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# **Political Scandals in Finland and in the UK: How Do the Media Cultures Differ?**

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# 1. Introduction: Why ministers should not drink all the vodka they are offered

On a cold February day in 2014, the phone line from Finland to Sochi, Russia, was bad. I was trying to have a conversation with the Finnish Minister of Culture and Sports, Paavo Arhinmäki, who was visiting the Sochi Olympics and whose special adviser I was.

Something had happened the night before, something that should not have happened. Mr Arhinmäki had been celebrating with the Finnish ice hockey team which had just won the Olympic bronze medal. The partying – apparently with Russian vodka – had gone too far. The minister had passed out at the table and eventually the Finnish players had carried him to his room to sleep. There were several witnesses to what had happened. Finnish digital news media, and some individuals in social media, had already started to report the incident. It had all the necessary ingredients to develop into a full-blown political scandal, with possibly disastrous consequences. Political scandals always demand a resolution, a final act, typically through the resignation or firing of the person at the centre of the scandal. The other option is a public request for forgiveness from the scandal-hit person (Allern & Pollack 2012, 19).

As the minister's press adviser, it was my task to try to help him avoid the emerging scandal. After having worked for two decades as a journalist in Finnish broadcast and print media, I had been invited in 2012 to work for the Minister of Culture. The offer was too tempting to decline. I have never been a member of any party, but I still ended up working inside the political system.

Was I able to help the minister? Probably. In political scandals, it is extremely hard to predict what will happen next. During the minister's return flight from Sochi, I sent him several text messages, with advice to calmly explain what had happened and to apologise. He had not given a proper interview about the incident, so everything was still possible.

A group of reporters was waiting for Mr Arhinmäki at Helsinki airport. His arrival was also broadcast live on TV by the Finnish national broadcaster YLE – something that usually happens only for notable news events, which Mr Arhinmäki's behaviour had suddenly become. I watched the TV footage at the Ministry of Culture in the centre of Helsinki. Reassuringly, Mr Arhinmäki's live performance in front of the TV cameras was successful. He admitted that he had been drinking too much and said that he was sorry. He also confessed to have received some "help" from the players in getting to bed (Tapiola 2014, Paavo Arhinmäki Sotshin tapahtumista: "No, sammuin tai väsähdin").

The scandal was still not over. During the days that followed, reporters continually contacted me and tried to find out something that had not yet come to light, or some detail that the minister would have personally lied about in public. They found nothing. Another crucial moment was when the sitting prime minister, Jyrki Katainen, said in an interview that people make mistakes and expressed his support for Arhinmäki to continue in his post. He did not approve Arhinmäki's behaviour, but his displeasure was benevolent. The end result was that the scandal, which could have caused minister Arhinmäki's downfall, died down in less than a week.

The Sochi incident is one of the reasons why this research exists. After the ministry post, I returned to journalism and to busy newsroom work with YLE. But something had changed. I felt that I should further deepen my vastly increased political knowledge. The aim of my research at the University of Oxford was to understand better the nature of scandal, which has become a permanent phenomenon in journalism.

On today's turbulent media stage, political scandals represent great drama. The main characters of national or even international political scandals are well-known politicians, celebrities, the kings and queens of our time. But even the most powerful politicians are mortal people, who have not always had the power they temporarily possess. Some-day, somehow, they will all lose it.

Political scandals are important, because they touch political power directly. No politician is safe from scandal. Watergate, the scandal that dethroned the president of the United States in 1974, is the supreme example. Watergate was not only important in itself, but opened a new phase in democratic journalism: one in which the uncovering of scandal took centre stage in the journalists' trade. Forcing politicians to apologise, or even to resign, became a major goal for many ambitious journalists.

In this research, I compare Finnish and British political scandals. Politics has become personalised since World War II. This development has been especially intense since the 1960s in the United Kingdom and since the 1980s in Finland (Thompson 2000, 90; Allern & Pollack 2012, 29). For politicians, a good reputation – which takes years to build and may be demolished in days – has become one of their most crucial resources. As party loyalties have decreased, the politician's reputation and personal characteristics become more and more valuable in the voter's mind: Is this a person who can be trusted? In a tough situation, will this politician be able to fight on the voter's behalf (Thompson 2000, 112)?

