

# Coverage of Straight vs. Gay Spouses of Candidates in Newspapers during the Finnish Presidential Election

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**Abstract:** Politicians' spouses, usually wives, have received increasing amounts of media attention in recent years. In this paper, the newspaper coverage and photos of two candidates' spouses during the 2012 Finnish presidential campaign are considered. In these elections, campaigns were conducted by a straight couple and a gay couple. Coverage of politicians' spouses has often been observed to perpetuate traditional gender roles, but a gay couple in this context might cause some confusion. This article focuses on what the newspapers reported on the candidates' spouses and on political couples, how balanced the coverage was, and how intimate details of the relationships were discussed publicly. The results show that the spouses' roles were treated in a traditional manner in the newspapers. The woman spouse met conflicting requirements, and the gay spouse was considered in a more stereotypically feminine role than in a masculine role.

**Keywords:** gender, spouse, newspaper, presidential elections, gay, Finland

THE SPOUSES OF U.S. PRESIDENTS, first ladies, have long appeared in public with their husbands (Stanyer, 2012; Winfield & Friedman, 2003). In other countries, spouses of heads of state have also appeared increasingly in public (e.g. Chao et al., 2018; Harmer, 2016). Presidents' spouses have traditionally been wives; therefore, the publicity of the spouses has been strongly gendered (e.g. Vigil, 2014). Politicians' spouses have traditionally performed some kind of gendered political role in electoral politics (Harmer, 2016). The ways in which they appear in news discourses speak volumes about the relationship between gender, media, and politics. However, in recent years "first men" have also figured in public (Mandziuk, 2017). Further, the first same-sex couples have also become public in politics. The role of politicians' spouses has thus acquired more varying nuances, but very little is known about whether this has had an impact on the gendered publicity of the spouses.

The prominent role of spouses relates to a development whereby politicians' private lives have become increasingly public. The media report frequently on politicians' families, personal affairs, love lives, and what they do during their leisure time. This development has appeared in democracies all over

the world, although there are many cultural differences (e.g., Errera, 2006; Stanyer, 2012); it has been called the privatization or intimization of politics (e.g., Stanyer, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012). The coverage of politicians' relatives, especially that of spouses, is an obvious example of privatization, an attempt to reveal more about a politician's private sphere.

In Finland, in the second round of the presidential elections of 2012, the situation was especially interesting from the perspective of spouses' gender roles. In these elections, campaigns were conducted by a straight couple and a gay couple, who were different in many ways. This was the first time that the Finnish media encountered such a situation in the context of a presidential election. In addition, from an international perspective, an openly gay couple is rarely seen in the final stages of a presidential election. During this Finnish campaign, the spouses of the presidential candidates, Ms. Jenni Haukio and Mr. Nexar Antonio, were discussed to an unprecedented extent in the media.

Coverage of politicians (e.g., Adcock 2010; Trimble et al., 2015) and particularly of their partners (Winfield & Friedman, 2003) has often perpetuated traditional gender roles, but a gay couple in this context promises to disrupt the gender stereotypes in the coverage of elected leaders' spouses. This article focuses on what the newspapers reported on the candidates' spouses and on political couples, how balanced the coverage was, and how intimate details of the relationships were discussed publicly.

### **Privatization of Politics**

In recent years, media have paid more attention to candidates' spouses. A politician can use this tendency to their advantage. They may on occasion use their personal lives as a resource to create a given impression and image. Thompson (2011) has said that politicians use this type of mediated intimacy to present themselves not only as leaders but also as ordinary human beings. However, politicians may occasionally be reluctant to disclose their private lives to the public in spite of media interest and indeed media pressure. The media may also make revelations about a politician's private sphere that creates a scandal. Stanyer (2012) concluded that revelations about a politician's personal

life may be consensual or non-consensual and scandalous or non-scandalous. Additionally, such information may serve to establish a mutual respect and understanding between the politician and the public; however, such information may also distract people's attention from politics and draw their attention to the surface of visible individual features (van Zoonen et al., 2007). After all, the media and politicians are coproducers in the phenomenon, as Langer (2010) observed.

Scholars have tried to theorize this development. The theorization, termed *intimization* (Stanyer, 2012) or *privatization* (Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007) closely relates to more widespread political trends, such as *personalization* (Van Aelst et al., 2012) and *presidentialization* (Langer, 2007). Rahat and Sheaffer (2007) first conceptualized privatization, and Van Aelst et al. (2012) presented the most developed model thus far. They also made recommendations for the operationalization of privatization in analyses of media content. In their model, the development is seen as part of personalization, which means a focus on individual politicians as central actors in the political arena and a shift in media focus from the politician as the holder of a public role to the politician as a private individual, as a person distinct from his or her public role.

