers, 2010.) Furthermore, Kovan & Dirkx (2003) stated that sometimes the same calling or attachment to the cause that initiated the activism could cause feelings of overwhelm and depression. Hence, being deeply concerned would somewhat naturally increase the sense of hopelessness and result in activist burnout. However, they also found out that the respondents considered it “deeply painful” to take care of their selves to overcome their burnout because it went “against their values and visions to be so self-focused” (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 112).

In the light of the research by Rodgers (2010), Chen & Gorski (2015), and Kovan & Dirkx (2003) – the culture in which activists operate should be assessed as a predeterminer of activist burnout. However, activism, emotional connections, or the calling for the common good are equally associated with enhanced self-esteem and confidence; a sense of commitment and purpose (Cosstick, 1994 in Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p. 101); and being a crucial motivator in social movements and activism (Aminzade & McAdam, 2002, p. 15). Which indicates, that root cause of becoming an activist, and (re)creating the culture of selflessness are evidently different sides of the same coin.

2.3. Hate speech

Hate speech is a relevant and disputed topic. It is often associated with participation and democracy, and debates around hate speech often include controversies between different constitutional rights f. e. freedom of speech and freedom from discrimination. Due to this conflict, interfering to hate speech effectively is a difficult task for legislators despite its risks. The difficult task becomes even more complicated when adequately defining hate speech. Defining hate speech is challenging due to the phenomenon's multidimensional and constantly changing nature, but even more because of the rapid development of its commonplace operational environment: social media.

2.3.1. Hate speech (ill) defined

Defining hate speech is difficult, and definitions between political actors and academia vary. To fully understand hate speech as a phenomenon, it is necessary to familiarize yourself with the existing definitions and their suitability in contemporary society, where the merge of traditional social life and online realities challenge their validity.

Hate speech can be defined as discriminative, derogatory, and threatening language based on an individual's or group's actual or perceived characteristics that is considered non-normative in society, f. e. race (other than white), ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, culture, or disability (table 2). However, notable differences in the definitions of different institutions, organizations, and authors occur. Such differences could exist because of differences in legislative contexts or attempts to expand existing and narrow perceptions that are inadequate.

Table 2. Definitions of hate speech.

Definition by:	Definition:
European Commission (2016).	<i>“Public incitement to violence or hatred on the basis of certain characteristics, including race, color, religion, descent and national or ethnic origin.”</i>
United Nations (2019).	<i>“Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender or other identity factor.”</i>
Non-Discrimination Ombudsman of Finland (n.d).	<i>“Hate speech is communication that incites hatred against one person or a group of people ... it may consist of speech, but it may also take other forms such as texts, pictures, symbols, music, drawings and films.”</i>

Faris, et. al., (2016, p. 5).	<i>“Speech which demeans or attacks a person or people as members of a group with shared characteristics such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or disability.”</i>
Cohen-Almagor, (2011, p. 1).	<i>“Hate speech is defined as bias-motivated, hostile, malicious speech aimed at a person or a group of people because of some of their actual or perceived innate characteristics.”</i>

Several authors have addressed the inadequateness of the existing definitions of hate speech (Saresma, et. al., 2022; Siegel, 2020; Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017). It was suggested by Fladmoe & Nadim (2017) that even if strict definitions of hate speech are a necessity in assessing the unlawfulness of actions, meaning the legal context, a broader understanding of hate speech is needed in empirical studies to see who could be exposed to hate speech and affected by it. Furthermore, Saresma, et. al. (2022), deemed defining hate speech as impossible, because as a societal and cultural phenomenon, the meanings attached to it are bound to fluctuate in time. Such a shift has been evident in the last decades, as nowadays, hate speech is more often associated with online hate than hate crimes occurring in the streets.

Consequently, one of the contemporary issues in defining hate speech is the extension of online realities to everyday lives. For example, Saresma et. al., (2022) noted that sometimes hate speech is used as a synonym for cyber hate, which is a larger phenomenon linked to extremism and antisemitism. They also noted that hate speech as a linguistic choice might have shortcomings, as it lacks the depth to describe other modes of hate online, for example, memes, pictures, or videos. Furthermore, Siegel (2020) also talked about online hate interchangeably with hate speech and further classified it as online hate speech. They also discussed how online platforms have created more challenges in interfering with and identifying hate speech. For example, the usage of epithets is not necessarily classified as hate speech, because they are not clearly hateful, even if the tone and the context would imply an intention of racist discrimination (Siegel, 2020). The tone of hate speech was also touched upon by Saresma et. al., (2022) who noted that hate speech is not necessarily hateful or angry, which also creates difficulties in its definition.

Defining hate speech is difficult for several good reasons. While defining hate speech, it is necessary to understand that it is not a simple concept but a multilayered and complex phenomenon. Moreover, even if it is crucial to have a clear frame legally, there are more than legal consequences attached to hate speech that is not based on pre-determined frames, but on the subjective experiences of the targets. Fladmoe & Nadim, (2017, p. 47) classified the consequences of hate speech as “social boundaries” as it incites fear and de-legitimizes targets from public debates.

Despite the attempts of researchers to make a distinction between online and offline hate speech and harassment, in this research, I will view all of these as a single phenomenon. The reason for the merge is that in the context of activism, most of the hate speech takes place online. However, even though hate speech and harassment could take place in online environments, in a country as small as Finland, anyone with a public presence could be recognized in real-life settings as well. That being said, the extension of hate to real-life occasions is only a matter of opportunity and coincidence. As far as the threat is real and if the online realities continue to be a lion's share of our everyday lives, I argue that there is no good reason to make a difference between these two in this case.

In this research, more importance is placed on the subjective experiences of the targets because the purpose is to assess how hate speech affected their participation. Thereby, the working definition is: hate speech is bias-motivated, hostile, and malicious language targeted at a person or group because of their actual or perceived innate characteristics. It is demeaning, threatening, or incitement to hostility and violence. Furthermore, as literature recognizes that hate speech could be hard to describe even if the target is negatively affected by it, the subjective experience is emphasized.

2.3.2. Consequences, targets, and people behind hate speech

The effects of hate speech on different actors have been extensively studied. The variety of research has enabled a consensus that hate speech is used to cause withdrawal from participation and silence the targets, that are for example politicians (Knuutila, et. al., 2019); researchers (Doerfler, et. al., 2021); disabled people (Vedeler et., al., 2019); or people in general, from which individuals who belong to underrepresented groups in society are more likely to be targeted (Saresma, et. al., 2022; Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017).

Furthermore, Fladmoe & Nadim (2017) investigated the targets also in terms of consequences. They conducted an extensive survey study on Norwegian adults' experiences with hate speech and unpleasant experiences online to see whether the hostile comments could have a silencing effect. In Norwegian legislation hate speech is defined in terms of protected grounds which is "a reflection of historical struggles for group recognition" (2017, p. 50). Their goal was to see whether hate speech on legally protected grounds is more likely to have severe consequences than other hate speech, as several authors have suggested (f. e. Boeckmann & Liew, 2002; Herek, et. al., 2002). They did this by investigating the scale on which the two groups are targeted, and how severe are they affected. First, they studied the effects of hate speech on people with an immigrant background and compared it to non-immigrant targets by using an extended definition of hate speech, that also covered

appearance, gender, and political views. It was noticed that within the legally protected grounds of hate speech, people belonging to groups with an immigrant background were in fact, most often targeted. However, when the definition was extended, the experiences of hate speech were evenly distributed among the immigrant and non-immigrant groups. Hence, their research indicated that no substantial difference in the consequences of hate speech between non-immigrant and immigrant backgrounds was discovered. It was suggested that as gender seemed to be a determinator for being silenced, it could be that people identifying as women could share the feeling of vulnerability, and thus, be more likely to withdraw from public discussion. (Fladmoe, & Nadim 2017.) Unfortunately, non-binary people were not included in the research.

Furthermore, even though withdrawal from participation is the most relevant consequence in this context, other consequences have been recognized as well. Siegel (2020) noted that online hate speech negatively affects the psychological well-being of the targets, could crucially influence intergroup relations at the societal level, and at worst be an incitement to physically attack the targets. Furthermore, it has been noticed that one of the most worrying effects of growing amounts of hate speech is, that repetitive exposure to hate speech increases outgroup prejudice by desensitizing individuals to verbal violence and lowering evaluations of victims (Soral, et. al., 2017). Such a finding portrays the effects of hate speech on society, as it portrays how prejudice towards underrepresented groups could even deepen if hate speech is deemed acceptable, or not interfering with it.

To understand hate speech, it is equally important to know who is behind it and what motivates them. However, this task is relatively difficult to solve for many reasons. First, most of the hate speech occurs in anonymous online spaces where it is difficult to determine who is behind it. Furthermore, in some contexts, f. e. the European one, the individuals using derogatory or threatening language could perpetrate a crime, which is why the offenders are not necessarily keen on coming forward with their offense. Additionally, it has been recognized that people who have committed hate speech often do not consider their language to be hate speech, or do not believe that such a phenomenon even exists (Saresma, et., al., 2022).

Even though it is difficult to recognize the individuals or groups that use hate speech, some common attributes have been found. Hate speech as a phenomenon can seem bigger than it is because hateful and provocative content online tends to be widespread (Siegel, 2020). However, it is often produced by a relatively small group of connected people (Siegel, 2020; Hawdon, et. al., 2017), especially in its most recognizable form. Furthermore, hate speech has been associated with the maintenance of the status quo of society – or angst resulting from shifts in it – as it is usually used by those who have

a normative presence in the society i.e., white, heterosexual men (Hall, 2015; Kimmel, 2018). Individuals who commit to hate speech have also been recognized to have a lowered ability for self-reflection and psychological well-being (Kaakinen, et. al., 2020).

Furthermore, in addition to knowing who is behind hate speech, even more, important to recognize the motivations behind those actions. Occasionally hate speech could be a result of poor self-control in a heated discussion or supposedly witty comments, but some of the intentions are deliberate attempts to affect society. Doerfler, et. al. (2021) recognized three distinctive categories of motivation for the online harassment of researchers: self-preservation, ideology-based harassment, and performative harassment. In their categories, self-preservation as a motive refers to the previously mentioned anxiety attached to shifts in status-quo: the harasser perceives the actions as a threat to their reality. Ideology-based harassment is motivated by actions that challenge or insult the ideologies of the harasser. Finally, performative harassment implies harassment that is done to gain social gratification or admiration of peers in their (online) communities. (Doerfler, et. al., 2017; Saresma, et. al., 2022.) These categories of motivation could clarify hate speech as a phenomenon in empirical research.

Multiple authors have concluded that one of the motivations to use hate speech is to silence participation (Saresma, et. al., 2022; Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017; Siegel, 2020). Therefore, it is safe to assume that one of the intended consequences of hate speech is inhibiting someone from participating. However, as Fladmoe & Nadim (2017) noted that not all instances of hate speech have a silencing effect. Hence, the relevance of studying the unexpected consequences is significant. Therefore, if there would be any unexpected behavior, such as empowerment, resilience, or headstrong resistance to the expected consequence, that could be associated with activist identity, it would indicate that there is more resilience towards hate speech among activists than the general population.

2.4. Contextual background

Finnish people are known to obey rules diligently. In the OECD report 2021, it was suggested that the obedient nature of Finns is a part of their cultural identity. The reasons for such obedience were based on:

“... strong adherence to the rule of law, low distance from people to power and elites, a shared belief on the benefits of egalitarianism, the role of public education for social mobility, a welfare system that widely provides opportunities and services to people living in Finland, shared Calvinist values of honesty and hard work, and cultural respect for constitutional and administrative stability of the internalization.” (OECD, 2021, p. 16.)

Honesty as a core cultural value has lived through public institutions, which has fostered transparency, openness, and inclusion of citizens in the construction of society. By using honesty as the ethos for Finnish public institutions, it has been possible to build trust between citizens and governing authorities and institutions, which results in the sensibleness of following the recommendations and regulations. According to international indicators, Finns still have comparatively high trust in public institutions and government, although some decreases have been reported during the economic crisis of 2008 and covid 19 pandemic. (OECD, 2021).

2.4.1 Contextual reasons for escalation of deprecation towards activists

The strong compliance with the law and high levels of trust in authorities naturally creates socially difficult conditions for activism. Specifically, if features of civil disobedience are included. According to Kopacheva (2021, p. 76), high trust in the political system has a negative correlation with non-conventional participation: i. e. boycotting, badge-wearing, protesting, and online activism. And even though there is a difference between participation and attitudes towards participation, the finding could indicate effects on attitudes as well, specifically in reflection on the suggestion of Besir & Magalhães (2016) that the degree of trust in the political system is dependent on the individual's position in society. Thus, it could be that compliance with the status quo decreases sympathy because of not being interested in or able to comprehend the issues at hand.

Interestingly, the degree of trust in political institutions and its correlation with non-conventional participation was more complicated. High trust in political institutions seemed to have a negative correlation with boycotting, signing petitions, and participating in online activism without affecting protesting or wearing a badge (Kopacheva, 2021, p. 74).² Reason for such a difference could be, for example, different people having different degrees of trust in the political system and its institutions. Moreover, freedom of assembly as a human right could be valued over political institutions, rather than being valued over the concept of democracy itself.