In minister Arhinmäki's case, his reputation and some of his personality traits helped his redemption. He was at the time 38 years old, quite young to be a minister, and extremely popular in Helsinki,

his home city. He was known as a little bit of a rebel, a streetwise politician, who was obsessed with football and had some sense of humour.

According to the Cambridge scholar John B. Thompson, scandal is a social phenomenon where an individual's reputation and trust are at stake (Thompson 2000, 22, 245). The scandal may demolish the reputation of the politician, as well as their career and family relationships. But if they survive the scandal, it may even make them more popular. Thompson suggests that political scandal can be regarded as a politician's credibility test (ibid., 112). By this definition, Mr Arhinmäki's credibility was strong enough to pass the test.

In relation to political scandals, I will analyse how the scandal processes differ in Finland and in the UK. Political scandals are especially common in liberal Western democracies (rather than authoritarian regimes or one-party states, where scandalous transgressions or even crimes are routinely covered up) and include some common features (Thompson 2000, 94). Still, what kind of transgressions and circumstances lead to political scandals is very much a national and culture-related issue. Comparing how political scandals differ in Finland and the UK tells us much about both societies: the media environment, the state of democracy, and the essence of power.

Political scandals have always existed, with a deep connection to the media of their time. The UK has a long and rich tradition of mass media, especially newspapers, with the first daily newspapers being established in the early eighteenth century (Engel 1996, 18). Finland gained its independence in 1917, but the history of the Finnish press goes further back. There have been newspapers in Finland, first in Swedish and later in Finnish languages, since the late eighteenth century (Tommila & Salokangas 1998, 12).

In the UK, political scandals have been important news for centuries, but that has not been the case in Finland. The Finnish press has traditionally been cautious and kind towards politicians. Before the late twentieth century, Finnish media participated in maintaining the consensus in society. According to Anu Kantola's research, there were only four political scandals in Finland in the 1970s. In the 2000s, there were 37 (Kantola 2011, 43); the number has roughly doubled every decade. This could indicate that there will be even more scandals in the future.

This research concentrates on the postwar period: the scandals that have been reported after 1945. The period has more relevance in the UK, where the whole history of political scandals would be too large a subject for this research. For example, when the *Daily Mail* (still the second biggest newspaper in the UK, with a circulation of over 1.5 million copies) was established in 1896, all kind of scandals were important news for the paper right from the start (Engel 1996, 64; ABC 2016: UK national newspaper circulations).

I carried out my research by interviewing Finnish and British journalists whose work is related to political scandals. I am interested in how they handle political scandals, and also their analysis of the best-known national political scandals in their home countries. With the material gathered in these interviews and some previous research into scandals, I have tried to predict the possible future of political scandals in these two countries. Will the Finnish media continue to follow the British path? How should (Finnish) journalists deal with the increased number of political scandals?

Especially in Finland, it is important to disseminate more knowledge about political scandals. Because of the growing number of scandals, more Finnish journalists than before have to deal with them. Does the increased number of political scandals indicate some kind of fundamental change in Finnish politics or the media environment there?

Journalism – especially extremely fast, almost online-speed web-based journalism and blogs – has created practices that accelerate scandals or even create them. Scandalous news often interests the audience very much, but it would be too simple to look at scandals only through sales, or to see them just as indications of the deepening moral decline of politics (Thompson 2000, 241). Even though political scandals may sometimes feel superficially “grubby” or “sleazy”, they still manage to reveal something about the very essence of political power – the way we are ruled.

Ministers should not drink all the vodka they are offered, because visibility in the world has irreversibly increased. Nowadays every single detail in a politician’s life may become public. As Thompson puts it: “The more visible you are, the more vulnerable you may be, because more visibility will generate more interest from the media and, however much you may wish to manage your self-presentation through the media, you cannot completely control it.” (ibid., 108)

This research aims to increase knowledge about the ways in which media functions. Hopefully it will offer relevant information to other journalists, as well as to all readers who are fascinated by the media and politics.



## 2. About this research and the methods used

The method of this research is a semi-structured interview. I interviewed three high-profile political journalists from Finland and three from the UK. All interviews were made in person in the spring of 2016, in Helsinki and in London.