Van Aelst et al. (2012) divided personalization into two types: *individualization* and *privatization*. Individualization refers to a shift in the presentation of politics in the media from parties to politicians and can be further divided into *general visibility* and *concentrated visibility*. Concentrated visibility is related to presidentialization, indicating the visibility of a limited number of political leaders. General visibility, in turn, concerns all politicians and describes a general shift to individual politicians. According to Van Aelst et al., the second type of personalization is privatization, which can be divided into increased media focus on the personal attributes of politicians and their personal lives, for example, their families and spouses.

According to this definition, privatization is part of personalization; therefore, personalization is a precondition for privatization. The personalization of politics has been much studied but has had inconsistent results. For example, meta-analyses do not consistently support the idea of a mediated proliferation of personalization because the results vary across

cultures (e.g., Adam & Maier, 2010; Karvonen, 2010). However, Karvonen (2010) observed that Finland is a positive example of personalization, and several recent studies seem to support this conclusion (e.g. Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014a).

A limited number of studies have focused on the personal lives of politicians, and the analyses and data varied (Stanyer, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012). Rahat and Sheafer (2007) in their analysis found no significant trend in the media coverage of candidates' personal characteristics and personal lives in Israel. By contrast, Langer (2007) found a clear upward trend over time in the promotion of articles addressing leaders' personal lives when she studied the coverage of British prime ministers in *The Times*. Errera's (2006) results revealed that the private lives of politicians are now also commonly discussed in French magazines.

Stanyer (2012) conducted probably the most extensive comparative research on the privatization of politics. His results suggested that leading politicians' family members, family life, and domestic spaces were increasingly subject to media coverage. However, there were big differences between the countries studied. Politicians' personal lives were most frequently reported on in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), but the other countries (e.g. Australia, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain) had media coverage that showed more respect for politicians' privacy; therefore, it is not to be taken for granted that privatization of politics is a transnational trend. In his study, Stanyer (2012) also concluded that privatization has two major consequences. The first consequence is the politicization of the personal lives of politicians, which means that the private life of a politician is exposed to criticism. The second consequence indicates the emergence of regular controversies and scandals regarding privacy intrusion and protection.

Den Herder (2013) compared political newspaper interviews over ten years in three countries. He observed that privatization was on the rise, although the development is far from unequivocal. Further, the privatization used was instrumental rather than substantial, meaning that politicians' private lives were invariably viewed in light of their professional careers. In addition, public opinion increasingly accepts the media coverage of politicians' private lives (Wojdyski & Riffe, 2011).

The personal, including politicians' couple relationships, has become an important element in the media's assessment of the performance and popularity of political parties and leaders.

### **Politicians' Spouses in the Media**

The private lives of politicians in the media were previously considered to consist of different elements. Langer (2007) listed five categories: family, personal appearance, lifestyle, upbringing, and religion. Errera (2006) had proposed six categories: romantic life, health, the home, family life, the past, and finances. Based on these categories, Van Aelst et al. (2012) created an index of privatization that includes coverage of family (i.e., family relationships and all aspects of domestic life), past life and upbringing, leisure time, and love life (i.e., sexual relationships, marriage, and divorce). This indicates that coverage of spouses and marriage is the central element of privatization. However, there are also difficulties applying these subcategories because it may be challenging to make a distinction between politicians' family lives and love lives.

Only a few studies so far have focused in detail on the media coverage of the spouses of politicians, but interest in the theme seems to be increasing. Most attention in earlier studies focused on U.S. first ladies. Stanyer (2012) observed that the first lady's mediated visibility increased dramatically over the course of the 20th century. Winfield and Friedman (2003) analyzed more qualitatively how candidates' wives were reported on during U.S. presidential campaigns. They found several established frames used to cover first ladies. First, they were usually introduced to the public as "escorts" to their husbands; however, the wives not only supported their husbands but also added an essential ingredient to the campaign or candidate. They were also their husbands' defenders, who had often made sacrifices for their husbands' careers. On rare occasions, they were also seen in the role of style-setter or in a *noblesse oblige* role, doing charitable work. The question was also raised whether the wife would be a White House adviser or policymaker. Burns (2005) showed that first ladies are repeatedly publicly defined in relation to other first ladies.

Harmer's (2016) analysis of the role of politicians' wives in British election campaign coverage between 1918 and 2010 shows that representation of the wives is clearly related to the privatization of politics. The coverage had altered in three main ways during the period studied. Harmer observed, firstly, that the role of wives in the campaign process changed from focusing primarily on their political function as active campaigners to a greater interest in their private lives. Secondly, the coverage had narrowed from a broad range of politicians' wives to concentrate almost exclusively on the spouses of political party leaders. Harmer's third observation is not solely related to privatization, but she claims that the press coverage of the spouses had become increasingly negative and critical of their presence on the campaign trail. She concluded that although these women made no formal political statements, they were informal representatives of their husband's political value. She further suggested that such women contribute to politics through their attachment to the informal private sphere and that this can also be seen as an attempt to enhance the image of their husbands by preserving their masculine public appeal.