Despite freedom of assembly being a valued part of the constitution, activism is easily deemed unorthodox: especially if it shows any signs of civil disobedience. A precedent emphasizing this occurred in 2020-2022 when seven officers used excessive force to separate a nonviolent protest. The officers in the case were prosecuted for using excessive force for separating the protest, regardless that the activists acted unlawfully by resisting officers' leaving orders. (Kirsi, 2022-06-03). A heated debate in the press and social media took place where others justified the use of force, and others

² Kopacheva's research sample included respondents from 19 countries, of which Finland was one.

claimed that even violent protests have been handled with less force in the near past. The difference of opinions depends on political positions between left and right, but generational and cultural factors also have a part in the polarized perspectives of activism (Eronen, et. al., 2022; Helve, 2015).

According to an E2 research survey, half of the Finnish (48 %) consider that civil disobedience is unacceptable, and only 25% think they could break the law when participating to direct action for an important cause. A notable generational shift is visible in how acceptable civil disobedience is as Finns below 30 years old are more likely to accept civil disobedience than over 30 years old counterparts. Political orientation is also a determinant of acceptance: people who lean to the left are more likely to allow civil disobedience, whereas moderate/rights are more likely to reject it. (Eronen, et. al., 2022.) These statistics provide an intriguing basis for examining the hostile or contemptuous attitudes toward activists.

One of the important factors explaining the generational gap is socialization. The older generations' worldviews were mostly impacted by their parents, educators, and peers: whereas the digital natives' generation and their worldviews have been affected by the internet as well (Helve, 2015). The younger generation is thus more likely to deviate from the normality of prior generations but also experience the urgency of environmental and social issues more deeply. Similarly, digital natives often suffer from voting apathy, which is generally considered a sign of laziness or lack of motivation, without digging deeper into the reasons behind the issue (Erola, et. al., 2017). The conflicts between the interests, knowledge, values, and behavior of the generations could result in the condemnation of alternative modes of participation.

2.4.2. Participation paradox

The participation paradox in this chapter refers to Finns' poor political efficacy, hence the perception of individuals' abilities to influence political processes and political system (OECD, 2021), but having ideal conditions for participation. There would be reasons to assume that Finns would be keen on civic participation, whether in parliamentary or activism. However, according to the OECD report, Finns have a poor sense of political efficacy despite the ideal conditions.: 47 % of Finns consider being interested in politics, but only 29 % see themselves as competent or able to participate. Moreover, only 17 % feel they can influence what government does. It was also addressed that individuals with lower educational backgrounds have the least trust in their abilities to influence decision-making. (OECD, 2021.) Voting apathy and smaller voting turnover among the lower socio-economic class are especially alarming among those who belong to a lower class inheritably. When

entire groups of people end up underrepresented, it naturally affects whose interests are, and are not, fostered in the decision-making processes. (Erola, et., al., 2017.)

All in all, Finns struggle with their trust in political parties especially. However, even if there seems to be a low political efficacy, the non-traditional methods of civil participation seem to be more used than in other EU countries with available data. Finns participate by, for example, contacting government officials and politicians, signing petitions, sharing political opinions online, boycotting products or firms, wearing a campaign badge, or working in associations. Hence, some participation occurs, despite the poor sense of political efficacy. As actions to improve citizen agency and the feeling of being heard are crucial for preserving the trust between public institutions and citizens, the importance of trust is vital for overcoming future crises as a society and gaining equity in society and decision-making (OECD, 2021).

Furthermore, Finns are less active to participate in even lawful demonstrations than people in other European countries (OECD, 2021). The freedom to protest freely is a marginal right on a global scale. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, 97 % of people are constrained from activism and civic engagement by their governments. Hence, Finland is one of 39 countries where activism is considered fully unrestricted. (CIVICUS monitor, 2021.) Usually, modes of civic participation are more frequently exercised in countries where citizens are granted rights to participate and express their opinions (Fisher, et. al. 2021). Thus, the conflict between low turnout to protests and full rights for it could be another indication of poor political efficacy. Moreover, it could exhibit presumptions about non-conventional modes of participation (often associated with activism) as ineffective or radical.

Radicalization in activism was briefly described by Stuart, et. al. (2013). They described activist radicalization as dissatisfaction and rejection of processes of mainstream activism because of experiencing a lack of voice. It was also noted that radicalization is often associated with actions where means justify the ends. Stuart et. al. argued that within more radical groups the differentiation and conflicts with broader social movements could be used to attract political attention. (Stuart, et. al., 2013, p. 575-576.) However, perceptions of the end justifying the means inevitably vary between people. Thus, without specifying whether “the ends” refer to armed conflict or non-violent sit-ins, it is difficult to define what radical activism is in practice.

According to Cross & Snow (2012, p. 116) definitions of radicalism or radicals are oftentimes dependent on context. Thus, ambiguousness also affects radical activism, defined through f. e. high-risk actions, extreme movement activity, and identity. Moreover, as it depends on society's general

attitudes of what seems acceptable, radicalism is often also defined by the state and how it responds. (Cross & Snow, 2012.) Thus, perceptions of radical activism, or extreme action, are constructed partially through state interference and authority. As peaceful protesting is a human right; state authority in defining whether the extent of activists' actions is appropriate; should be contrasted carefully with other human rights and contexts. For example, it has been discussed whether civil disobedience should be legitimized in the context of environmental activism, as governments globally fail to protect their citizens from climate crisis (Chiroleu-Assouline & Lambert-Mogiliansky, 2022).

The legitimacy of civil disobedience in institutional democracy is a complex issue. As laws can be seen to work through the Foucauldian perspective of discipline and control – approval of exceptions has dystopian potential. However, as oftentimes activism calls for a rethinking of legislation, attitudes, or actions of the society: civil disobedience is also leverage in addressing the issues. Through activism, the unthinkable has the potential to become thinkable, as the window of acceptance could shift (Astor, 2019).

2.4.3. Historical trajectories and present state of Finnish activism

A noticeable feature of Finnish activism is its historical development. Finland's status of pioneering in equal rights was built by early-day activists. The first women's associations were founded before Finland's independence and equal rights of inheritance and education were granted already in the end 18th century. In 1901 women in Finland fought and received the right to go to university, and in 1906 Finland became the first country to give full political rights to women (STM, n. a.), concurrently with the lower classes.

Finland is still today considered one of the most equal countries in the world and female leaders are not a rarity in national or municipality governments. Gender mainstreaming is favored in family policies and equal division of care responsibilities is recommended and enabled. (STM, n. a.). However, a lot of work is still to be done; Finland is among the most racist countries in the EU (FRA, 2018); and ranks third in violence against women in EU countries (OECD, 2022).³ Additionally, the legislation still lacks recognition of gender diversity, which is a barrier for transgender minorities to receive any gender-affirming care. Not to mention the government's weak attempts to reconcile the assimilation of Samí and preach of indigenous rights of self-determination. Therefore, the right to organize and protest is crucial to be protected in the future too – also by considering the effects of hate speech on physical, spiritual, and mental health.

³ Latest data available, prevalence during lifetime.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research strives to understand the phenomenon of hate speech and its unexpected consequences for activists. To study human experience, naturally, qualitative research methods were considered suitable. The data was collected from 8 participants that were acquired with open invites and using networks: thus, purposive and snowball sampling was adopted to recruit the respondents. The interviews were organized offline and online and lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. The research was interpretive, as it was crucial to understanding the experiences of the activists. Interview data were analyzed thematically with the help of Atlas.ti software. The ethical considerations needed were to balance anonymity and the researcher's position.

3.1. Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a natural choice for studying human experience. It “aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans' lives and social worlds” (Fossey, et. al., 2002, p. 717) and seeks to understand “constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time” (Merriam, 2002 p. 4). Furthermore, qualitative research has strengths in discovering contextual variables that have so far remained undetailed (Marshall & Rossman, 1995 in Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research is a hypernym for research methods that focus on data that is non-numerical and which describes or explains experiences, behaviors, and social contexts (Fossey, et. al., 2002). Qualitative research is particularly feasible in developing in-depth knowledge of less researched and complex topics, and it usually is chosen due to a lack of existing theory that would adequately explain a phenomenon studied (Fossey et al, 2002; Merriam, 2002). An important feature of qualitative research is that it is often inductive, meaning that the concepts, theories, or hypotheses are based on the analysis and data, while deductive research often has hypotheses as the basis of the research, which is then confirmed (Merriam, 2002).

There are different paradigms in qualitative research that differ in terms of epistemological assumptions and approaches to observe and measure the phenomena researched. For this research, an interpretative paradigm is the most suitable because it focuses on understanding the actions and experiences of individuals (Fossey, et. al., 2002). In the interpretive paradigm, the reality is considered an outcome of social constructions, such as language or shared meanings (Myers 2009 in Nickerson 2022). Another important that frames the research is its philosophical basis that determines how people's and things' existence is perceived. Essentialism sees that “objects or people possess

necessary characteristics that they cannot lose without ceasing to be themselves” (Kurzweily, et. al., 2020 p. 116), while constructionism it is considered that people construct reality through externalization, objectification, and internalization – meaning that perspectives of reality are actualized through social practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Contextualism sits between the two by acknowledging “the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 81).

Thorne (2000) discussed slight differences in researchers’ positions; while some are researching to unravel the truths in the world to understand them; some recognize that reality takes place in subjective experiences, social contexts, and in historical time. The difference between the two is in this case significant as I believe that contextual realities are crucial determinators of subjective experiences. Thus, it is important to emphasize that my attempt is not to make essentialist determinations of individuals that share common attributes, nor make generalizable statements. Hence, this study is constructionist, but it acknowledges the contextual realities as determinators of social practices.

3.2. Data

Having relevant data is the utmost important thing for any research. The data for qualitative research can be gathered from extensive sources: for example, recorded participant observations, journal entries, focus group studies, text documents, multi-media files, public domain sources, policy documents, photos, autobiographical sources, or stories and narratives (Crabtree & Miller, 1999 in Nowell, et. al., 2017; Thorne, 2000). For this research, I chose to interview activists to collect data that is of high significance. Other types of data, such as documentaries or biographies, could have been used, but due to the limitation of time; interviews were considered a better option. The data from interviews was primary, as it was collected for this research specifically (Hox & Boeije, 2005).

3.2.1. Participants and sampling

The determination and sampling of relevant informants assist in the collection of quality data. Qualitative research sampling strategies have different features, which is why multiple methods can be used for collecting relevant data (Fossey, et. al., 2002). The determination of the sampling method is done by assessing how the research questions can be answered (Tongco, 2007). Qualitative research sampling is purposive when participants are selected based on their relevance as information sources

(Fossey, et. al., 2002). Thus, it is a deliberate choice determined by the participant's qualities (Tongco, 2007).

Sometimes if there are difficulties in finding enough relevant informants, purposive sampling can be extended with snowball sampling; that is a collection of informants through networking and referrals (Parker & Scott, 2019). Meaning that any informants collected through purposive sampling are asked to refer other informants that would fit the criteria. Snowball sampling reaches saturation when the informants start referring to each other within the network. (Parker & Scott 2019.) These two sampling methods have different strengths. Purposive sampling can maximize the diversity of answers to provide a wide range of perspectives and challenge the researcher's own views to foster credibility: whereas snowball sampling is a good way to collect respondents that are hard to find (Fossey, et. al., 2002). Sampling in this research was done by purposive method, as the criteria of participants were concise. Additionally, one of the participants had multiple referrals for informants, which is why snowball sampling was adopted.

The informant criteria in the research were the following: participant needs to do activism or identify as an activist and must have experienced hate speech because of their activism. The determination of becoming targeted to hate speech because of activism and not f. e. marginalized position was left to the participant.⁴ Respondents were recruited with a public invite at the researcher's social media platform. Additionally, direct messages on Instagram, Facebook, and e-mail were sent to activists and activist groups. Altogether 25 messages were sent, from which 8 respondents were willing to participate (figure 1), which was enough for a master's thesis, as 6-10 respondents are enough to thematically analyze data of small projects (Braun & Clarke, 2013 in Fugard & Potts, 2015, p. 671).

⁴ Some attempts at differentiation were done in interviews to determine if the activists were targeted with hate speech by chance, or because of their activism. Differentiation is difficult because any visible participation in controversially deemed issues can trigger hate speech, and active participation is a predetermining factor in becoming a target. Therefore, it is challenging to fully differentiate if the attacks are personal or targeted towards the agency of the activist.



Figure 1 Sampling process.

Participant demographics were considered somewhat important because for example being a female or belonging to racially or ethnically underrepresented groups is considered a threat of being vulnerable to hate speech (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017). However, the determination of relevant demographic information was left for the participant to decide. Such a decision was part of the ethical consideration of the research, that participants were not assigned to label themselves in any way. The available demographic information of participants is expressed in table 2 (F=Female, M=Male, N-B=non-binary, N. D.= No data). An important notion considering the participants' demographics, is the regional homogeneity of the sample. The participants were predominantly living in large cities with a radius of approximately 200 km, which could affect the findings due to significant regional differences in hostility of attitudes when shifting towards peripheries. Another relevant shortcoming in the diversity of the sample was a notable underrepresentation of people of color and male participants.

Table 3. Participant information.

Gender	F	M	N-B	N.D.	Total:
N _o	3	1	2	2	8
Ethnicity other than Finnish	0	1	0	0	1

The interviews for the research were conducted within a period of three months. The interviews were done online and offline – and in English and Finnish. The interviews were semi-structured: interviewer had an interview guide of 7 questions, from which three had sub-questions to support the main question. From the preliminary questions the discussion was given the possibility to flow conversationally (Fossey et. al., 2002), and the interviewer asked further and clarifying questions

based on the answers to acquire in-depth data. Hence, sometimes the participants answered multiple questions at once, so the interviews differed from each other. If relevant divergence in the question setting occurs in interviews quoted, that is communicated. The data from 8 interviews amounted to 113 pages of text.