The Finnish interviewees were Olli Ainola (special correspondent of the tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat*), Mari Haavisto (political correspondent of MTV3, a commercial TV channel), and Ville Perna (editor-in-chief of *Suomen Kuvalehti*, a weekly magazine known for quality journalism).

The British interviewees were Anushka Asthana (political editor of the *Guardian*), Joy Lo Dico (editor of the gossip column “The Londoner’s Diary” in the *Evening Standard*), and Mary Riddell (freelancer, a long-term political columnist of the *Telegraph*).

I chose these journalists to interview because they cover politics and sometimes also scandals. The interviewees represent various commercial media: broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, a magazine, and a TV channel. Every interviewee’s media also produces digital news. I interviewed both men and women. Professionally, the interviewees are in their mid-career or already senior: the youngest interviewee is 33 years old and the oldest (of the ones who told me their age) is 57. The interviewees represent commercial media, because it has most relevance in covering political scandals. Historically, political scandals have often been exposed in privately owned newspapers.

This research is qualitative in nature, comprised as it is of only six semi-structured interviews. More interviews would not have been possible in a research project of this scale. The question framework used for the semi-structured interviews is shown in the appendix. The questions aim to lead the interviewees to describe how they report political scandals, and also welcome their analysis of the best-known national political scandals in their own countries.

Political scandals or *mediated scandals*, as they are called in media research, had started to appear in the British newspapers by the late eighteenth century (Thompson 2000, 32). It is expected that in the future political scandals will spread digitally and extremely rapidly all over the world. The Clinton–Lewinsky scandal in 1998 was one of the first examples where the internet played an important role in transmitting the story.

Mediated political scandals have increased in recent decades, and there is some considerable academic research about the scandals that I refer to both in Finland (as well as in the other Nordic countries) and in the UK. The history of the press is very well documented in both in Finland and in the UK, which has aided with my research.

There are many definitions relating to political scandals. In Greek language, the word *skandalon* meant a trap or an obstacle. In this research, I have decided to use the definition that John B. Thompson presented in his well-received book *Political Scandal*: it “refers to actions or events involving certain kinds of transgressions which become known to others and are sufficiently serious to elicit a public response” (Thompson 2000, 12–13). This means that there always has to be some kind of norm violation, transgression, or even crime, which is the starting point of the scandal. Then, this transgression has to become public – it has to be somehow exposed to a wider audience. (Typically this exposure takes place in the media, hence the term “mediated scandal”.) Also, in the end, a scandal needs somebody to condemn the norm violation or transgression. The wrongdoing itself is never enough to create a scandal, and a full scandal need all these parts.

Because of the theoretical nature of this definition, I have also referred to political scandals by another more practical definition, which also has been used in the research: a political scandal has to be both political and national, the case has to be reported as “scandalous”, and there should be broad media coverage in at least two leading media organisations for five days or more (Allern & Pollack 2012, 31).

## 3. Finland: “Now we ask about sex. We used to ask about the budget”

### 3.1. Before and after Kekkonen

The media environment in Finland has dramatically changed since World War II. The most drastic change in covering political scandals happened in the 1980s, after the prolonged era of President Urho Kekkonen, which lasted 25 years (1956–1981). As Ville Perna, the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Suomen Kuvalehti*, describes it:

*At the beginning of the 1980s, the tide clearly changed. There were suddenly more denunciations than before, police investigations got better, and also the media started to report more about the wrongdoings. Digging into those kind of things moved to a whole different level (Perna 2016, interview).*

As an example, Perna mentioned extensive bribery cases related to some Finnish construction companies. In the so-called Noppa case in the 1980s, many party politicians and civil servants were convicted of several crimes. Also, the rewards and fringe benefits of members of parliament started to interest journalists – for example, examining MPs’ taxi receipts became one form of journalism. According to Perna, the reason for the cautious coverage of politics and politicians was “a trauma caused by the long Kekkonen era, when everybody cherished something called the common national interest” (ibid).