Even the latest studies confirm that the role of a politician's spouse in the public sphere represents traditional norms and expectations concerning women, or they are seen as good wives standing silent alongside their husbands (Chao et al., 2018; Mandziuk, 2017; Simon & Brooks, 2016; Vigil, 2014). Even the role of the first lady of China has been perceived to ensure that her appearances and activities add charm to her husband so as to make him shine (Tian & Deng, 2018). Ultimately, the women spouses' roles seem to be strongly gendered, while men spouses are still rare, so their public role is not so clear. For example, Mandziuk (2017) observed that Bill Clinton as a spouse of a presidential candidate was able to demonstrate his masculinity, and his role was not so restrictive. However, the role of spouse is equated with heterosexual marriage. As far as I know, the publicity of politicians' gay spouses has not been studied previously, but earlier studies on gay and lesbian political candidates show that they are evaluated differently as a result of the stereotypes surrounding their sexual orientation, meaning gay men are feminized and lesbian women are masculinized (Doan & Haider-Markel, 2010).



The privatization of politics in Finland has not been systematically studied, and Finland was not included in the comparative studies mentioned above. Since the 1982 Finnish presidential election, the spouses of candidates have helped them campaign in public (Sänkiaho, 1983), but the spouses' roles have since become more prominent. Jallinoja (1997) studied how the love lives of celebrities were described in interviews in Finnish women's magazines. Her data between 1955 and 1995 showed that politicians' interviews touching on their marriages were first published in the 1970s, and the number increased gradually. By the 1990s, politicians' marriages were covered as much as the marriages of celebrities in other fields. Railo (2011) also observed that the number of articles about politicians' families increased during the 1990s and that in women's magazines romantic aspects of relationships were addressed. Romance was emphasized, and the tone of the stories became more intimate. For example, Liimatainen and Isotalus (1998), in an analysis of how Finnish magazines wrote about Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen's new relationship and marriage, observed that the published articles conveyed a positive image of the prime minister. Juntunen and Väliverronen (2010) stated that the intimate lives of politicians had long been taboo in Finnish journalism, but this has been slowly changing since the early 2000s. Sex scandals involving leading politicians have notably changed the way in which the media view the private lives of politicians, and today, politicians' private and love lives are reported on more openly and easily in the Finnish media (Isotalus, 2017; Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014b; Juntunen & Väliverronen, 2010).

The disclosing the private sphere of politicians can be irrevocable (Isotalus, 2017) because if a politician has disclosed something private in some context, for example divulged something about his or her family or marital relationship during a campaign, it is impossible to take it back and suppress these issues in some other context. In these cases, the media often make reference to the doctrine of consent. Juntunen and Väliverronen (2010) defined the doctrine: "politicians cannot just reap the image benefits of constant publicity and then appeal to the protection of privacy as soon as they are concerned something damaging may be published" (p. 824).

## **The Elections, Candidates' Spouses, and Equality in Finnish Society**

According to the Finnish Constitution, the president of the republic is elected for a term of six years. The president is elected by a direct vote, if necessary, in two rounds. If one of the candidates receives more than half of the votes cast in the election, he or she is elected president. If none of the candidates receives a majority of the votes cast, a new election round must be held between the two candidates who received the most votes in the first election round. The candidate who receives the most votes in the second round is elected president.

The same person may be elected president for no more than two consecutive terms of office. Because the incumbent Tarja Halonen (Finland's first woman president) had two terms as president, she could not run for a third term in the elections. In 2012, there were eight candidates in the first round. This means that every parliamentary party had a candidate of its own. The second round candidates were Sauli Niinistö (the National Coalition Party) and Pekka Haavisto (the Green League). The campaigning for the second round lasted two weeks.

Niinistö had been a candidate in the 2006 presidential elections and barely lost the election to the incumbent Halonen. After the election, during the entire six years he was considered a likely shoo-in for the presidency and a leader in all polls. His party, the National Coalition Party, was also the biggest party in Parliament. In the first round, Niinistö received 37% of all votes cast. Thus, it was no surprise that Niinistö continued to the second round.

However, it was surprising that Pekka Haavisto received 18.8% of all votes and survived to the second round. His share of the votes cast was 11.5% higher than the share of votes cast for the Green League in the previous parliamentary elections. There was a lot of enthusiasm about his candidacy, and his campaign was described as unique because so many people outside the party wanted to participate in campaigning (Kämppi & Lähde, 2012). In the second round, Niinistö received 62.6% of the vote and Haavisto 37.4%. Niinistö won the election. There were 4.3 million citizens eligible to vote in the presidential election, and the voter turnout was 72.8%.



Both candidates had a spouse with a significant age difference, and both candidates were older than their partners. Niinistö is 29 years older than his wife, and Haavisto is 20 years older than his partner. Neither couple had children at the time of the elections, but Niinistö has two adult sons from a previous marriage. However, there were more differences than similarities between the couples.

Niinistö was married in 2009 to Ms. Jenni Haukio (born 1977), a Finnish woman. During the campaign, she was 34 years old. Haukio graduated from the University of Turku in 2001 with a master's degree in political science. She has worked in politics and was the head of communications for the National Coalition Party during the elections. She has also published poetry collections.