3.2.2. Interview guide

The interviews to gather data were semi-structured and followed an interview guide. It was necessary to carefully consider the questions to not lead the respondents' answers in any direction. Thus, a decision between risking the questions to be insignificant, or to be leading, needed to be done. I decided to have questions that are not directly connected to research questions. However, there were considerations of relevance behind the questions, even if they could seem irrelevant.

The interview questions ([appendix 1](#)) relevance are explained here. The first question determined the focus of the participant's activism to assess if hate speech was targeted toward the individual's identity or actions. The second question and its sub-questions investigated the motivations of participants' activism. It gave the respondent a chance to reflect on their possibilities of participation or special features of activism that are ideal for them in comparison to f. e. politics. The consciousness of agency was related to the perceptions of activists' strategies. The third question was to shift participants' focus to their experiences of hate speech: it examined the nature of experienced hate speech (f. e. was it occasional or consistent, or multiple or individual attacks). This question also provided a possibility to ask further questions.

The fourth question specified if the activist was targeted to hate speech because of activism. The sub-questions reflected the pieces of literature (Costello, et. al., 2019; Siegel, 2020) indicating that hate speech is likely triggered by events and is often targeted at public or visible agents. Therefore, it is assumed that activism or protest can be a trigger as such, but if it receives publicity, it is even more likely to activate a counteraction. Therefore, the individuals would not be necessarily targeted with hate speech, if they would not visibly demand change, despite their real or perceived characteristics.

The fifth question examined if the activists' experienced emotions after being targeted corresponded with findings from the literature. Experiencing negative consequences at a personal level could indicate that activists are not impervious to being targeted. The sixth question is a follow-up for the latter question: it examines whether the consequences of hate speech to activism are conformable with consequences personally to assess possible discrepancies between the two and to examine if consequences are not as expected. The seventh and final question provided participants the chance to

elaborate on something previously mentioned or discuss anything else. Moreover, it provided a possibility to freely express anything else that was relevant to the topic.

3.3. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns. The themes are established through a careful coding process, that eventually helps the researcher to recognize the relevant themes to answer the research question(s). Hence, it is used to organize and describe a plurality of data in detail. The strengths of thematic analysis are its flexibility and suitability for novice researchers. Furthermore, thematic analysis is not bound to pre-existing theoretical frameworks, which is why it is a natural choice of analysis for interpretive research. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) Thematic analysis has occasionally been considered an insufficient method of analysis, due to the scarcity of literature in comparison to other well-known methods, and because of missing consensus on its use (Nowell, et. al., 2017). However, due to the growing number of literatures that has systemized the use of thematic analysis, it has gained approval (Nowell, et. al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In thematic analysis it is important to pre-determine choices that determine assumptions related to the research; for example, what counts as a theme, is the study inductive or theoretical, and what epistemological assumptions it holds. If the research is inductive, the analysis is data-driven and if it is deductive, it is theory-driven. An inductive approach often produces a richer description of overall data, while the deductive approach focuses on only the theoretically relevant parts. In inductive research, the codes are not based on an existing frame of codes, but instead, they are derived from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) As this research is not used to test an existing theory, but to gain data-driven insights, an inductive approach is used.

3.3.1. Coding

The analysis process started with getting familiar with the data to create initial thoughts about what is important and interesting. While familiarization, the initial ideas of similarities or patterns are formed, which is the first phase of the coding process. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) Initial coding is an activity that requires frequent revision of the data (Nowell, et. al., 2017). When the data has been carefully examined, it is time to start the coding with a limited set of codes sufficient to gather important information about the scope of interest (Attride-Stirling, 2001). As the coding is for simplifying the data and focusing on specific issues in it: the codes should have explicit boundaries to avoid undefined and extensive highlighting (Attride-Strigling, 2001; Nowell, et. al., 2017).

I began the familiarization process by scrutinizing the recordings and original transcripts produced by the Microsoft word transcribing feature. The original transcripts were inaccurate because the feature had issues with recognizing speech appropriately. Moreover, half of the interviews were organized in public spaces, which affected the accuracy of the transcripts. Therefore, I corrected all transcripts manually to produce truthful replicas of the original interviews. Writing transcripts helped to memorize the interviews and provoke first thoughts of similarities or patterns to help with the coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Once the first group of codes was created, the transcripts of interviews were transferred to Atlas.ti coding software. During the first set of coding, I noticed that the first set of codes was inadequate, which is why I created several new codes while coding. However, this resulted in poorly defined boundaries between the codes which is why the codes were refined by replacing them partially and carefully estimating proper distinctions between them. I used quite a bit of time for coding, as it might be important in upcoming phases. As King (2004) addressed, sometimes focusing too much on predefined codes or code groups prevents sufficient acknowledgment of data that conflicts with an initial assumption; or if there are not enough predetermined codes, data could seem too complex to get a hold of. Thus, I considered careful coding as a key factor in the reliability of the analysis.

The second round of coding was more successful, due to the repetitive examination of data during the process. As a result, data extracts from the final round of coding decidedly captured everything relevant. All quotations from interviews were delivered to a code table to assess them once more, and it was possible to start generating themes from the data. Some of the extracts were coded with multiple codes because the extracts occasionally overlapped with relevance to other codes. This was however taken into consideration while coding by adding a comment to the extracts, to remember the thoughts behind multiple codes. Examples of codes, explanations of what can be expressed in them, and example extracts are visible in table 4.

Table 4 Code table with data extracts

Codes and explanations:	Example extract:
<p>Expected feelings or behavior.</p> <p>(Negative emotions, f. e. anxiety; or negative consequences, f. e. withdrawal)</p>	<p>“The effects to me personally, well, I am often overstimulated, stressed, or experiencing anxiety 24/7 when it is difficult to sleep as an example”.⁵</p>
<p>Unexpected feelings or behavior</p> <p>(Unexpected emotions, or consequences)</p>	<p>“Sometimes it has affected me so, that it rather gave me drive or strength, because <i>if people think like that, then I have to invite even more people along, to make the other point of view visible as well.</i>”</p>
<p>Discrepancy of feelings and behavior</p> <p>(Signs of discrepancy between expected and unexpected feelings or behavior)</p>	<p>“I perfectly understand those who have withdrawn from participation or have not participated from the start, but personally, I have chosen to persist, mainly due to the innate sense of justice. No matter how much hits I take, I’ll be like <i>God damn it I will not give them what they want by not continuing.</i> But at the same time, it often has consequences to my mental health.”</p>
<p>Activism over conventional participation</p> <p>(Any reasons for doing activism instead of politics)</p>	<p>“You know the politic life here in Finland, like many other countries, from my own point of view, it is not that easy, and it is not that accessible for everyone. Even so, we see a lot of immigrant background people in politics; they are in Parliament, mayor of city or whatever, but it is still, I don’t know, I don’t feel they are there because they want them. Probably because, I do not want to generalize, because they want probably some <i>yeah, we are open and people of color here.</i> But how much really, they have the decision, and how much they can make decision inside those political parties? We have from the most far right to the left you know. And all of them you can find immigrant. But what is important for me, is how much they give impact, how much they change, how much their voice is heard?”</p>
<p>Identity factors</p> <p>(Activism is, or can be, explained with identity, personality, or character traits)</p>	<p>“Well, I think I have always had that kind of a personality that I cannot accept things being wrong or unjust. Like I always want to know justifications for everything, and if they are not satisfactory to me, then I am not obeying them and want to free others from them as well if it is a rule or something like that.”</p>
<p>Quality of hate speech</p> <p>(Mapping of different qualities of hate speech from experiences)</p>	<p>” I would be ready if someone challenged some of my arguments or would cite another research or such. I would be happy to do that. But they are always like <i>why this fat whore won’t stop whining;</i> or, <i>why the issues are always raised by ugly and fat people;</i> so basically, attacking my appearance because it is the easiest thing to grab into. And always commenting my body.”</p>

⁵ Example of a pre-translated quotation: “Vaikutukset muhun itseän, niin tuota välillä on tosi semmoisessa virittyneessä stressitilassa tai ahdistus tilassa, niinku silleen 24/7, että on vaikea nukkua ja tälleen”. Rest of the non-translated quotations in [appendix 2](#).

<p>Community</p> <p>(How is community framed in the experiences?)</p>	<p>“I say that there are also good sides in hate speech – because when you receive it, and you share it – you can also receive warmth and compassion. And maybe even harness other people for the cause in a way that it is possible to utilize it to make others wake up like <i>I really did not know that it is this bad.</i>”</p>
<p>Feedback</p> <p>(How is feedback framed in the experiences?)</p>	<p>” I still don’t know if it was a good idea to do file the crime report. I just don’t know. I want to think that it is important, and it will be a precedent as 38 people got sentenced ... and it felt good that many others who had experienced the same messaged me like <i>thank you for going through this, now we have something to refer to.</i> But I really don’t know. I’m thinking about the relationship of traditional and restorative justice, and I think it affects how I feel.”</p>
<p>Job</p> <p>(Activism is connected to paid labor)</p>	<p>” Raising awareness is one method and also sharing information and articulating it. And the modes can be broad. I consider that my plays are informative even though they are pieces of art. And columns are informative. “</p>
<p>Responsibility</p> <p>(Indications of having a responsibility, or considering that there is not much choice)</p>	<p>“I have been growing into especially feminist thinking while becoming a young adult, and through that began to understand like hey this world really is very unfair. So somehow through knowledge and understanding different structural issues I got this feeling that something needs to be done.”</p>
<p>Anonymity or non-anonymity</p> <p>(How is anonymity or intimacy visible in the experiences?)</p>	<p>” Nowadays I am like, that I don’t want to show the street where I live. Like yeah, I still talk about it often because it is a long street and such, but I want to protect my privacy a bit more, for example by not having my surname mentioned in my front door.”</p>
<p>Other</p> <p>(Other frequently arising or important reasons that could explain discrepancy of consequences)</p>	<p>” And then of course I know that they are writing things about me. Usually I don't Google my name, and especially if it is some magazine or some online thing, kept by racist people or the white people or whatever. I don't go there; I don't want to see that. Like I said, I don't understand so much Finnish, and if I want to understand, I can put in Google, but why would I bother myself? I don't. I focus on what I am doing. I focus on the people who keep me empowering and supporting. I don't really want to see this hater.”</p>

3.3.2. Theme creation

Theme creation begins with a consideration of what counts as a theme. Assessment of themes' relevancy is entirely dependent on the researcher's interpretation and judgment (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Hence, any concurring findings are ultimately dependent on the researcher's representation of interviews (Schwandt 2001 in Tobin & Beckley, 2004). Therefore, to enhance the credibility of the research, the possible pitfalls should be acknowledged and avoided by f. e. improving the credibility by describing the trials of thought explicitly in the report. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggested that

themes are always somewhat patterned. Moreover, they emphasized that the key themes are not determined by the quantifiable measures but by whether the theme is relevant to answering the research question(s). I decided that patterns in this research refer to at least third of the respondents. However, if something central to the entire phenomenon would be disregarded, exceptions could be made. Such exceptions would be visible in the report.

The basic principle of theme creation is combining code extracts into relevant categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The theme should capture the meaning of the experience (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). It should also be combined from pieces of diverse experiences that would seem meaningless individually (Aronson 1994). As the themes' purpose is to capture the meaning and abridge vast amounts of data to analyzable proportions, balancing between focusing too much on research questions and predetermined codes is necessary: precisely because it determines the extent that valuable information is preserved (King, 2004).

I started my theme organizing by grouping the connected data extracts into piles, as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). I had a preliminary thought of patterns formed from extractions, but there were still some difficulties in noticing connections and mutual relevancies between all quotations. King (2004) suggested that some of the codes or extracts might not have equal relevance in understanding the phenomena, and more focus should be placed on identifying relevant themes, than interpreting every extract to the same extent. Thus, I decided to make preliminary themes from extracts that demonstrated the key issues to understand the phenomena. I continued by creating a mind map to recognize possible relationships between codes, themes, and subthemes. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), mind maps and tables are useful tools in theme creation, as it helps to sort the codes into themes.

After drawing the first mind map, I noticed some connections between the nodes, which enabled me to generate another, more organized, and descriptive version. At this point, I thought the themes were ready and started revising them. However, I discovered that some of the important extracts that were merged during coding were unfit, resulting in spillover and vagueness. Thus, I revised some of the coding, which was not precise enough because I had coded some data extracts with multiple codes. Finally, with small changes to the main themes and by adding subthemes, I was able to create themes that were aligned with the content. (Figure 2.)