With respect to freedom of speech, Finland has in a couple of decades transformed itself into the best country in the world. In the latest World Press Freedom Index, Finland was, once again, ranked first (Reporters Without Borders 2016). Historically, the Finnish press has a relatively long tradition of operating under some sort of censorship. When Finland belonged to Sweden (1150–1809), the Swedish authorities censored all printed media, including newspapers (the first Finnish newspaper was established in 1771). When Finland became part of Russia (1809–1917), the Russian censorship took over until Finland became independent. Also, after independence in 1917, there was domestic censorship in times of war: during the Civil War (1918) and World War II (in Finland this means the Winter War of 1939 and the Continuation War 1941–1944).

The “common natural interest” is something that Finns know very well. It has been used by politicians as a justification for why some issues should not be reported. Also, voluntary self-censorship has at times been widely adopted as a normal practice. For example, during World War II, there was very little need for actual censorship in the Finnish newspapers. The reason was that

before war broke out in 1939 the then commander-in-chief Mannerheim, who later became president, had written a letter to the Finnish editor-in-chiefs insisting that the press should support the government. For example, it was forbidden to criticise the actions of Germany, which was Finland's ally (Tommila & Salokangas 1998, 236).

In President Kekkonen's era, self-censorship was largely adopted in stories relating to Russia (then the Soviet Union) and to Kekkonen himself. For many decades, Finland was financially dependent on trade with Russia. A senior special reporter of *Ilta-lehti*, Olli Ainola, started his journalistic career in the mid-1980s and soon found out that some negative aspects of the trade with Russia- were not reported:

*It was a kind of bilateral barter trade, which took place with the protection of both states. The Finns delivered consumer goods, coats and boots and boats, to the Soviet Union and also did some construction there. In return we got oil, so much that the Finns started to sell it onward to the rest of world. Enormous amounts of money came to Finland. This trade had some special characteristics. The Russians paid their bills in advance so there was an enormous excess of capital that eventually even changed the Finnish banking system. But all this happened through a negotiation process and was linked with corruption – the Finns were corrupting the Russians. But when I discussed this with my senior colleagues, it was accepted that this was a part of the game (Ainola 2016, interview).*

Finland nowadays is a wealthy country with, according to some surveys, hardly any corruption (Transparency International 2015). The media business is technically advanced, and the press is free to publish anything they wish – but they don't. The Finnish press has a well-functioning self-regulating system, which is run by journalists themselves. In Finland, as far as is known, professional journalists have not deliberately and systematically used criminal methods. The practices of ethical journalism are defined in the *Guidelines for Journalists* (Council for Mass Media 2014), which all professional journalists and media companies have signed up to. If some media break the commonly agreed rules, it will come to public notice, which is a kind of shame punishment. There is no censorship, but journalists are in general well aware of what is regarded as ethical journalism and what is not.

There are some special features of Finnish society that may explain the high standards of journalism. Finns are well educated – in 2014, among the 33 OECD countries, Finnish young people (20–24 years old) had the third best education and 45% of them had a university degree (Kivinen & Hedman 2016: Suomalaisen korkeakoulutuksen kansainvälinen taso on väitettyä parempi). Also, the trade unions have an exceptionally strong position in Finland. They are active players in daily politics, and about 70% of the Finnish labour force belong to a union (Findikaattori

2015: Ammatillinen järjestäytyminen). The Union of Journalists in Finland (UJF) has about 15,000 members, and it is one of the founders of the Council for Mass Media (CMM). The membership of CMM includes all professional Finnish news media companies, broadcasters, and book publishers. The existence of CMM is crucial in maintaining high journalistic standards. CMM drafted the *Guidelines for Journalists*, and it constantly updates the guidelines and, through a complaints process, monitors that they are followed correctly. Anybody who considers that there has been a breach of good journalistic practice may make a complaint. Even though CMM is not a court, its decisions are widely respected. Because of CMM, press-related trials are rare in Finland. However, the number of Finnish libel trials has increased in the last decade: in 2004, there were about 2,700 libel trials and in 2014 about 4,700. One reason for this increase is the internet: many ordinary people have made police reports, mostly about possible libels that have been published on social media, especially on Facebook (MTV3 2015: Kunnianloukkauksesta netissä tehdään yli kolme rikosilmoitusta joka päivä).

When the Finnish press was new, at the end of the eighteenth century, it concentrated at first on covering issues relevant to the elite. As the literacy of Finns rose dramatically in the late nineteenth century, the reach of the newspapers also started to rise. By the 1940s, newspapers reached 100% of literate Finns (Tommila & Salokangas 1988, 15, 27). When President Kekkonen came to power in 1956, Finland already had a full range of different kinds of newspapers and magazines.