Haavisto had a registered partnership from 2002 with Mr. Nexar Antonio Flores (born 1978). During the campaign, Flores was 33 years old. He was born in Ecuador and is thus an immigrant, whose first language was Spanish, although he spoke good Finnish. He is trained as a hairdresser, media assistant, and steward, working as a hairdresser during the elections. He has not been involved in politics. He had also been convicted of several minor criminal offenses, which was public knowledge; several years before the election, he had been in a fight at a nightclub. During the first round of voting, it was revealed that he had been arrested for drunk driving on a visit to Ecuador and had concealed his arrest from his partner.

Concerning gay and lesbian rights in Finland, same-sex sexual activity has been legal since 1971 with “promotion” thereof decriminalized and homosexuality declassified as an illness in 1981. Finland allowed registered partnerships in 2002. This gave same-sex couples the same rights as married couples except for adoption and a joint surname. During the presidential campaign of 2012, The Equal Marriage Law was under discussion in public, as the Finnish parliament was due to vote on it soon after the elections. However, the law was not passed until 2014. The first same-sex marriages were conducted in 2017.

Concerning gender equality, the situation is brighter—at least in politics. Mäkelä et al. (2015) noted that Finland has long been considered a model country for gender equality,

and women have traditionally taken an active part in politics. In Finland, women have also been appointed or elected to all leading political positions: those of president, ministers, and party leaders of almost all political parties. The 2007 cabinet of Finland was the first cabinet in the world to have more women representatives than men representatives. The women-men ratio in Finnish Parliament has grown, but women are still a minority in the parliament.

However, in their study, Mäkelä et al. (2015) noted that the Finnish newspapers often published decidedly one-sided and gendered representations of both political culture and gender. The media's idea of politics and politicians' roles seemed to reinforce historically formed masculine social conventions, and journalists still seemed to produce similar representations, though the borders of gender conventions are always wavering and changing. Nevertheless, not all areas of Finnish society are necessarily as equal as politics. For example, Sihto et al. (2018) emphasized that in marital relationships the gendered conventions die hard and families' everyday lives are slow to change. According to their study, women still do most of the household chores in heterosexual relationships and are dissatisfied with the situation. By contrast, same-sex couples seem to share the household chores more equally.

### **Research Questions**

In the 2012 Finnish presidential elections, the spouses of the candidates seemed to receive more media attention than ever before in a Finnish election campaign. This was particularly obvious during the second round. The media coverage of this second round is thus an appropriate context for considering the coverage of the candidates' spouses. Although this election campaign may be exceptional in this regard, the election could change the norms of coverage permanently (see Langer, 2010).

Many studies on the private sphere of politics have been quantitative. However, Van Aelst et al. (2012) noted that qualitative analysis might be important for exploring aspects of privatization. Additionally, few studies have focused specifically on the media coverage of politicians' spouses during an election campaign, although family and love life are seen as a central

part of privatization. Previous analyses on U.S. first ladies have shown that coverage (e.g. Winfield & Friedman, 2003) and imagery (e.g. Mortensen, 2015) reflect gender roles in society. Therefore, the first research question considers what Finnish newspapers wrote about the candidates' spouses.

RQ1. What did newspapers report about the two presidential candidates' spouses?

Politicians' spouses have traditionally been wives; therefore, earlier research suggested that coverage of them has been gendered, and certain gendered roles are favored (see Adcock, 2010; Winfield & Friedman, 2003). Additionally, the heteronormativity of this coverage was challenged (see Trimble et al., 2015) because one couple was gay. Therefore, the balance of the coverage was considered by analyzing the quantity of reporting.

RQ2. What is the extent of the coverage and imagery of the spouses?

The candidates' marital relationships involve very private and intimate issues. Regardless, the media seemed to be very interested in politicians' private and intimate love lives. In the third research question, the focus is on the level of privatization by asking what was reported about the relationships. This question aims to consider the role of intimate information in the media coverage of politicians.

RQ3. How were the intimate relationships described in the newspapers?

## **Data and Method**

The second round of the Finnish presidential campaign lasted two weeks, and the data were collected during the period of January 23 to February 7, 2012 (Election Day). In the first round, there were eight candidates campaigning, therefore the coverage concentrated mainly on the candidates. Their spouses were paid hardly any attention in the media. Because there were

only two candidates in the second round, the candidates' spouses were also paid much more attention in the media, especially in the newspapers. In Finland, the presidential election is a major topic in the news only about two or three months before the elections, and it is in the news every day only during the second round, that is, these two weeks. Thus, the two week period is a logical and reasonable term for the purposes of the study and a clearly distinguishable phase in the campaign.