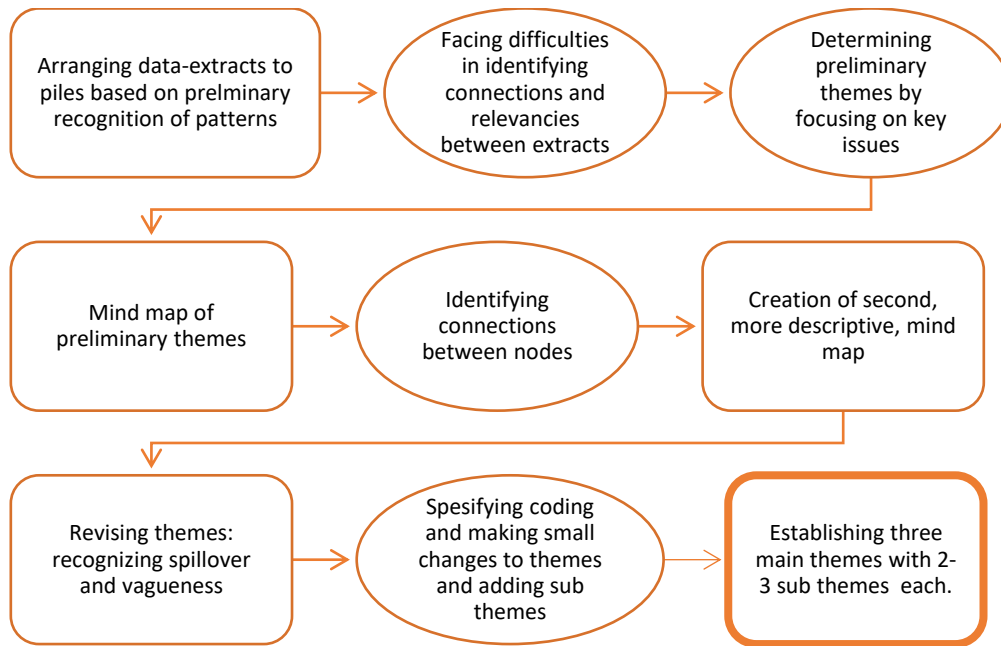


Figure 2. Theme creation process step-by-step

During the last phase of theme formation research questions were used as guiding factors. Yet, as King (2004) advised, it is important to not be guided solely by the research questions, due to the risk of losing themes that are not directly relevant but could have underlain importance. However, as the theme formation was almost finished, I considered that the risk of losing sight of important themes was slim. Finally, I created a table that included three main themes, with 8 subthemes (see [figure 3](#)). Under those themes, I listed data extracts and their codes. All the extracts were double-checked to confirm their significance and alignment.

3.4. Ethics

Any research should be done keeping in mind ethics. Orb, et. al. (2001, p. 93) suggested that the core of ethics is “doing good and avoiding harm”, which can be obtained through the application of suitable ethical principles. They suggested, that weighing potential benefits and harm, protecting privacy, being prepared for emotional discomfort, emphasizing participants’ rights, and avoiding exploitation; are fair principles to avoid causing harm. In this research, all participants were given full information about the usage of data and their permissions to recordings and transcripts were frequently confirmed. The participants were offered the possibility to check their transcripts for accuracy, and withdrawal from the study was possible until the approval of transcripts. The participants were instructed to point out any parts of the transcript that should not be used as direct quotations. If those parts were used, they were remarkably modified to preserve anonymity. However, as some of the cases discussed during the interviews had been publicly handled before, the risk of

losing anonymity was recognized. The risks were discussed with the participants during the interviews to make sure they are acknowledged. Furthermore, the initial thought of the researcher was that respondents could participate by using their names, but later, the researcher decided to pursue anonymity due to the risk of being re-targeted. All participants in this research were adults.

As the study was recognized to have a distressing nature, certain precautions were followed. For instance, participants were not forced to label their gender, sexuality, or other sensitive information. Therefore, any remarks about identity were voluntarily expressed during the interviews. Furthermore, the participants were informed that if any uncomfortable feelings arise, they can be expressed to pause the interview. It was also made clear that if any discomfort arises, it is recommended to let the interviewer know. Finally, it was promised that none of the transcripts, or recordings, in entirety are published and that they are removed after the analysis. None of the data will be released to third parties and the interviewer is bound to secrecy in terms of releasing the names or data of the participants.

4 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter reports the analysis of empirical data. The empirical data was retrieved by interviewing activists and asking about their experiences of activism, hate speech, and how it affects them. My first research question was: *could hate speech have unexpected consequences for activism?* It assesses whether consequences from hate speech could be something more than expected f. e. withdrawal from participation or being silenced. The second research question was required to investigate the reasons behind the potentially unexpected consequences and to examine whether they could be connected to activism or activist identity. My second research question was: *how can unexpected consequences be explained by analyzing activists' experiences?*

The data was analyzed thematically. With a careful process of coding, it was possible to recognize themes and patterns from the interviews by reflecting the answers between codes to each other and comparing differences or finding similarities. The themes and subthemes established through coding were the discrepancies between personal costs and action; what is it with you activists'; and other keys to unexpected consequences. Each main theme had 2-3 sub-themes, that demonstrated each theme's key findings and enabled a coherent narrative in the report (figure 3). The themes are presented in hierarchical order, as they gradually complete their precursors. Hence, a disclaimer, that none of the themes alone can be used for describing the phenomena, is needed.

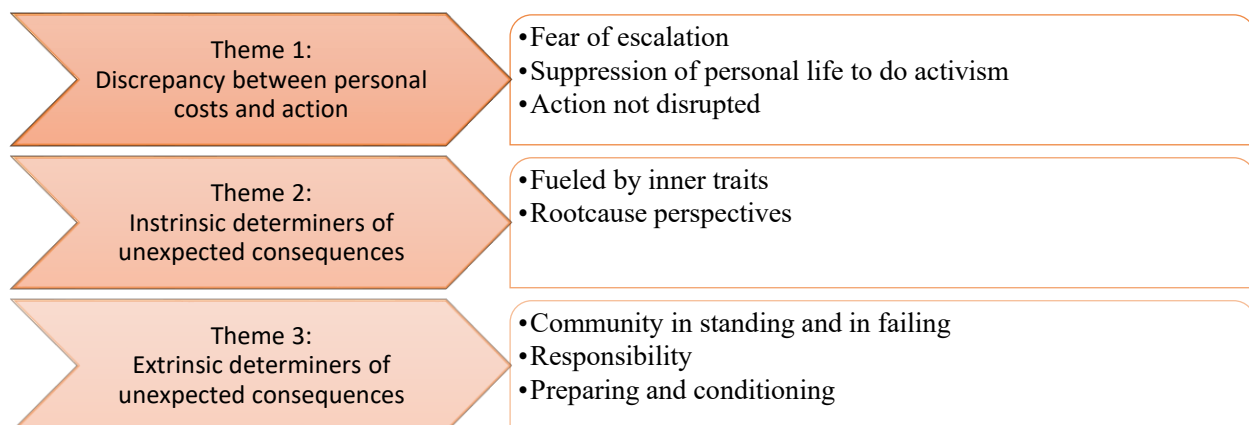


Figure 3. Themes and subthemes.

4.1. Discrepancy between personal costs and action

The consequences of hate speech have been extensively researched. For example, Saresma, et. al. (2022); Vedeler, et. al. (2019); Fladmoe & Nadim (2017); Knuutila, et. al. (2019); Doerfler, et. al. (2021); Soral, et. al. (2017) and Siegel (2020) have concluded that consequences of hate speech are mostly negative, including deterioration mental health, deepening outgroup prejudices, withdrawal

from participation, and as a result, weakening of democracy. The results are daunting and especially hazardous for the underrepresented groups of society, that are affected by the social power imbalances to begin with. Hence, hate speech should be most severely addressed in attempts to secure democratic development.

4.1.1. Fear of escalation

Feelings of fear, having decreased elbow room, and being too tired to continue, were expected and commonly expressed in the experiences of activists. While respondents discussed hate speech and its consequences, it instantly became clear that none of us, no matter how fierce, are bulletproof to it:

“I somehow thought that I am the toughest fucking bitch – and even though I kind of am – after the action I experienced physical symptoms of anxiety ... For example, I got so pissed, and so anxious about this incident, that I was going to a metro, and someone suddenly ran out of there – like this really basic thing – but the person started running towards me and I got a huge panic attack. And that was the moment when I realized how much those threats online had affected my day-to-day life.

My heart rate has gone up and I am constantly worried that if someone moves somewhere, that they are about to attack me. And it happened once too; someone attacked me in front of a mall. He just came punching me and yelled something like “I know what you are doing, it is shit”. And I just jumped to the first bus that passed by and got away from the situation. And I have had shit brought to my front door. So, the online hate also manifests as real as that”.⁶

The manifestation of hate speech (whether online or in physical life) to violence or other concrete domains, was a common concern. Most of the activists portrayed negative feelings because of being targeted to hate speech, but most attention was given to worrying about their safety. The insecurity was highlighted in situations outside of the action, for example, at home, on the everyday commute, or in instances related to work. Such a discrepancy was also briefly noted by Knuutila et. al. (2019, p. 61-62), that even if generally hate speech has negative effects, some people are not willing to let it affect their participation, even if it would affect the general atmosphere or personal well-being. The discrepancy between the consequences of hate speech personally, and activism itself is somewhat contrary to the consensus.

⁶ ”Ja siis mä ajattelin jotenkin, että mä oon vitun kova ämmä ja mä olenkin silleen, mutta esimerkiksi silloin aktion jälkeen, niin kyllä mulla tuli oikeesti fyysisiä ahdistusoireita Ja sit mua rupesi vituttamaan se, ja mua oikeasti ahdisti tosi paljon esimerkiksi sellainen, että mä olin menossa metroon ja sitten joku lähti juoksemaan sieltä niinku metrosta ulos. Siis ihan normaali juttu, mutta se lähti juoksemaan mua kohden, niin mä sain hirveän paniikkikohtauksen. Ja siinä vaiheessa mä tajusin, että kuinka paljon ne netissä ne uhkailut oli myös vaikuttanut silleen mun omaan semmoseen perusarkeen. Ja silleen, että mun syke on noussut ja mä pelkään koko ajan, että jos joku liikaa jossain, niin mä pelkään et se niinku käy kimppuun tai jotain. Ja kyllähän mun kimppuun myös on käyty kerran ostarin edessä. Joku äijä tuli lyömään mua ja huusi jotain...mä en muista mitä se huusi, jotain että mä tiedän mitä sä teet sä teet ihan paskaa tai jotain tällaista. Ja sitten mä vaan hyppäsin nopeasti johonkin bussiin, mikä meni vaan johonkin suuntaan, että mä pääsin pakoon sitä. Ja sitten mun ovelle on tuotu paskaa, et sellanen niinku nettiviha myös manifestoituu todeksi silleen.” [Original quotation modified for anonymity].

Fear of escalation also included the fear of becoming a target of doxing. Especially agonizing type of doxing was the one that was related to being misunderstood by a perceived ingroup and being criticized hostilely by them. When misunderstandings or misinterpretations led to being in a middle of an online furor, the respondents expressed fear of having a falsely tainted reputation among their ingroup. Fear of defamation was experienced in the research of Knuutila et. al. (2019, p. 55) as well. However, the respondents who discussed the hostile critique doubted whether they consider it hate speech:

*“I try not to see those because sometimes it is stressful to do things. Because there are people who will purposefully misinterpret you. I don’t know if I would call it hate speech, or I don’t know, but it is this weird competition between feminists. There [online forums] is some of that and I wish not to be too aware of what they talk about me. For example, if there is an online discussion where they say that I have a victim mentality, I am unqualified high school philosopher etc., which resembles of bullying and being back to junior high. I don’t know if I would think of it as hate speech, but I try to avoid reading those. But still I feel like I have been more burdened by the other feminists’ nonconstructive [criticism] and hostility than the sexual harassment in ylilauta”.*⁷

It is important to note, that even in contexts where unpleasant feelings are not legally defined as hate speech, similar consequences could occur, which becomes a “social boundary” for participation (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017, p. 47). Furthermore, defining hate speech in the era of expanding digital technologies and social polarization is challenging. Thus, its development needs to be constantly assessed to understand the phenomena. One of the recently recognized features of hate speech is doxing, which means widespread harassment campaigns to remove a person from a position to make an impact (Saresma, et. al., 2022). Especially, because the actions used in doxing could be individually assessed harmless or even justified critique – in hundreds or thousands of strategically targeted messages, they become an attack, that is recognizable as hate speech (Saresma et. al. 2022, p. 105). Furthermore, even in cases where the peers of the activist are hostile in less severe ways as doxing, it has been considered a causing factor in activist burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015, p. 377).

Interestingly, the activist identities could be an explaining factor in the fear of escalation of online furor as well. Features of “symbolic identity boundaries” (Stuart, et. al., 2013) were visible, as the respondents discussed anxiety resulting from hostile counterparts of their perceived activist community, f. e. “feminists”. The symbolic identity boundaries were seen as competitive, which

⁷ ”En mä oo niin tarkkaan seurannut, koska mä just koitan silleen niin kun, tai siis kun se on oikeasti tosi stressaavaa välillä niin kun toimii. Ja silleen että ihmiset nyt tiedätsä vaan silleen ymmärtää väärin, tai ymmärtää tahallaan väärin. Ja sellaista niin kun mitä mä en ehkä välttämättä kutsuisi vihapuheeks, tai en tiedä, mut semmoista ehkä niinku feministien välistä sellaista ihme kilpailua ja tuollaista, niin sitä on jonkin verran, niin se että mä en välttämättä haluaisi olla liian tietoinen sitten siitä, että mitä musta silleen puhutaan. Että jos jossain on joku keskustelu, jossa niin kun puhutaan vaikka siitä, että oon vaan tällainen joku uhriutuva, epäpätevä, lukiolaisfilosofi ja jotain tällaista, niin kun et toihan on vaan tommosta kiusaamista ja tulee semmoinen niinku yläaste meininki vähän niinku mieleen. Että en mä tiedä et pitäisinkö mä sitä silleen vihapuheena, mut silleen, että mä koitan olla ehkä niinku lukematta niitä. Mutta siis niin kun tavallaan sillä musta tuntuu, että enemmän mua on niin kun kuormittanut sen tavallaan toisten feministien se sellainen jotenkin epärakentava ja epäsolidaarinen meininki, kun jotkin ylilaudan vaikka jotkut seksuaalissävytteiset viestit.” [Original quotation modified for anonymity].

resembles Bobel's (2007) definition of a "perfect standard" to be reached to be legitimate for the collective identities of activists.