TV became common in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite its technical capability, the atmosphere in Finnish news production was unusual. Finns were afraid of angering the USSR and tried to maintain good relations. Politicians – under the determined leadership of Kekkonen – and journalists both participated in this type of self-censorship. For example, self-censorship prevented Finnish journalists reporting about Kekkonen's dementia at the end of his era. In the early 1980s the issue became a public secret, even though the president's weakened condition was noticed by the rather large number of people surrounding him. This did not become a scandal – although later it caused collective shame among journalists that the subject was not covered. Ville Pernaa, who is also a historian, has some understanding of the journalists of the time:

*Was it (the end of Kekkonen's era) the biggest scandal in the Finnish political history? It is a little bit like asking what was the biggest political scandal in the Middle Ages. The time was so different. It does not compare to what would happen now if the current prime minister had serious dementia for one and a half years, that he would just sit there and nobody would say anything (Pernaa 2016, interview).*

All the interviewees of this research regarded it as impossible nowadays that the press would not report a noticeable change in the national leader's health. As Mari Haavisto, a political

correspondent at the commercial TV channel MTV3 states, internet and social media have also changed the environment:

*Of course we would report that kind of thing. Times were different before and after Kekkonen. Also, that sort of thing would not remain private nowadays. Even though journalists, for some reason, decided not to cover it, there would still be somebody with a mobile phone who would take a picture and broadcast it (Haavisto 2016, interview).*

### **3.2. Finnish political scandals are about money (and power)**

In Thompson's classification, the three main types of political scandals are: political sex scandals, political financial scandals, and political power scandals. According to Anu Kantola's and Juho Vesa's research, the most common reason for political scandal in Finland has been financial misconduct: corruption, bribery, or other improper financial benefits. Only after that comes inappropriate personal behaviour, typically drinking, but not drugs (there have been no big drug-related political scandals in Finland). Sex scandals have also been rare (Kantola & Vesa 2013).

*You said that the Finnish political scandals are about finance. That is true. But they are also about the battle over power. For example the Jäätteenmäki case was like that, and many others. I was thinking about the questions beforehand, what the scandals here are about, and yes, they are about power and money. These are the Finnish issues (Ainola 2016, interview).*

The Jäätteenmäki case refers to one of the biggest scandals in Finnish political history. In 2003 Anneli Jäätteenmäki was the leader of the Centre Party, which won the parliamentary election, and became the first Finnish female prime minister. Her prime ministership lasted only three months. She had to step down because of a scandal relating to confidential government information she had received from the president's office, and which she had also used in the political battle before the election. When the leak of confidential information was exposed by the media – the fact that she had indeed received some leaked confidential material – she ended up explaining and eventually lying about how and why she got the information. Lying is against the rules in most Western parliaments, including the Finnish parliament.

*It was really dramatic. I was taking the entrance examination to study journalism at the Jyväskylän University when it happened, and I still remember those pictures on TV, when Jäätteenmäki walked up to Halonen (then president, also a woman). I can still see them in my mind's eye. Maybe it was because she was the first, there were big expectations, she was the first Finnish female prime minister. I remember that. It also has a lot to do with us (MTV3), this company, it was our TV*

*debate where she showed that she had got some papers. It has left a mark. There was drama, there was a story, how it went on (Haavisto 2016, interview).*

The Jätteenmäki case is in many ways a “perfect” political scandal. First, there was a transgression (the leak). Then, the leak was exposed by the media (exposure). Jätteenmäki herself added to the drama by referring to the leaked material in public and even waving the papers themselves in the MTV3 television debate – a confusing fact which indicates that, despite being a lawyer, she was not fully prepared for her possession of this material to become such a devastating issue. In the end, Jätteenmäki had to go to the president’s official residence to announce her resignation, which happened in front of the TV cameras (judgement/culmination).