The data were collected from three newspapers and their supplements: the biggest Finnish daily (*Helsingin Sanomat*) and two afternoon papers (*Iltalehti* and *Ilta-Sanomat*). Collecting data only from newspapers is reasonable because of the high level of newspaper readership in Finland, and newspapers are considered to be a reliable source of information (e.g. Juntunen & Väliverronen, 2010; Mäkelä et al., 2015). These are the three most read newspapers in Finland (Kansallinen mediatutkimus KTM, 2012), and they are also the only nationwide newspapers, which are aimed at the general public and not targeted at any specific group of citizens. Because the presidential candidates stand as candidates in the entire country and there are no separate electoral districts, it is reasonable to focus only on these three nationwide newspapers.

The focus of the data collection was on the candidates' spouses; therefore, all stories containing a direct mention of the spouses and all pictures in which they appeared were collected manually from the newspapers. Stories included, for example, personality profiles, news features, interviews, analyses, and campaign updates. The data consisted of 112 articles and 106 pictures.

The first part of the analysis was quantitative, and the number of articles and pictures of the spouses was counted and compared. The main analysis method was qualitative thematic textual analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010), which, for example, Ling and Berkowitz (2018) have used in their study of a politician's spouse. In the first phase of the qualitative analysis, the purpose was to identify what themes were raised concerning the spouses. After close reading, the contents were grouped into different themes. The use of the themes resembles the news frames which Winfield and Friedman (2003) used in their study, but the analysis was also open to new themes. Additionally,

attention was paid to how often certain themes occurred in order to establish which frames are more typical than others.

The second phase involved analyzing how the spouses were portrayed in the articles, meaning what had been recounted about their backgrounds and what adjectives were used for them. The third phase was to consider how the relationships were described and how intimate details of the relationships were reported to the readers. After this, the pictures were analyzed. In the pictures, the spouses' facial expressions, the composition of the picture in relation to the candidate, body and eye contact, and what they did and where were analyzed. In all phases, these analyses of the two spouses were compared to ascertain how balanced or different the coverage was.

## **Results**

### *Themes of Coverage*

The first goal was to consider what was written about the spouses as regards the main themes in these articles. The most typical way to mention a spouse in the articles was to say that he or she was there with the candidate. Thus, the spouse played the role of "escort" on various occasions during the campaign. Second, the newspapers reported on the spouses' participation in the campaign either independently or in an active role. Third, the newspapers speculated as to what a spouse would do in the event of their partner winning the election. Antonio Flores had announced that he would like to continue to work as a hairdresser, which gave rise to considerable speculation in the papers because journalists and the public wondered how this would be possible for the spouse of the president. Jenni Haukio said she understood that she would not be able to continue working for the party but would like to continue in some kind of work. She was also asked whether she felt she was sacrificing her career because of her husband's possible presidency, but she did not admit it.

A very popular theme was the age difference between the spouses and the candidates as it was so marked in both couples. It was also popular to report how a spouse supported the candidate or gave media interviews. The media were also very

interested in what the couples did during their leisure time and how household chores were shared. Further, spouses' relatives and a spouse's work during a campaign were often reported.

The coverage in these articles of the most popular themes was consistent for both the spouses. The newspapers reported Jenni Haukio slightly more frequently campaigning for or supporting her husband. In contrast, there was more press coverage of Flores's Ecuadorian relatives than of Haukio's Finnish relatives. The clear exception was household chores, which Haukio and Niinistö were asked about more than the other couple. Niinistö had said on television: "For every one of us, it is important that there is someone waiting at home, making dinner and ironing shirts and coddling you before anything else." This was seen to represent excessively traditional gender roles; thus, the couple had to repeatedly explain the statement and mention that they shared the household chores equally. Here is an example on this theme:

"Household chores are shared equally," Haukio said. "If one happens to be running for president, then the other does little bit more at home. What's so strange about that? And we've always done the household chores ourselves. I've never even had a cleaner" (Helsingin Sanomat, 29 January, 2012).

Haavisto, by contrast, answered this question humorously and said that all their household chores were done by the men.

Next, equally reported themes were the couples' homes, candidates' compliments or thanks to their partners, and the voters' support for the spouses. Themes that concerned only Flores were his previous minor criminal offenses, how the couple had met, how he would act as the president's spouse, and how a gay couple was or would be received in other countries after or during the campaign. The last theme was related to the question of how a gay couple could represent the country. In a story about this theme, Flores stated his belief: "Finns are ready for a same-sex presidential couple. - Finland is changing all the time and the world is constantly changing. I don't think that the Finns are afraid,' he pondered" (*Ilta-Sanomat*, January 24, 2012).



The themes that concerned only Haukio were the couple's dog and her relations with the media. Before the campaign she had been very reserved with the media, and this reservation was seen by the media as slightly negative. Articles also mentioned several times that Haukio did not respond at all to certain questions.

Minor issues concerning the spouses in articles were their youth, education, work, taste in music, clothing style, and positive words about their partners. Further, Haukio's tooth extraction and Flores's trip abroad were reported. Flores's native country, Ecuador, was discussed, likewise how well he spoke Finnish and how much he liked various traditional Finnish foods. Thus, the newspapers emphasized that Flores was an immigrant and not a Finn by birth.