4.1.2. Suppression of personal life to do activism

Most of the activists expressed ways in which they suppress their everyday lives to do activism despite hate speech. Thus, in addition to being directly affected by hate speech, a variety of protective measures at the cost of regular life was described. Protective activities described were very similar to what was recognized by Knuutila et. al. (2019, p. 53-54), such as hiding contact information, or scrutiny of what can be shown on social media to not dox themselves. Protective measures also included the decision to not read anything that is written about oneself, being susceptible to opening e-mails or other attempts of making contact, and having all their information in digital and population data services agencies hidden. Additionally, the respondents expressed that they have lost their trust in people, and must go through extensive cognitive and emotional labor to not be affected:

"Because for me, like I didn't do this work for one day or two, but more than 10 years before I came to Finland. And I have like the strategy of how to protect yourself from these haters. They will always exist. They will always come and show up in your life, but you can make the boundaries clear and try to protect yourself, so you can do your work best. Because when it affects one person, really. It can get to you for many years and maybe some people – they cannot even continue after that. So, for me, I don't want to arrive to this situation."

"Also, it has affected my personal life so, that I don't do online dating. I couldn't have in several years after I found out that few activists' tinder profiles had been screenshotted and they were bashed in the online forums".⁸

By making personal and tangible decisions to shield their selves, respondents expressed commitment to their activism. Sometimes the decisions included giving up parts of life that can be considered significant. Such decisions, and the extensive emotional and cognitive labor portray a sense of responsibility to the cause, which was considered a predeterminate to activist burnout by Chen & Gorski (2015). The signs of activist burnout were visible in many respondents' answers either in the present or past tense, but they were discussed as either something to overcome to persist or something that needs to be taken seriously by changing tactics to persist. Similar findings were reported by Kovan & Dirkx (2003, p.112).

4.1.3. Action not disrupted

In previous subchapters, I presented experiences of expected consequences and how the activists suppressed their personal lives to keep going. Yet, during the interviews, a clear majority insisted that

⁸ "Niin ja siis no sillain se on vaikuttanut henkilökohtaiseen elämään, et mähän en voi nettideittailla. Mä en oo enää voinut nettideittailla vuosiin sen jälkeen, kun mä löysin, että muutaman aktivistin tinder profiileista on otettu kuvakaappauksia ja niitä haukuttiin tuolla foorumeilla".

their activism is not disrupted by hate speech. Some of the experiences portrayed how the demands or disrespect they experienced caused opposition by principle, or the decision to act even more provocatively out of spite. Often, however, hate speech was considered a factor amplifying determination, in one way or another:

"I actually get stronger with the haters, or I feel like I get stronger when people are against me, you know? When I found that everybody like oh yeah, it's nice... that's fine. But when everybody is like no, don't do that, you are horrible... Ok, then I will do it thousand time more (laughing). I am like that actually; this is my character, and they probably try to take it away, so I need some energy like this. But they don't know probably, those haters, that there are people who can get stronger with what they say, because they don't care about their point of view. I don't care about what they think about me. Just they think they'll make me mad or make me feel bad. Actually, I continue my work to make them feel bad – this is how it goes."

Many of the respondents discussed their headstrongness with laughter, which was interesting because humor has been recognized as one of the coping mechanisms that enhance persistence in high-risk activity (Downton & Wehr, 1991 & Downton & Wehr, 1997 in Nepstad, 2004). Moreover, it has been recognized in the literature that the ideological or value-based uniformity of social movement organizations and partakers enhances commitment (Barkan, et. al., 1993). Thus, the degree of commitment and persistence could be related to value commitments as well. In their research on the effects of hate speech on elected politicians, Knuutila et. al. (2019, p. 61-62) noted that the consequences of hate speech are dependent on the person. Interestingly, the quotations in their research that described unexpected consequences included indications of valuing social justice and equity. Such observation indicates that activists' participation is shielded by their core values, as suggested by prior literature (f. e. Barkan, et. al., 1993; Kovan & Dirkx 2003). One respondent portrayed her emotional labor and value considerations followingly:

"It is something that I must emotionally process by myself. And it is exhausting and frustrating and makes me question why I do these things because it is such a burden. And over and over again I process it like; I do this because I believe in these things, and they are important; and that the hate is only a demonstration of the urgency of these matters, and I will not be silent".⁹

4.2. Intrinsic determiners of unexpected consequences

It seems, that the prior research has failed to address the power of flaming determination that is founded on personal characteristics, profound values, and wounds of humanity. Factors like personal characteristics, considering hate speech as a symptom of the same source that initiated the activism, and infusing activism into other aspects of life; seem to be poorly evaluated in understanding the

⁹ "Ja ne on semmosia mitä vastaan pitää tehdä sitä tunnetyötä sit niinkun ite. Ja sit se on hirveen väsyttävää ja turhauttavaa ja saa mut kyseenalaistaman, että miks mä teen näitä asioita, koska se on niin raskasta. Ja sit mun pitää aina uudelleen ja uudelleen käydä se läpi että mä teen näitä asioita koska mä uskon näihin ja nää on tärkeitä ja tää on vaan osoitus että näitä tarvitaan näitä tekoja ja mä en suostu vaikenemaan".

phenomenon. The analysis identified that intrinsic traits, such as innate characteristics or personal worldviews could be a determiner of unexpected consequences from hate speech.

4.2.1. Fueled by inner traits

When respondents were asked how they became activists, most of them mentioned a profound sense of justice and an inability to tolerate unfairness. The sense of justice and headstrongness was portrayed as something that the respondents are inherent, which could be interpreted as something that cannot be detached from them:

*“I think it stems from this sense and need of justice that I’ve had since I was very young – from when I was very little – and also that it’s really difficult to tolerate unfairness”.*¹⁰

*“I feel it relates to my personality, in which a huge factor that also determines who I am, is sense of justice. It is something who I have been since childhood that if I see something that is wrong, I must step in; and it is really hard to let go of something that is not right”.*¹¹

*“It is an essential trait. Unfairness bothers me so much that I have to act. It is something that is the core of my perceptions of world and humanity”.*¹²

The sense of justice and headstrongness appeared respectively as a reason for becoming an activist to begin with, but also a reason for persistence under hate speech. Such a finding was somewhat expected considering the preliminary assumption of this research and prior literature on emotions as core motivation for activists (Aminzade & McAdam, 2002). However, it is also contradictory to the research of Chen & Gorski (2015) and Rodgers (2010) who considered the emotional burden as a predeterminer of activist burnout. As visible from the quotations, all the respondents express letting go, or not acting, as something they have to do or is very difficult not to do. Such a factor is evidently a determinator for persistence, but equally a risk for activist burnout.

The innate sense of justice and headstrongness were not the only profound characteristics that the respondents reasoned for their leading motivation of beginning and continuance. Other characteristics were related to hurtful experiences in their past which they wanted to shield others from by creating change; belonging to an underrepresented group that is lacking fundamental rights or recognition or having a lifestyle or worldview that is not compatible with existing normative frames in society.

¹⁰ “No kyllä mie luulen, että se niin kun oma tekeminen kumpuaa siitä, että on ollut jotenkin tosi niinku nuoresta – tosi pienestä pitäen – aika voimakas jotenkin semmoinen oikeudenmukaisuuden taju ja tarve ja niin kun semmoinen, että on ollut jotenkin vaikea hyväksyä semmoista ns. epäreiluutta”.

¹¹ “Mutta sitten musta tuntuu, että se myöskin linkittyy siihen, että musta tuntuu että mun persoonassa on semmoinen tosi tosi iso ja semmoinen tekijä mikä tosi pitkälle ja tosi vahvasti määrittää sitä kuka mä oon, niin on oikeudenmukaisuus. Että se on niinku semmonen et mä oon ollut ihan lapsesta sellainen, että jos mä näen niinku mitään väärää, niin puutun siihen saman tien ja mun on tosi vaikea päästää irti semmoisista asioista, että jos mä nään jotain, mikä ei ole oikein”.

¹² “Ei se on ihan semmoinen perusominaisuus. Semmoinen epäreiluus niinku ahdistaa niin paljon, että on niinku pakko toimia. Jotenkin se on mun semmoinen niinkun maailmankuvan ytimessä ja koko ihmiskäsityksen ytimessä semmonen”.

4.2.2. Root cause perspectives

Most of the respondents expressed root cause reasoning for their activism to begin with, but also for handling hate speech. They discussed how hate speech is an affirmation of their activism; this is how it started, and this is a demonstration of its cause. One of the respondents was asked why hate speech has not disrupted her participation, despite its significant consequences to her personal life: *“Maybe because it stems from exactly that. The activism. From the inequality and all that. So, maintaining [inequality], cannot terminate [activism]. That is only throwing fuel to the fire.”*¹³. Additionally, she described that she was able to depersonalize the hate she had been subjected to, because the hate could be perceived as a symptom of structural misogyny, meaning that it was never personal and could have happened to anyone with the same mission:

*“I have realized that it helped to process the hate, when I understood that when we did the action, it could have been anyone and they would have received the exact same feedback. So, it helped me to acknowledge that it wasn’t personal. [...] But instead, it was the exact same misogyny, and anyone else would have gone through the same”.*¹⁴

Other respondents showed deep considerations of structural and systemic causality as well. Root cause thinking was used to rationalize hate speech to not let it affect it. It also was discussed by referring to it as a learning experience. The following respondent went through years of trials as the plaintiff because of multidimensional and severe hate speech and harassment. They described the significance of root-cause thinking and learning quite exquisitely:

[...] I am very sad about the theater and show and such that was started back in the days, because it ignored [the important things]. My activism was related to refugees in Finland; the issues in how their cases were handled and the tightened asylum politics. And I think that actually – the hate agent in this case – was the government, its ministries, and head of Migri. They were the ones infusing hate to this society when they held statistics on the wall counting how many families they could send back. So it was for their benefit that the focus is shifted to few weaklings that attacked [me] online.

*I believe that the system enjoys that these glaring incidents become the center of attention; and by system; I mean the capitalist system. **That** is fully hate speech, because it ruins this society, the climate, everything. And this, the individualistic materialism, is the worst kind of hate speech because it has been normalized. And I can be honest with you; even that I went through all of this and received thousands of hateful messages and been to court; they were not the ones destroying this society, or who destroyed the future of those refugees. Like if we think of a family from Afghanistan; a Hazara family; whose asylum application is rejected, and whose lives are at risk at home; they can handle occasional yelling at streets, even if it is horrific. But what Migri did to them was the actual hate crime. And I’m honest about it because that’s how I think it is. Which means,*

¹³ “Ehkä koska se on syntynyt juuri siitä. Se aktivismi. Siitä epätasa-arvosta ja siitä. Niin sitten ei se niinku sen jatkaminen niin saa sitä loppumaan. Tai sehän vaan niinku bensaa liekkeihin heittävät tekijä”.

¹⁴ “Ehkä niinku se mitä mä oon tajunnut jotenkin, että sekin auttoi siinä käsittelyssä, se vihapuheen käsittelyssä, kun mä tajusin, että kun me tehtiin se aktio, niin siinä olisi voinut olla kuka tahansa ja se on saanut samanlaisen palautteen. Niin se auttoi niinku siinä tajuamaan, että se ei ole henkilökohtaisesti minulle. [...] vaan se on juuri sitä naisvihaa, että periaatteessa niinku kuka tahansa olisi voinut olla siinä” [Original quotation modified for anonymity].

*that playing this theatre in which me and some hostile gang is fighting each other is irrelevant: because then the attention is not in the system that is structurally oppressive”.*¹⁵

The respondent concerned was the only respondent that did not identify as an activist because their actions had spiritual foundations. The respondent recognized their activities as compatible with the definitions, but their activism was described as a transformative way of life evolving from the difficulty to existing inside the systemic frames of normative society. The respondent later during the interview expressed that they would continue their actions eventually and that they had learned that next time, they would strive to utilize the hate and critics by steering them to the oppressive system, instead of getting stuck with the participation of their own victimization.

The descriptions of the respondent resembled transformative learning, which was one of the main concepts in the research of Kovan & Dirkx (2003). According to Mezirow (2018, p. 116), transformative learning is “the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change”. He argues that such frames are structures for the ways in which meaning is constructed by attributing significance and consistency to our experiences; and that people program their actions through these limiting frames selectively based on beliefs, intentions, expectations, and purposes.

In the study of Kovan & Dirkx (2003) the hardship that activists went through, was considered a part of transformative learning, through which they understood their work as a calling. In their research activists frequently mentioned head, heart, and spirit as their motivation (2003, p. 108), which portrays the experiences of activists in this research as well.

¹⁵ “[...] mua niinkun surettaa todella paljon, että se teatteri ja se kaikki show ja semmoinen, mikä käynnistyi aikanaan, niin siinähan sivuutettiin [ne tärkeät asiat], koska se liittyi turvapaikanhakijoihin suomessa ja heidän niinku keissien käsittelyn ongelmiin ja tiukentuneeseen turvapaikkapolitiikkaan, niin tuota... ja se oli sipilän hallitus silloin niin, että sehän se oli niinku tavallaan se vihatoimija. Ja että se oli niinku hallitus, se oli ministerit, se oli migrin johto. Ne oli niinku ne, jotka tihkui vihaa tähän yhteiskuntaan, kun ne piti migrissä taululla tilastoa, että kuinka paljon me saadaan perheitä lähetettyä takaisin. Ja sitten tavallaan heitähän palvelee se, että se kamera siirretään näihin muutamaan reppanaan, jotka haukkuu [mua] jossain netissä. Tavallaan mä ajattelen, että systeemi nauttii siitä, että me kiinnitetään huomio niinku näihin jotenkin räikeimpiin tapauksiin ja siinä mä tarkoitan koko niinku kapitalistista systeemiä. Se on niinku täyttä vihapuhetta, koska se tuhoaa tämän niinku yhteiskunnan, ilmaston, kaiken. Ja myös semmoinen niinku individualistinen materialismi niin se on niinku sitä pahinta vihapuhetta, sen takia että se on normalisoitunut.