After the scandal there was hardly any public discussion about the leaked information itself. It related to discussions that Paavo Lipponen, the previous prime minister and Social Democratic Party leader, had had with the US president George W. Bush in Washington before the 2003 Iraq war. The discussions can be interpreted as making Finland close to the US-led Western alliance, which later attacked Iraq, although Finland officially never joined the alliance. Rather than investigating the contents of the leak, the media concentrated on the process of how Jätteenmäki had received the confidential information. The scandal soon became known as *Iraqgate*. This is very “Finnish” in the way it concentrates on legality: was Jätteenmäki’s action legal or not? The media’s standpoint was largely the result of the original scoop, made by the tabloid *Ilta-Sanoma*’s political reporter Pekka Ervasti, one of the best-known political correspondents in the country. Jätteenmäki’s dismissal can be seen as a result of Pekka Ervasti’s series of revelations.

In 2003, Pekka Ervasti received the Journalist of the Year award in the Finnish journalism contest organised by the Swedish book publishing company Bonnier. The award was explained as follows:

*Questioning the prime minister’s statements was the starting point for this systematic work, which led to the best summer news season of the decade and to the historic dismissal of the prime minister. Good perception, work with sources, instinct and persistence generated a classic piece of political journalism (Suuri journalistipalkinto 2003: Palkitut 2003).*

In the Jätteenmäki case, as in many scandals, most of the publicity was eventually attached to the so-called *second-order transgression*: Anneli Jätteenmäki’s desperate attempt to cover up what had happened earlier. Second-order transgression means the object’s attempt to conceal the original norm violation. It is typically a public lie or denial, which may, when revealed, become an even more serious factor in the scandal than the original transgression (Thompson 2000, 17–18). In the Finnish parliament, Anneli Jätteenmäki ended up uttering a classic second-order

transgression sentence, which would later become very famous: “I’ve tried to speak as truthfully as I can.” (Kaleva 2009: Jätteenmäen pääministeriura päättyi valehteluun)

### **3.3. Politicians’ private lives – a problem**

The Finnish press still has some respect for politicians’ private lives. If a public person, even a top politician, wishes to keep their private life out of the public eye, most journalists and media organisations respect that at least to some extent.

*Of course we respect that (privacy), but then it will have to be that politician’s choice from the start. If you have once opened your closet, if you have done so in the elections, you cannot say a year later that now nothing can be written about my husband, or my divorce, or about this same person who was previously interviewed in that news story. The policy must be clear from the start* (Haavisto 2016, interview).

Mari Haavisto names as an example Alexander Stubb, the Finnish conservative party’s former leader and finance minister, who is also a previous prime minister. Stubb had his children with him on a National Coalition Party cruise, where many journalists were also present. Stubb’s children were not photographed, because he had agreed this with the press (ibid.).

Finnish political correspondents have no tradition of writing about politicians’ private lives. Until the first decade of the 2000s, the private lives of politicians were not covered by the quality press. Throughout the twentieth century, the Finnish press was quite strictly divided into the quality press and the more entertaining titles. The division has not totally vanished, and can be perceived when journalists talk about their work identity – what kind of stories they do or would like to do. Stories about politician’s private lives simply did not exist in quality newspapers and magazines (Pernaa 2016, interview). On the other hand, the tabloids, gossip magazines, and women’s magazines did print stories like these. For example, the major women’s magazine *Anna* was one of the publications where this type of story was published at least from the mid-1970s, and this has been examined in academic research (Railo 2011). Olli Ainola says in his interview that as a young editor in the 1980s he found out that a Finnish top politician had an extramarital affair with a celebrity. In public, the politician was always seen with his wife, but at the same time he also had a mistress. Ainola asked his senior colleague’s advice:

*My colleague told me that in Finland this is not a story, unless this politician has strongly marketed himself or herself as a supporter of family values. So there was no story* (Ainola 2016, interview).



In political quality journalism, *Helsingin Sanomat*, YLE's broadcast news, and *Suomen Kuvalehti* – all rather traditional media – may be seen as trendsetters. YLE's TV news is extremely popular. In 2015, about 2.4 million Finns – almost half of the population – watched it every week (Finnpanel 2015, Katsotuimmat TV-lähetykset kanavittain). In 2015, *Helsingin Sanomat* was the biggest Finnish newspaper with a circulation of 267,000 copies. *Suomen Kuvalehti*'s circulation was 75,000, which is about average for a Finnish magazine (Media Audit Finland 2016). Still, the circulation figures show that Finns have a significant interest in news about scandals. Among magazines, the entertainment magazine *Seiska* (“Seven days”), which concentrates on celebrity gossip news, also including politicians, has about double the circulation of *Suomen Kuvalehti*: *Seiska*'s circulation in 2013 was 158,000 (ibid., no later figure is available). The two Finnish tabloids are popular as well: in 2014, *Ilta-Sanomat* had a circulation of 110,000 and *Iltalehti* 72,000 (ibid.).