Most of the photos of the spouses were taken at campaign events. The most typical composition was a spouse beside the candidate. Both spouses were photographed more with their partners than alone, but Flores was clearly more often alone in pictures than Haukio. Both spouses were also pictured on the campaign alone, surrounded by supporters, or behind the candidate. Further, both spouses were pictured holding flowers. Flores was also pictured working in a hair salon, but there were no pictures of Haukio at work.

In most of the pictures the spouses looked positive or were smiling. In most cases, Flores was smiling broadly while Haukio's smile was more reserved. The pictures showed Niinistö and Haukio having more physical contact with each other compared to pictures of Haavisto and Flores. Niinistö and Haukio had eye contact in several pictures, and in some photographs the two were very close to each other such as if just about to kiss. They had also more body contact in pictures: they hugged once and were hand in hand in some cases, or Niinistö's hand was on Haukio's back or shoulder. Flores and Haavisto had eye contact in fewer pictures, and they had body contact in only two pictures: in one a hug and one with Flores's hand on Haavisto's shoulder.

### ***Reporting Balance***

Reporting balance was first scrutinized by analyzing the number of pictures and articles. These numbers are presented in Table

1. In general, the spouses appeared more often in the afternoon papers than in the daily *Helsingin Sanomat*. Flores was mentioned more frequently in articles, and he was also in more pictures than Haukio. The exception was *Helsingin Sanomat*, in which there were the same number of articles of the spouses but fewer pictures of Flores. During the second week of the campaign there were no pictures of Flores at all in *Helsingin Sanomat*.

**Table 1.**

*Numbers of articles and pictures featuring spouses in three newspapers.*

<b>Spouse</b>	<b>Jenni Haukio</b>	<b>Antonio Flores</b>	<b>Sum</b>
<b>Newspapers</b>			
<i>Helsingin Sanomat</i> , articles	15	15	30
<i>Helsingin Sanomat</i> , pictures	9	7	16
<i>Iltasanomat</i> , articles	15	24	39
<i>Iltasanomat</i> , pictures	17	28	45
<i>Iltalehti</i> , articles	19	24	43
<i>Iltalehti</i> , pictures	22	23	45
<b>Total articles</b>	49	63	112
<b>Total pictures</b>	48	58	106

However, in general, Antonio Flores appeared more frequently in these three newspapers than did Jenni Haukio. In most cases, the newspapers' purpose seemed to be to report on the spouses similarly: there were similar types of stories, the same questions were asked, and, in many stories, there were the same number and similar pictures of the spouses.

Next, the descriptions of the spouses were investigated. In many articles, the spouses were described in detail. For example, *Helsingin Sanomat* wrote: "In this election, the spouses of the

candidates are scrutinized more carefully than ever before” (January 29, 2012). The numerous descriptions of the spouses varied widely; different positive images were presented of both spouses. Jenni Haukio was described repeatedly as working as the head of communications for the National Coalition Party, as having published books of poetry, and as working on her doctoral dissertation. As a person, she was described most commonly as quiet and distant, someone who preferred to be in the background. However, she was also described as empathetic, warm, and emotional. Many descriptions referred to her good appearance; otherwise, she was described as attractive, fit to be first lady, or stylish. Some articles compared her to Jacqueline Kennedy and others characterized her as mumsy. Concerning the last description, Haukio herself said: “I have also been called a granny, and I have nothing against it. Grannies are the loveliest persons in the world” (*Helsingin Sanomat*, January 29, 2012).

Flores was repeatedly described as a hairdresser who had come from Ecuador. He was often described as laughing, joyful, smiling, and having a sense of humor. The adjectives often used to characterize him were animated, unrestrained, and genuine. There were more descriptions of his appearance than of Jenni Haukio’s. Flores was described as cute and well-dressed. For example, a long interview mentioned: “Flores and Haavisto have received a lot of praise for their trendy appearances. Casually dressing Flores often gives his partner hints on how to dress” (*Iltalehti*, January 23, 2012).

### ***Descriptions of the Relationships***

The ultimate purpose of this paper was to analyze what kind of picture the newspapers conveyed of the politicians’ relationships. The level of intimacy in the articles seemed to be similar for both couples. However, Sauli Niinistö and Jenni Haukio seemed to set clear boundaries about what could be made public of their relationship, and they refused to comment on certain intimate issues. These boundaries were not reported in interviews with Pekka Haavisto and Antonio Flores.

Niinistö and Haukio emphasized the equality in their relationship and said that household work was shared in their marriage. They said that they took care of each other and their

marriage was a companionship in which they shared all bad and good issues. They also said they had the ability to cheer each other up and that they seldom had disagreements. In the papers, their relationship was described as warm. The couple did not want to tell how they had met because they had decided to keep it a secret. They had also been able to keep the whole relationship secret for two years before it became public. They declined to discuss the possibility of children. In an interview, a journalist asked about their family life and wrote: “Questions about dreams in family life come up against a brick wall. This is a private area and clearly off limits. However, Sauli and Jenni attach great importance to family and friends” (*Ilta-Sanomat*, January 28, 2012).