Et kyl mä vaan niinku suoraan sanoa, että vaikka mä oon käynyt tämän myllyn läpi ja niinku saanut tuhansia vihaviestejä ja ollut oikeudessa, niin ne ei ollut ne, jotka tuhoaa mun mielestä tätä yhteiskuntaa, tai joka tuhosi silloin niinku turvapaikanhakijoiden tulevaisuutta. Että ihan sama... siis jos otetaan vertailukohteeksi afganistanilainen perhe, joka saa niinku kielteisen päätöksen olla suomessa; Hazara perhe, jonka henki on uhattuna kotimaassa...niin kyllä ne sen kestää, jos kadulla joku huutelee, vaikka sekin on ihan kauheeta. Mutta se mitä migri teki heille, niin se on niinku se viharikos. Ja tavallaan näin mä sanon ihan näin suoraan. koska näin tää mun mielestä on. Jolloin myös se, että voidaan pelata semmoista teatteria, että tämmöinen [minä] ja sitten joku ihme vihamielinen joukkio taistelee keskenään, niin tavallaan se on epäoleellista. Silloin huomio ei ole niinku siinä systeemissä, joka rakenteellisesti sortaa”.

4.3. Extrinsic determiners of unexpected consequences

The last subchapter argued that activists have innate characteristics, or deep perspectives of root causes, that help them overcome hate speech. However, those factors represent only the inner traits. In addition to the intrinsic motivations, also external sources of persistence were described in the experiences of activists. Extrinsic determiners for unexpected consequences from hate speech were recognized to be linked to other people, a sense of responsibility to them, and also expectations of how others will react to activism – which determined how surprising the attacks were – or how successfully the respondent shielded themselves from the beginning.

4.3.1. Community in standing and in failing

Prior literature has recognized the community as a determinant of activists' well-being (Nepstad, 2004; Chen & Gorski, 2015). Community and its actions have been recognized to be a reason for commitment and persistence (Nepstad, 2004), but also a predeterminate for activist burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Furthermore, other people's expectations, belonging to a community, or having a collective identity with a group of people, can shape an activist identity and contribute to its development (Horowitz, 2017).

The respondents talked about the community and other people's feedback considerably. Mainly community was described as vital. Sometimes one reason for activism was a longing for a collective or community that would share the values and be present in an alternative way of life. Some described how the community's positive feedback and comments are golden in work, that is ungrateful in many ways:

"The thing that gives, and keeps moving, is all the good. When people say that I feel seen when reading your columns. And damn, when someone thanks me, that they have never seen a person their size on the stage, like 'thank you that I got to see this'. Or, when you hear that someone, like people I know, says that 'wow I never thought it like that – that there is a lot of internalized misogyny in the world'. That's the best feedback. And I think that if I did these things, a I would never get anything back, it could become too heavy. But knowing that there are a lot of people who are empowered, get food for thought, or gain representation gives me strength".¹⁶

When considering the ungrateful nature of activism and its relevancy to exhaustion (Chen & Gorski, 2015), it is interesting how well the respondents utilized the manifestation of that ungratefulness to their benefit. They often described how hostile comments can be used for mobilization or receiving

¹⁶ "Se mikä niinkun antaa ja pitää liikkeessä on sit kaikki se hyvä. Se kun ihmiset sanoo, että sun kolumnia lukiessa minulla on nähty olo. Siis hitto, tai että joku kiittää, että en ole koskaan nähnyt itseni kokoista ihmistä lavalla, kiitos että sain nähdä tämän. Tai että kuulee jotain tyyppejä, että niiden ajattelussa on nitkahtanut joku, siis tuttuja, että ne on niinku ihan että vau en oo ikinä ajatellut noin, että sisäistetty naisviha, sitä on paljon maailmassa. Tyytit niinku näin. Niin sehän se on se niinku paras palaute. Et mä luulen et jos mä tekisin näitä tekoja. Ja en ikinä sais mitään niinku takaisin, niin sen voisi käydä niinku raskaaksi. Mutta nythän se, että mä vaan tiedän, että on tosi paljon ihmisiä, jotka saa tästä mun duunista voimia tai ajateltavaa tai representaatiota, tuo voimaa".

empathy from their peers. It was common, that the hate content was shared to demonstrate or raise awareness of the importance of their activism. The same principle of sharing and demonstration applies to the concept “slacktivism” that was presented by Morozow (2009). Despite online activism having its critics (Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Gladwell, 2010-10-27), it seems to have a stronger community presence than expected.

One respondent discussed their utilization of hate speech in the recruitment of activists to enable activism in the safety of a big community. The activist group ended up getting an exponential kickstart after the respondent and her friend was targeted; signifying that instead of hate speech being a silencing factor in this case; it ended up amplifying multiple voices:

“[... when the action was] we noticed how huge the hate was and such, and we just had to do something about it. So basically, if someone wants to send me threats, I just get more pissed and want to support others in their activism. So, the group kind of was started as a result, which I think, is a strong indication that the threats are not stopping us”.¹⁷

Even if community or other people were mostly portrayed in positive light, there were also parts that had more negative connotations, which relate to boundary adjustments of a category-based activist:

“And personally, I don't hang out with any North African, for example. Even so, few times, I received nice messages [...] saying like ‘I'm really proud of you, you're really doing well, and hope to see you’. And I was like... this is nice, but I don't... you know?”

Like I don't even want to meet people from my own country because in the end they will put me to the same circle that I don't want to be in. So, you know, in the beginning, one or two, they will be supporting – but this one or two will open the door 2000 people because the community is small here and everybody know each other, you know? Then you need to meet this and that, and then people start to criticize.”

The last respondent belonged to two historically oppressed groups. However, the respondent experienced that the identity group that is greater in size holds values against the respondent's other identity group, which has resulted in boundary adjustments for the respondent. Furthermore, it could be assumed, that by decreasing the size of his in-group by establishing boundary adjustments, his category-based activist identity could be strengthened.

4.3.2. Responsibility

Feelings of obligation or responsibility were frequently mentioned by the respondents. Feelings of responsibility varied from responsibility in general to responsibility for self and others. The

¹⁷ “[... kun se aktio oli] ja me huomattiin et miten valtava se viha oli ja kaikkea, niin sitten meillä oli niinku pakko tehdä jotain sille asialle. Että mulla tulee just se et, jos joku lähettää mulle uhkailu viestejä, niin mua alkaa vituttaa vaan enemmän ja sit mä haluan niinku tarjota muille tukea, jotka voi sit tehdä aktivismia. Et sit se ryhmä niinku myös lähti siitä, mikä on mun mielestä aika semmoinen niinku voimakas osoitus, että ei se kauheasti auta se uhkailu”.

responsibility of a group was considered a factor in the creation of a role-based activist identity (Horowitz, 2017). Furthermore, Rodgers (2010) and Chen & Gorski (2015) suggested that responsibility to the cause or others could be predeterminate of activist burnout. In the interviews responsibilities were narrated with multiple choices of words, which held the same message:

*” And the older I have gotten; I have come to thinking that I the maturity comes with so many privileges. For example, that when I go around in the world as a grown-up, compared to a teenage girl, I have such a different status. I also have space in the society and a possibility to use my voice in different level than other, which is why I feel like **I am responsible** for using these privileges well, and for good”.*¹⁸

*“[...] And as I have seen and heard – and what I know from my own everyday life, the kind of discrimination that I’ve faced – and how other members in the community live surrounded by it. Then that too has given me this passion that something **has to be done**”.*¹⁹

The respondents were driven by their responsibility to use their efforts for good of others. And even though respondents’ activism was often somehow related to their struggles in society, they often discussed their activism as something that is done for others. Prior literature has discussed the sense of responsibility of activists from the perspective of organized activists’ responsibility to each other (Rodgers, 2010; Nepstad, 2004). In this study, however, the activists often expressed their responsibility to a wider community – possibly because of the prominence of social media and online platforms in their activism.

One of the respondents in the entire research was affected more than others. They experienced the consequences of hate speech to their well-being, and thereby activism was extensive. They had changed tactics to continue their activism despite the deterioration of their well-being, but they also expressed disappointment over that. I asked the respondent whether they think their mental health would be in a better state if they never would have done activism:

*“It is difficult to say, because **it’s not like I have a choice**. If something is wrong, then it **has to be fixed, right?** [...] I think that in those topics where I have something to give, **it is my responsibility** to do so; no matter what it brings forth to me”.*²⁰

This specific respondent’s activism was very much connected to their underrepresented position in society. It was very difficult to differentiate the respondent’s experiences of hate speech and discrimination in general, and as part of activism, or between the effects of it personally and their

¹⁸ ”Ja sit mitä vanhemmaksi olen tullut niin nykyisin ajattelen, että mulla on niin paljon etuoikeuksia, jotka syntyy niinku iän myötä - siis ihan se, että kun mä pyörin aikuisena ihmisenä maailmalla, niin mulla on ihan eri tavalla statusta kun että pyörisin teinityttöinä. Ja sitten mulla on nykyisin myöskin yhteiskunnallista tilaa ja mulla on mahdollisuus käyttää mun ääntä ihan eri levelillä kuin muilla, niin mä koen, että se tuo myös tiettyä vastuuta siihen, että näitä etuoikeuksia tulee käyttää niinku hyvin ja hyvään”.

¹⁹ “[...] Niin sitten kun on nähnyt ja kuullut, ja tietää omasta arjestaan, että millaista syrjintää kohtaa ja miten niinku muut yhteisön jäsenet, että mitä se elämä on sen syrjinnän keskellä. Niin sitten siitakin on tullut semmoista paloa, että jotainhan tässä pitää tehdä”.

²⁰ ”Ihan hirveän vaikea sanoa koska tota eihän mulla on ollut vaihtoehtoa siinä. Että pitäähän sitä lähteä tekemään, että joku asia on vaan niin semmoinen että se on pielessä, niin sehän on korjattava [...] mä ajattelen että niissä asioissa missä mä koen, että mulla on eniten annettavaa, niin niissä mulla on velvollisuus toimia sitten; riippumatta siitä, mitä se mulle aiheuttaa”.

activism; until they started talking about responsibility. The respondent had experienced discrimination based on their identity on daily basis for years, but their sense of responsibility seemed to be linked to their calling in trying to save others from the same fate. They acknowledged that it is very difficult to assess the effects of activism (or hate speech stemming from only that) on their capacity to act.

Moreover, when the respondent discussed their responsibility for others, their tone of voice lightened significantly. Hence, even if it was difficult to assess the consequences of hate speech on the respondent's activism overall, I do consider that in this case, a feeling of responsibility and a sense of justice was crucial for the respondent's resilience. However, as Chen & Gorski (2015) argued moral obligation to the cause could partially determine activist burnout, which is why it is crucial to assess if activists' resilience only enables them to bite the bullet a bit longer, but which turns against them eventually.

4.3.3. Preparing and conditioning

Often respondents seemed to be quite conditioned to the negative implications of their activism. Surely many activists know from the start that their demands and actions are controversial because otherwise there would not seem to be a reason to do activism, to begin with. As one described:” [...] *when you think of doing activism, you cannot just do it. You must prepare, be prepared, and think about the safety measures, surrounding support, and everything.*”²¹

However, when the safety measures and support systems were previously discussed, the general impression from them was that the activists adopted them over time, instead of considering them from the start. Of course, the magnitude of hate and threats is easily surprising, especially if there is no prior experience of publicly challenging social norms or criticizing them; so, it could be, that the necessity of protective measures is realized the hard way. Multiple respondents expressed how surprised they were in the beginning when they started to gain a lot of negative attention. Many of them, however, had conditioned to negative attention as a tax for doing activism:

*“It really is a tedious downside in doing activism. But I have thought that sadly, it is the price women must pay to take part in public discourse – whether you are a journalist, activist, or a politician. The pattern is always the same. And it shouldn't be like this, but it is what it is, and we just have to live with it. And everybody just needs to do their own decisions whether it is something they want to do or not”.*²²

²¹ “[...] kun miettii aktivismia ja sen tekemistä niin ei sitä voi vaan tieteen tahtoon jotenkin lähteä tekemään. Just että pitää valmistautua ja olla valmistautunut ja miettiä ne omat jotenkin turvakeinot ja tuki ympärille ja kaikkea”.

²² “Kyllä se niinku on todella ikävä varjopuoli tässä aktivismissa. Mutta tuota mä oon just ajellut silleen, että se on niinku valitettavasti se hinta mikä naisen pitää maksaa siitä, että osallistuu julkiseen keskusteluun, että että oli sitten journalisti nainen, aktivisti nainen tai

"I think here everyone is their own responsibility. And they said it before when I was in back at [...], they repeated: every activist has his own responsibility to protect himself from any kind of violence. And also, this hate speech and this kind of violence, it is what I name it like... it's the tax that we pay for what we are doing in society. We are making a change, and this change will not come for free. We pay from our own life, but also this is the tax that we pay. That's it. That's how I see it".²³

poliitikko nainen. Niin se niinku kuvio on niinku sama. Että sen ei pitäisi olla niin ja se ei ole oikein, mutta niinku it is what it is ja sen kanssa nyt joudutaan sitten elämään. Niinku, että pitää jokaisen tehdä ne omat valinnat, että haluaako sitten tehdä sitä vai ei".