The popularity of the entertainment media indicates that there is demand for scandalous news in Finland. Also, the traditional quality media has slowly changed its news alignments. Sex-related scandals have been rare, apart from a couple of quite recent ones: the scandal relating to the former prime minister Matti Vanhanen's private relationships (he stood down as prime minister in 2010), and the former foreign minister Ilkka Kanerva's text message scandal, where he had sent inappropriate messages to various women (he was forced to resign in 2008). An MP, Toimi Kankaanniemi, was also involved with a similar kind of “sexting” scandal in 2015, which led to his withdrawal from government negotiations and demolished his chances of becoming a minister. The only former political scandal that may be seen to have something to do with sex was when Matti Ahde, the former CEO of the national betting agency Veikkaus, was sacked in 2001 because of accusations concerning his sexual harassment of his subordinates. Ahde is a well-known Finnish politician and a former minister, who had been nominated as CEO of Veikkaus because of his Social Democratic Party membership.

Ilkka Kanerva's and especially Matti Vanhanen's sex-related scandals changed the media culture in Finland. Vanhanen was the prime minister in 2006 when he was divorced and started various relationships, which the media covered. In former times, for the press to cover the prime minister's private relationships and even his sex life would have been unheard of. The change was not easy for political correspondents:

*I certainly remember the first womanising adventures of Matti Vanhanen, because I had just come to the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE in 2005, to work as a managing editor of the political news department. I remember that my boss was grumbling because my predecessor in the political news department absolutely would not agree to do a story about Vanhanen and his issues*

*with women for the YLE TV news. So he got the financial news department to do the story instead. He asked me not to be so stubborn in the future (Ainola 2016, interview).*

The Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE was not the only media organisation where journalists were confused. A political sex scandal in Finland was something new, even though sexual violence and violence towards women are very common. For example, 30% of Finnish women aged 18–74 years have been victims of physical or sexual violence by their existing or previous partner (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014). Politicians' sexual behaviour, even though it might include transgressions, just used not to be something that was discussed in public. It is possible, even probable, that the 1998 Clinton–Lewinsky scandal in the United States also liberated Finnish media to write about sexual encounters.

At the same time, so-called “kiss and tell” phenomena experienced a small renaissance in Finland: The private text messages of certain male politicians were only revealed publicly because the women who had received them gave them to the press. One woman, a previous girlfriend of Prime Minister Vanhanen, also wrote a detailed book about the relationship in 2007, which led to a trial. Prime Minister Vanhanen sued the woman, who, as well as the publisher of the book, was fined in 2009 for spreading information in a way that insulted private life. The conviction was secured by descriptions of the couple's sex life. So even though the information was correct, it was, according to the court, insulting to spread it (Mäkinen 2010, Susan Ruususen kirja: Tuomio tuli vain seksikohdistista).

The change in way these topics were covered was not welcome to most Finnish political journalists:

*I have to admit that I would not, as a political correspondent, like to go digging into those (politicians' text messages). If we wanted them, I might say that this is somebody else's job, this is not the work of a political correspondent (Haavisto 2016, interview).*

Mari Haavisto describes vividly how journalists move quite freely around the Finnish parliament, knowing when and behind which doors the politicians are having their meetings, and also knowing their routes in and out of the building.