The articles include a few descriptions of their physical contact; at the party after the first round there was a warm hug, and they came so close to each other that it was almost a kiss. Several times articles also mentioned that they held hands.

Pekka Haavisto and Antonio Flores said that they shared household chores equally but, for example, did their laundry separately and ironed their own shirts. They were frank in the interviews about what caused disagreements between them, whether the age difference bothered them, and whether they felt jealous in the relationship. The couple was described as a little more amorous in the newspapers than the other couple. Haavisto and Flores said that their relationship was love at first sight, and that Haavisto had fallen in love with Flores’s laugh. A story described the beginning of their relationship: “Antonio Flores fell in love with the blond-haired Pekka Haavisto in a Colombian bar. Flores has described that he fell in love with Haavisto at first sight and did not know that he was a Finnish politician. This instantaneous flaring up of love caused Flores to move to Finland in 1998” (*Ilta-Sanomat*, January 23, 2012).

The couple said a similar sense of humor bound them together and that they laughed a lot together. They said they could talk about everything with each other and that their rule was not to go to sleep angry. They also talked openly in interviews about how they had met, how the relationship developed, and commented on the possibility of children. Concerning body contact between them, there are only two observations: a hug

was reported at the party after the first election round and one instance of loving eye contact was reported.

## **Discussion**

This study focused on the press coverage and image imparted of the candidates' spouses during the Finnish presidential campaign, which in the final round featured a straight couple and a gay couple. The aims were to consider how the spouses were reported on, how balanced the reporting was, and how the relationships were described. According to the results, the coverage of the spouses seemed to follow generally the traditional frame for spouses (Chao et al., 2018; Mandziuk, 2017; Simon & Brooks, 2016; Tian & Deng, 2018; Vigil, 2014). Regardless of gender, both spouses were placed in a feminine role, and they both also encountered problems with it. In this role, they were presented, as Harmer (2016) put it, as non-political supporters of their husbands' political ambitions and as enhancing their husbands' images by accentuating their masculinity. Additionally, the traditional role of a spouse underlines the seniority of the husband in this case. After all, it would indeed appear that a candidate's gender determines more how a spouse is viewed in the media than the spouse's own gender.

The analysis of the themes in the coverage reveals that the main role of these Finnish spouses resembled that of U.S. first ladies (Winfield & Friedman, 2003). In most cases, the spouses were seen as "escorts" to the candidates, meaning that the spouses were mentioned only when appearing somewhere with a candidate. They were also reported to support their partners and participate in the campaign, and the images supported this frame. During this campaign, the spouses did not really have to defend their husbands, but Jenni Haukio was asked several times if she felt she had sacrificed her career for her husband's career. Several times, both spouses were seen in the role of trendsetter, but it is salient that Antonio Flores was described more often in this regard than was Jenni Haukio. Haukio's style was defined in relation to previous U.S. first ladies a few times; this type of comparison is very common in the U.S. (Burns, 2005). The Finnish spouses were not described as having a *noblesse oblige* role, but this may be because of the less prominent

role of high-profile charity occasions in Finnish society. In the U.S. context, the spouse's role as an adviser or policymaker is also often discussed. No such discussion was observed in the Finnish coverage, but the future role of the president's spouse was often written about.

Generally, the journalists tried to be very impartial to the candidates and the couples in this data. This can be seen, for example, in that the couples had been asked similar questions in interviews. Further, both spouses were described positively in the newspapers. The negative or critical coverage of spouses, which has been mentioned in international studies (Harmer, 2016; Stanyer, 2012), was hardly to be found in this data. Because of the positive coverage, the spouses served more as a resource for the candidates to modify their images and present them as ordinary human beings (see Thompson, 2011). In both cases, the spouses let the candidate shine. As well, Stanyer's (2012) observation regarding privacy protection was noticeable in the study. Niinistö and Haukio, namely, refused to answer the most intimate questions and declined to discuss certain issues in the media. The media seemed to take such protection of privacy negatively.

The comparison of the coverage of the spouses reveals two interesting gender issues. Firstly, the double bind (e.g. Campus, 2013) which is shown to be typical for the coverage of women politicians seems also to apply to the women spouses of politicians. For example, the newspapers were interested in the division of household chores between the couple Niinistö and Haukio. It was seen as reprehensible for the division to be clearly gendered; therefore, the couple emphasized in many interviews that their relationship was equal. However, Haukio was generally characterized with feminine words such as empathetic, warm, emotional, and stylish. She was described more like a retiring sort of wife who supported her husband than a politically active partner. The woman spouse met conflicting requirements because in the media she was cast in the very traditional role of the politician's spouse, but at the same time she could not be like a traditional wife and take responsibility for the household chores. It seems that the more independent of a role spouses have during a campaign, the worse they fit the traditional role



of a spouse. This can be seen in the case of Hillary Clinton (see Winfield & Friedman, 2003).