²³ Original quotation modified for anonymity.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the last few years, as the scientific interest in the effects of hate speech has increased, concern about its effects on societal participation has grown. The concerns are often communicated on the social media platforms of equality organizations (f. e. UN Women Finland, 2022; Naisten linja, 2022; Nytkis Ry, 2022). The concerns often include activists, but as activists and civic participators have always been subjected to heavy consequences for their actions, they could have greater persistence against hate speech as well. Thus, this research aimed to understand whether activists are affected by hate speech to the same extent that for example, elected politicians are. Two research questions were presented to study the phenomenon. The first research question was to recognize if activists discussed unexpected consequences from hate speech: *could hate speech have unexpected consequences for activism?* Additionally, a second research question was needed to identify explanations for unexpectedness: *how can unexpected consequences be explained by analyzing activists' experiences?*

The empirical analysis was thematic. With three main themes, that had 2-3 subthemes each, I was able to filter the vast amount of data into meaningful categories. The themes were complementary to each other and the order in which they were presented was deliberate to portray the phenomena accurately and answer the research questions logically. Table 3 summarizes the key findings of each theme, which are further discussed in this chapter.

Table 5. Key findings of empirical analysis

Main theme	Discrepancy between personal cost and action	Intrinsic determiners of unexpected consequences	Extrinsic determiners of unexpected consequences
<i>Subthemes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of escalation • Suppression of personal life to do activism. • Action not disrupted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fueled by inner traits. • Root cause perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community in standing and in failing. • Responsibility • Preparing or conditioning
<i>Key findings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activists are not bulletproof, and the consequences are often personal. • Symbolic boundary adjustments as a social boundary • Protective measures • Power of values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics or worldviews inseparable from self: predeterminer of persistence and burnout • Demonstration of cause and need for continuance. • Transformative learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like-minded as a community • Utilization of hate speech • Activist identity: boundary adjustments & responsibility • Responsibility as a predeterminer of persistence and burnout • Conditioning

The analysis identified that there are, indeed, unexpected consequences for hate speech to activists. The expected effects were more likely experienced personally, than disrupting activism. If expected consequences were expressed, they were often discussed as a matter to overcome, to continue activism. Activists reasoned their attempts to overcome the negative experience or activist burnout, with innate characteristics or worldviews, or perceptions of hate speech as a demonstration of the cause. Moreover, considering community and a sense of responsibility as a factor fostering

persistence was common, and sometimes hate speech was utilized within communities as a tool for mobilization. The key finding however was, that according to this analysis, but also prior literature (Rodgers, 2010; Chen & Gorski, 2015; Kovan & Dirkx 2003) the factors that are often considered to enhance persistence, are similarly, the ones that precede activist burnout. Furthermore, an interesting contrast to prior literature on slacktivism and online activism (Cabrera, et. al., 2017; Kutlaca, et. al., 2020; Gladwell, 2010-10-27) was noticed, as respondents frequently referred to online communities as crucial, which contradicts prior views of online communities' weak psychological ties and potential in building collective identity.

5.1. Discussion

The key findings from each theme portrayed relevant aspects to consider when answering the research questions. They also were significant in terms of the preliminary assumptions of this research. First and foremost, it was noticed that activists are not bulletproof to hate speech. Activists portrayed fear, anxiety, and decreased elbowroom in their actions, which is compatible with prior research (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017; Knuutila, et. al., 2019; Vedeler, et. al., 2019; Doerfler, et. al., 2021). Some of the activists had breaks from their actions to recover or changed tactics entirely due to deteriorating well-being. These examples can be seen as the realization of the expected consequences of hate speech; assuming, that expected consequences are withdrawal and being silenced from participation (Saresma, et. al., 2022; Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017; Siegel, 2020). Nevertheless, the experiences of disruption of activism in the sample group were marginal and despite being affected expectedly, the respondents concerned expressed vigorousness in continuing their actions in one way or another. Hence, the analysis suggested that activists are not bulletproof to expected consequences, but that the effects are more likely experienced personally, rather than being disruptive to their activism. Such a finding has a significant contradiction to the consensus that hate speech disrupts participation.

However, a surprising finding relating to expected consequences and activist identity was noticed. The analysis identified features of "symbolic identity boundaries" (Stuart, et. al., 2013) which were noticed to have more negative consequences for activists' agency, than what is traditionally considered hate speech. Such finding could have a logical explanation; collective identity and community support are key determiners of activists' persistence (Nepstad, 2004; Chen & Gorski, 2015); thus, diminishing them could result in decreased motivation. Moreover, hostile behavior of peers and group cultures can also be considered a precedent of activist burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015).

Such a finding is relevant in light of the development of contemporary activism. As a significant share of social lives has shifted to online platforms, the conceptions of how communities or groups are assessed, have blurred. Meaning, that while in organized groups people know precisely who belongs to their community, in online realities there could be significant ambiguity in the determination of communities or collective identities. And while there has been critique towards online communities (Gladwell, 2010-10-27), this study has indicated that the psychological ties between online communities are stronger than perceived and that conflicts within the perceived collective identities could be uneasy.

Generally, the consequences of hate speech were however unexpected, even though activists experienced negative emotions from it. Respondents frequently discussed experiencing negative feelings in everyday situations such as public transportation, or how they suppressed their personal lives due to hate speech. Yet, most of the activists still considered hate speech as rather a provocation, than a disruption of their actions, despite the negative effects on them personally. The provocation and determination that stemmed from being targeted with hate speech, and which enhanced the activists' persistence against it, was reasoned through personal characteristics and values. Such finding is supported by previous research where it has been suggested that individual characteristics and values are connected to the formation of activist identity (f. e., Kutlaca, et. al., 2020; Snow & McAdam, 2000), which fosters activists' persistence in movements (Nepstad, 2004). Furthermore, activists often discussed the importance of protective measures. Additionally, feelings of conditioning, or getting used to hate speech as part of activism, were mentioned. It seemed that the protective measures were often incorporated into activists' lives over time, possibly as a phase in the process of becoming conditioned.

The discrepancy of personal consequences and effects on activism were also discussed in terms of learning, root cause thinking, and mobilization. The activists often stated that hate speech rather indicates what needs to be discussed more, than scares them off. It was seen as a symptom of the structures or systems that the activists opposed, to begin with, making it even more important to not let it affect their activism. The root cause or systemic thinking helped in depersonalizing the attacks, as it fostered a viewpoint, where anyone opposing the normative society would be treated the same. Moreover, root-cause thinking was also utilized in mobilization. The respondents often considered that hate speech played important role in the expansion of the movement/activism, as it was often used to demonstrate the issue, that is widely normalized in society (f. e. misogyny).

Furthermore, activist identity as such was less mentioned in the answers as was first considered. It seemed not to be something that would simply explain headstrongness for example. Such deviance from the expected could be, in a sense, explained by the collective nature of activist identity. For example, Snow & McAdam (2000) and Stuart, et. al., (2013) mentioned that there is ambiguousness in determining whether activist identity is developed after joining the movement, or whether there are pre-determining traits in individuals to explain it. Additionally, Nepstad (2004) suggested that activist identity is formed through collective action, and not for example ideological premises. Thus, it could be that headstrongness is essential in becoming an activist, but because it has existed within the individuals already before becoming an activist, it is not considered a part of activist identity per se. However, as responsibility and community were often mentioned in the experiences, some connections to f. e. Horowitz's (2017) research on activist identity could be drawn. The connections were related to boundary adjustments of category-based activist identity, and the responsibility of role-based activist identity.

Features of role-based activist identity as a factor enhancing resilience were found in the data. Horowitz (2017, p. 11-12) suggested that a role-based activist identity could enhance the persistence of activists in a movement, resulting from the sense of obligation that they feel towards their community. The sense of responsibility and obligation was extensively described by the respondents in this study; and even in the cases where the respondents had experienced the expected consequences of hate speech, responsibility was mentioned and emphasized as a reason to continue. Moreover, those respondents who discussed responsibility and showed signs of role-based activist identity often expressed their responsibility to a wider community. Such findings could connect to the prominence of social media and online platforms, as contemporary role-based activists could have communities that are at least partially online; extending their social lives and activism, but also their sense of collective identity and responsibility further.

Personal characteristics, worldviews, values, or sense of responsibility to others; were often discussed in connection to persistence. The data highlighted these factors as evident in shielding the respondents from hate speech and its consequences to activism. While personal characteristics, worldviews, values, and sense of responsibility to others are connected to activist identity, they are also associated with emotional energy, which has been considered the main tool for mobilization and commitment in movements (f. e. Cosstick, 1994 in Kovan & Dirks, 2003, p. 101; Aminzade & McAdam, 2002, p. 15).

Nevertheless, authors that have studied reasons for activist burnout have suggested that at least parts of emotional energy (f. e. values, or sense of responsibility and urgency) could in some contexts precede activist burnout (Rodgers, 2010; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Chen & Gorski, 2015). Often the context includes a community that has a culture of selflessness (Rodgers, 2010) or a “culture of martyrdom”, that can occur and be imperceptibly maintained within organized activists’ groups, due to the common personal characteristics and values of selflessness of activists (Chen & Gorski, 2015, p. 382). The significance of the activists’ traits in maintaining emotionally draining cultures was demonstrated in the research of Kovan & Dirkx (2003, p. 112), where respondents depicted self-care as painful because it is self-focused. This specific context identified before was not identified in this study, which could explain why the emotional energy was described in a positive light.

However, some indications of activist burnout were visible in the analysis. For example, the sense of responsibility and personal values played a significant part in marginal cases where the activists’ well-being was risked. Such findings could indicate that individual activists can create similar conditions for themselves, as the culture of selflessness would in organized groups. Thus, the flip side of emotional energy cannot entirely be disregarded. Even so, it needs to be noted that the connections between emotional energy and activist burnout are not necessarily one-sided, because the determiners of both could simultaneously result in a willingness to learn from what happened. At least the respondents in this study, who experienced signs of activist burnout seemed to be searching for ways to overcome their barriers, instead of quitting.

Such willingness to learn could result in transformative learning (as was demonstrated in Kovan & Dirkx 2003). The analysis identified, that one of the respondents in this research had gone through something like activist burnout because of their activism. The respondent had recovered and was able to retrospectively discuss the experience as something that allowed them to learn for the future. Even though constant learning was something that most of the respondents portrayed in their experiences; whether in improving their protective measures, or tactics of mobilization; this specific learning experience had similarities to transformative learning that could be one of the ways to persist in activist movements and overcome activist burnout (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

5.2. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have been assessing what kinds of consequences might hate speech have for activism. I argued that activists could be more resilient against hate speech, due to their activist identity or innate characteristics. Moreover, I addressed how activists as change leaders have been

limitedly covered in prior research that assessed the effects of hate speech on participation – which I claimed to reflect the general opinions towards activists' work. To demonstrate the shortcomings of prior literature I analyzed the experiences of activists in Finland to fill the acknowledged research gap. My analysis was based on key concepts that were significant to understand the phenomenon; activism as a crucial part of institutional democracy, activist identity, activist burnout, and hate speech as an ill-defined and complex phenomenon. Additionally, cultural context as a relevant factor was reflected as background information. Data was gathered by interviewing eight activists from different fields of interest, which was thematically analyzed to answer the research questions.

My first research question was: *could hate speech have unexpected consequences for activism?* The analysis identified that hate speech has, indeed, unexpected consequences for activism. Even though activists are not bulletproof to the negative effects of hate speech, the consequences from it are often experienced personally instead of letting them affect their activism. There was even a clear consensus, that the activists are not willing to let the hate speech stop them. Instead, if the expected consequences were realized in a way that activism was disrupted, the activists tended to overcome the effects by searching for support and mobilizing, learning from the experience, and creating protective measures for the future. Thus, the unexpected consequences of hate speech could be classified as direct or indirect. While the increasing determination and motivation are a direct unexpected consequence; the other effects could be seen as indirect as they are generally used to overcome the expected consequences. However, as they would not necessarily occur without hate speech, it means that f. e. expansion of the movement is an unexpected consequence from an expected consequence.

My second research question studied *how can unexpected consequences be explained by analyzing activists' experiences?* As mentioned, increased motivation and determination were recognized as a direct unexpected consequence. The activists reasoned their reactions with their innate traits, like personal characteristics, sense of responsibility, values, worldviews, and root cause thinking. Additionally, the importance of community and peer support was emphasized. The analysis of these factors was reflected in prior research, and I was able to associate them with activist identity and emotional energy. Activist identity was identified as a relevant factor in recognizing how intergroup and community relations, collective identity, or sense of responsibility could determine activists' resilience. Moreover, emotional energy, referring to a combination of activists' worldviews, values, and innate traits, was identified to foster persistence as well. However, this does not come without qualifications. It was identified in prior research that a combination of emotional energy and a culture of selflessness (either as self-inflicted or because of intergroup relations) could precede activist

burnout. And even though infallible signals of such were missing from this study, indications of the risks were occasionally visible. Thus, in the worst-case scenario, there is a risk that emotional energy only prolongs the activists' endurance, eventually leading to activist burnout.