Secondly, the gay spouse was considered stereotypically more in a feminine than a masculine role. Flores was not generally characterized with masculine features; the characterizations were more feminine than masculine. His appearance was frequently commented on, and he was described as smiling a lot, which is more typical for women than men (e.g. Davis & Weitz, 1981). In some images he was pictured at work as a hairdresser or holding flowers, which has been a very typical way of portraying women spouses. It therefore seems that a gay spouse was cast more in a feminine role than a masculine one. The gay spouse was feminized as has also been noticed to happen in the case of gay politicians (Doan & Haider-Markel, 2010). However, as a gay spouse, he was not able to demonstrate his masculinity such as, for example, Bill Clinton was observed to do (Mandziuk, 2017).

Therefore, the newspapers seem to follow the traditional and gendered structures of politics and politicians' relationships. Although one of the couples was a same-sex couple, both of them were seen from the heteronormative perspective. Since the relationship between man and woman is perceived to constitute the norm, attempts are made to apply this perception to same-sex relationships. Heteronormativity appeared garishly in the articles, which questioned Flores's ability to represent the country as a spouse of the potential president, and there were doubts as to how they would be received as a gay couple in some countries. But more than that, the heteronormativity appeared implicitly in the coverage.

Railo (2011) has observed that men as politicians are the norm, and women are an exception to the rule. From the perspective of this research, a gay man as a candidate's spouse is like an exception to the rule or a foreigner in this culture. This implies a clear heteronormativity in the campaign coverage. This view is strengthened when the imagery and mentions of eye and body contact are considered. There seemed to be more intimate contact between the straight couple than the gay couple. The absence of intimate contact between Haavisto and Flores may be because either the norms of society do not encourage physical contact between gay men in public or the media are reluctant to describe such contact.

Flores's sexuality was not, however, emphasized in the newspapers; on the contrary, he was written about in a very similar way to the straight woman spouse. More than as a gay man, Flores was cast in the role of immigrant. It seemed that the Finnish media did not want to emphasize the sexuality of Flores because this would have also stressed the sexual orientation of his husband, presidential candidate Haavisto. Instead, it seemed more permissible to pay attention to Flores's immigrant background as this was not so closely related to his husband.

The stories were generally very intimate and indicated a strong privatization trend. For example, the longer interviews with the couples were reminiscent of romantic stories of the relationship, which seems to be the typical approach today (Railo, 2011). According to the results, the coverage of a politician's spouse and marital relationship serves as a tool of privatization by which the media can delve more deeply and broaden the scope of the publicity of the private sphere. By interviewing a spouse or a couple together, it is possible to reveal more intimate and many-sided topics than by reporting only on the candidate. For example, the topics such as how a couple met, if they were planning to have children, what they did at home, or how they showed their caring for each other offer more details about a candidate's private life. On the other hand, the stories on spouses and their personalities and opinions or their roles in the campaign and as a possible spouse of the president in future are broadening the field of topics which strengthen the development of privatization.

The results of this study indicate a trend of privatization in Finland as in most democracies. The media also showed great interest in the candidates' spouses and treated them as celebrities. Another issue is the political significance of this interest. The coverage of spouses was not merely instrumental (den Herder, 2013); in many respects it was also substantial. According to these results, the media wanted to lay bare the relationship of a candidate, his life, and personality through coverage of his spouse. Thus, the role of information about a spouse influenced a candidate's image. However, the role of the spouse seems to be even more important. He or she is intrinsically an important active campaigner (see Harmer, 2016) and has individual significance in campaigning; thus, his or her attractiveness may

serve to benefit a candidate. Of course, the influence of a spouse could also be the opposite.

Further, the analysis showed that the operationalization of privatization can be very challenging. Van Aelts et al. (2012) developed previous operationalizations and created an index that includes coverage of family, past life and upbringing, leisure time, and love life. In the present study, all these elements were analyzed in terms of what was written about the spouses. Thus, use of the index may have overridden the role of spouses in the study of this development or we may be unable to capture their importance in campaigning or in making public the private lives of politicians because the spouses are connected to all these subcategories. Therefore, operationalization and the definition of privatization should be further developed and investigated in future studies of political communication.

The main limitation of the study is that its data concentrated on only one election campaign, a period of two weeks, and used only newspaper coverage and imagery. Therefore, the results do not reveal the development of privatization. However, from the data, it is possible to observe what is specific to the coverage of a same-sex couple in a political context, which was the main aim of the paper.

The study has shown that the politicians' spouses perform gendered political roles in electoral politics. Although Finland is one of most equal countries in the world, the coverage of the spouses was clearly gendered and even stereotypical as far as these Finnish newspapers are concerned. The heteronormativity of coverage was clearly discernible. The coverage of the Finnish spouses of presidential candidates seemed to have many similarities to the coverage of politicians' spouses in many other countries, thus it seems to be a particular role which inevitably brings the gendered private sphere into the political public arena.

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