Furthermore, some of the factors that were recognized as indirect unexpected consequences were also noted to enhance resilience: for example, protective measures were obviously considered important. However, respondents also expressed creativity by refining hate speech into a tool for their purposes, which provided them peer support and empathy, but was also used to demonstrate the issues and mobilize. This finding, along with other remarks on community and peers indicated that online platforms could be better support for activism than priorly agreed. Thus, this study slightly challenges the concept of slacktivism.

Finally, one interesting, but weakly supported, an indication of an unexpected consequence was transformative learning. Allusions to transformative learning occurred in analysis, and while its prominence was slight in the entire sample, prior literature supported the suspicion. As transformative learning could enable lifelong endurance in movements, as any hardships would be considered as a profoundly transforming learning experience; it is worthy of presenting, despite being less commonly mentioned.

5.2.1. Limitations of the study

This study did not come without considerable limitations. As a master's thesis the resources for its executions were not aligned with the worth of the research. The time spent with background research, interviews, and analysis could have been doubled and still, there would have been an aspect that would have not been discovered.

Furthermore, the results of the research are not generalizable due to the small sample group, which itself had significant limitations. The respondents of the study were mostly located within a 200 km radius of the capital city, which could remarkably affect how severely the consequences of hate speech are experienced, as the effects of negative attention to material, physical, and psychological safety could be greater in smaller cities. Furthermore, the sample group was limited also in terms of diversity – as racially, ethnically, and culturally underrepresented activists were almost missing. Furthermore, the group only included one environmental activist, and for example, animal rights activists were missing altogether. Additionally, differentiation between individual activists and activists belonging to collectives or organizations would have been useful. Hence, even if the findings

of this study suggest that activists are not equally affected by hate speech, the finding cannot be generalized and should be treated as such.

Furthermore, the consideration of the conflict of interest of the author needs to be evaluated with transparency. The researcher has a background in activism and therefore, interpreted the data and phenomena as insider and outsider. Some of the people interviewed were also familiar with the researcher. Such factors inevitably affect the interpretations, as there is tacit background knowledge that cannot be fully addressed. However, this was borne in mind throughout the analysis and interpretations. Additionally, as Fossey, et. al. (2002, p. 730 citing Denzin) noted; “the extent to which anyone is able to represent the experiences and intentional meanings of others depends on interpretations that are necessarily personal, experiential, and political”. Hence, a positionality of some kind can be somewhat expectable in qualitative research. Furthermore, tacit knowledge was constantly considered as a factor that insists vigorous transparency in the reporting. Thus, the extra effort to make the links between findings and data visible and comprehensible to the reader was made, as suggested by Fossey, et. al. (2002).

Moreover, to be noted, the findings from the research are personally indifferent to the researcher – and none of the possible findings was considered more valuable than the other. In that sense, there was no risk of intentionally producing biased discoveries. Analyzing the data truthfully and making legitimate research was my main interest – both as an activist – as a researcher.

5.2.2. Contributions and suggestions for future research

This study has provided a glimpse into understanding how activism is affected by hate speech and why an activist’s agency is not as easily disrupted as commonly considered. And even though the contribution is an interesting starting point for further research, it is not a credible basis for any generalizations. However, concerning prior research, this study does have some important considerations for organized activists.

First, this study indicates the importance of knowing more about activist burnout, as activists with strong activist identities and high emotional energy could be at risk of burnout. Without recognizing its symptoms or causes, activist burnout could disrupt the activist’s agency eventually. Moreover, especially in organized groups, it is crucial to focus on an atmosphere that fosters well-being and is free of hostility. Time and space for discussing any conflicts, negative emotions, or fatigue can have a tremendous influence on a group’s persistence.

Furthermore, this study also left behind interesting prospects for future research. Firstly, to generalize any of the findings presented here, similar research should be done with a larger number of respondents and more diverse demographics. Moreover, as there could be differences between activists in different fields of interest, comparisons between those could be useful. Additionally, as individual activists and activists that are members of organizations were not differentiated here, comparison between different types of activists in that sense could also indicate possible differences in f. e. how collective identity is perceived, and whether measures for conflicts within the groups can prevent activist burnout or otherwise foster well-being.

Altogether, as it was discovered that some factors in determining the activists' persistence, could be those that precede activist burnout, it would be relevant to do more research on that with reflection on different activist identities. Specifically, a comparison of the benefits and damages of activist identity and emotional energy is needed. Equally important would be an understanding of contextual differences that result in activist burnout, and on the contrary, to the resilience of activists.

Finally, as transformative learning as a tool for overcoming activists' struggles received minor consolidation, it could be further studied to create frameworks of transformative learning for activists' use to foster their physical, emotional, and psychological safety. Transformational learning could be a key for development, that could result in more sustainable practices of activism – that in turn, foster diverse democracy.

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APPENDICES

Interview Script

Beginning: practicalities and definitions

- Estimated length of the interview is 30-60 minutes.
- Suggestion to discuss experiences freely, and if needed, additional or guiding questions will be asked.
- Definition of hate speech: Hate speech is bias-motivated, hostile, and malicious language targeted at a person or group because of their actual or perceived innate characteristics. It is demeaning, threatening, or incitement to hostility and violence.

Additionally, it was noted that literature recognizes occasions where hate speech could be hard to describe, even if the target is negatively affected by it. As the research is focused on personal experiences, discussing also those experiences were encouraged, even if they would not fit the definition. It was asked to verbalize the experience as detailed as possible.

- Definition of activist: any person who actively participates socially or politically; or strives to change faults they have recognized at structural, institutional, or systemic level.
- Finally, as a measure to enhance respondent's feeling of safety, it was asked if the participant would like to give any pre-information that they would like the interviewer to be aware of before starting. Additionally, it was suggested that if any discomfort arises, it is expressed, so the interview can be interrupted or terminated. Consent for recording was confirmed.

Table 6 Interview Script

	Main question:	Keywords if needed:
1.	Who are you and what kind of activism are you practicing?	
2.	How have you become an activist and why?	Triggering event; marginalized position; only possibility to participate in structural; institutional, or systemic level; what motivates your activism; how would you describe the consciousness of your agency
3.	Have you experienced hate speech often because of your activism?	One or more occasion(s); one person, group of people, or both
4.	Would you tell me about the occasion when you have experienced hate speech because of your activism?	Triggering event (appearing in the news or an article, a protest, or other reason for the attack); describe the hate speech you experienced and was there a specific feature that it was directed at; how did it feel to get targeted?
5.	Were there any outcomes from the hate speech you experienced: did it affect you personally?	
6.	How about your activism, was it affected?	
7.	Finally, would you have anything else that you would like to tell me about or add?	,

In the end: possibility to ask questions and final information.

- Once the recording had ended, information and possibility to ask questions was offered to confirm that participant knows their rights and has interviewer's contact information in case of f. e. wishes of withdrawal.
- It was once more made clear how the data is handled.
- It was asked whether the respondent wants to proofread the transcripts.

Pre-translation quotations of table 2

Table 5. Non-translated version of table 2

Codes and explanations:	Example extract:
Expected feelings or behavior. (Negative emotions, f. e. anxiety; or negative consequences, f. e. withdrawal)	”Vaikutukset muhun itseän, niin tuota välillä on tosi semmoisessa virittyneessä stressitilassa tai ahdistus tilassa, niinku silleen 24/7, että on vaikea nukkua ja tälleen.”
Unexpected feelings or behavior (Unexpected emotions, or consequences)	”Joskus se on vaikuttanut muhun niin, että se on antanut enemmänkin sellaista draivia ja voimaa, että jos ihmiset ajattelee noin niin mun pitää vielä enemmän jotenkin kutsua ihmisiä mukaan ja niinku näin, että näkyy semmoinen toinen näkökulma.”
Discrepancy of feelings and behavior (Signs of discrepancy between expected and unexpected feelings or behavior)	”Ja itse niinku täydellisesti ymmärrän niitä, jotka on vetäytynyt tai ei ole alun perinkään lähtenyt, mutta itse olen tehnyt valinnan pysyä siinä, koska tästä päästään siihen mun oikeudenmukaisuus luonteenpiirteeseen, että vaikka kuinka ottaisi hittiä niin sit mä oon silleen, että en jumalauta anna niille mitä ne haluaa et mä niinku pysyn tässä. Mutta sitten et kyllä yleensä sillä on niinku myös seurauksia niinku ihan omalle mielenterveydelle.”
Activism over conventional participation (Any reasons for doing activism instead of politics)	“You know the politic life here in Finland, like many other countries, from my own point of view, it is not that easy, and it is not that accessible for everyone. Even so, we see a lot of immigrant background people in politics; they are in Parliament, mayor of city or whatever, but it is still, I don’t know, I don’t feel they are there because they want them. Probably because, I do not want to generalize, because they want probably some <i>yeah, we are open and people of color here</i> . But how much really, they have the decision, and how much they can make decision inside those political parties? We have from the most far right to the left you know. And all of them you can find immigrant. But what is important for me, is how much they give impact, how much they change, how much their voice is heard?”
Identity factors (Activism is, or can be, explained with identity, personality, or character traits)	”No mä luulen, et mä oon aina ollut ehkä sen luonteinen, että mä en hyväksy sitä, että asiat on jotenkin väärin tai epäoikeudenmukaisesti. Et mä aina haluan tietää perustelut kaikille asioille ja jos ne perustelut ei mua tyydytä, niin sitten mä en halua totella sitä ja mä haluan myös vapauttaa muutkin siitä jostakin säännöstä tai tämmöisestä.”
Quality of hate speech (Mapping of different qualities of hate speech from experiences)	”Mä olisin valmis niinku siihen, että joku haastaisi jonkun mun väitteen tai tois toisen tutkimustuloksen tai niinku näin. Tämmöistä tekisin mielelläni, mutta ne on semmosia niinku että älä sinä läski huora niinku jaksa länkyttää ja miksi nää on aina vaan rumia ja laskien ongelmia ja semmoisia niinku ulkonäkökeskeisiä, et se on se mulla niinku helpoin semmoinen mihin niinku tyypit tarttuu. Ja mun kehon kommentointi.”

<p>Community</p> <p>(How is community framed in the experiences?)</p>	<p>”No siis vihapuhe, siis sinähän on paljon myös hyvää, koska tota kun sitä saa, niin sitten kun sitä jakaa muille, niin sillähän saa itselleen myös lämpöä ja myötätuntoa. Ja saa ehkä muita valjastettua asian taakse, että sitä voi hyödyntää myös, että useampi ihminen herää, että hei mä en ole tiennyt, että tää on näin hirveätä ja näin.”</p>
<p>Feedback</p> <p>(How is feedback framed in the experiences?)</p>	<p>”Niin kun mulla ei oikein vieläkään, että oliko se hyvä idea, että mä tein rikosilmoituksen vai ei. En mä vieläkään tiedä. Mä haluan ajatella, että se on tärkeätä ja se on jollain tavalla ennakkotapaus ja näin kun siinä tuomittiin sitten joku 38 ihmistä ... ja se tuntui musta hyvältä, että monet laittoivat viestiä ketkä on itse ollut samassa tilanteessa, että kiitos että sä niinku teit sen, että nyt on niinku tommoinen tapaus johon voidaan viitata ja muuta. Mutta että se oli tosi...en mä tiedä. Mä mietin niinku restoratiivisen oikeuden ja sitten toisaalta tommosta perinteisen oikeuden suhdetta, että sitä mä mietin ja se on jäänyt niinku vaikuttava ehkä sitten.” [Original quotation modified for clarity]</p>
<p>Job</p> <p>(Activism is connected to paid labor)</p>	<p>”Tietoiseksi tekeminen on yksi semmoinen asia ja niinku tiedon jakaminen ja sanoittaminen. Ja ne muodot voi olla tosi laajoja. Et kyllä mä koen, että vaikka mun teatteriesitykset myöskin välittää tietoa vaikka ne on taideteoksia. Ja myös kolumnit välittävät tietoa.”</p>
<p>Responsibility</p> <p>(Indications of having a responsibility, or considering that there is not much choice)</p>	<p>”Ja niin kun sitten tavallaan ehkä kun on kasvanut ja jotenkin ehkä erityisesti semmoiseen feministiseen ajatteluun sitten niinku aikuistumisen kynnyksellä ja nuorena aikuisena, ja sitten sitä kautta lähtenyt hahmottaa sitä, että hei maailma on oikeasti ihan tosi epäreilu. Niin jotenkin semmoisen tiedon ja jotenkin semmoisen erilaisten rakenteellisten asioiden ymmärtämisen kautta on tullut semmoinen semmoinen fiilis, että jotainhan tälle pitää tehdä.”</p>
<p>Anonymity or non-anonymity</p> <p>(How is anonymity or intimacy visible in the experiences?)</p>	<p>”Mut nykyään mä oon silleen, että esimerkiksi mä en halunnut näyttää mun kotikatua silleen. Tietysti kun mä nyt puhun ... paljon, mutta se on iso ja silleen, että mä haluan vähän enemmän niinku suojella, että mun nimi ei ole ovesa vaikka.” [Original quotation modified for anonymity]</p>
<p>Other</p> <p>(Other frequently arising or important reasons that could explain discrepancy of consequences)</p>	<p>” And then of course I know that they are writing things about me. Usually I don't Google my name, and especially if it is some magazine or some online thing, kept by racist people or the white people or whatever. I don't go there; I don't want to see that. Like I said, I don't understand so much Finnish, and if I want to understand, I can put in Google, but why would I bother myself? I don't. I focus on what I am doing. I focus on the people who keep me empowering and supporting. I don't really want to see this hater.”</p>