*It is changing, the work of political correspondents, as well as that of all journalists. If you ask the senior political correspondents, they are astonished even by the fact that we are standing at those doors and waiting and asking, for example in the Kankaanniemi case, did you send those messages? (...) I am talking about the senior colleagues. They are standing at that door grumbling*

*that their work has come to this: We ask about sex. Before, we used to ask about the budget.*  
(Haavisto 2016, interview)

Writing about a politician's private life is nowadays part of the job for many political correspondents, whether they like it or not. There are still differences between the media. The so-called quality medias would at least not like to be among the first to "dig the dirt", which is the role of the gossip papers. And which are gossip papers? For example Mari Haavisto includes a couple of weekly entertainment magazines (*Seiska*, *Hymy*) and the two Finnish tabloids (*Ilta-lehti* and *Ilta-Sanomat*). In her own workplace at MTV3, Haavisto also distinguishes "web reporters" from other kinds of editors. The "web news department", states Haavisto, is the kind of place where they would be interested in even quite trivial news items about Finnish politicians, because "*they bring clicks*" (ibid.). Mari Haavisto also describes a certain kind of pattern of how scandalous material may end up being made public in Finland: after some gossip magazine has first done the dirty work, the other, more prestigious media may then start to deal with the subject, quite often just quoting the original exposure news story and then carrying on with their own follow-up stories and analysis.

Mari Haavisto also points out that some of Matti Vanhanen's sexting messages, when he was still prime minister, were first published in Sweden:

*Vanhanen's dirtiest text messages were published on a Swedish site. They were kind of not published in Finland* (ibid.)

This is very interesting, because it is certainly not the first time that something too daring to be published in Finland has instead been published in Sweden. That was already quite usual in the nineteenth century, when Finland was still part of Russia (Tommila & Salokangas 2000, 25).

### **3.4. Does gender matter in political scandals?**

Women's participation in politics is common in the Nordic countries: in the 2015 parliamentary election in Finland, 41.5% of the MPs elected were women. In the 2014 election in Sweden, the share of women MPs was 45%. But women are still rare in the highest political positions.

The gender roles in the few Finnish sex scandals have been very traditional: there is always a powerful male politician who improperly approaches a woman, whose position is somehow weaker (typically at least financially weaker) than that of the politician. The question of male and female politicians possibly receiving different, gender-oriented treatment in scandal news – i.e. whether female politicians are treated differently from their male colleagues – got mixed answers from both

the Finnish and the British interviewees. Some of the interviewees say that women are treated more harshly than men, some that men and women are treated equally, and one of the interviewees said that it is definitely male politicians who get the harsher treatment in scandal publicity. (It was the same interviewee, Joy Lo Dico, who could not name a single political scandal where the central person would have been a woman. In her opinion, political scandals only hit the most powerful male politicians.)

There is some research evidence that the different treatment of male and female politicians is one feature in political scandals. For women politicians, scandals are quite often “private”: connected to the politician’s personality, private life, and family, not to her political views or actions (Allern & Pollack 2012, 136). Also, among female politicians, rather mild transgressions may lead to a huge mediated political scandal, as was seen for example in the case of Mona Sahlin in 2010. She was a Swedish MP who was deposed as Social Democrat Party leader before her likely prime ministership in 2010. This was largely because of the famous “Toblerone scandal” concerning Sahlin’s misuse of her state credit card. Subsequent academic analysis has shown that the journalists covering the Toblerone scandal concentrated heavily in their stories on Sahlin’s gender, motherhood, and appearance, even her clothing and make-up. When, after having lost the parliamentary election in 2010, Sahlin eventually left all her political positions, the response in the Swedish press was positive. Sahlin’s solution was described as “intuitive intelligence, unerring political compass, sense of responsibility”, among others. The positive approach could also be interpreted as restoring the political (male) balance: “Mona Sahlin no longer posed a threat to the male hegemony in Swedish politics.” (Allern & Pollack 2012, 131)

The Jättteenmäki scandal in Finland (see section 3.2) has some similar characteristics to the Sahlin scandal in Sweden. Both ended with the dethroning of the country’s first ever female prime minister: in Finland three months after Jättteenmäki’s election, and in Sweden even before Sahlin was elected. Olli Ainola notes that during the short era of Jättteenmäki’s prime ministership, Finland was historically in a unique situation: both the president and the prime minister were women.

*... And they hooked up so well together, they had the same kind of thoughts about Finland’s position. This was frightening to a lot of people: that now we have these two troublesome bitches, who are going to stop everything, the NATO membership, and everything like that (Ainola 2016, interview).*

The importance of gender in political scandals was a troubling subject to the interviewees. Of the British interviewees, Mary Riddell from the *Telegraph* has made similar observations in the UK to what is represented in the Nordic scandal research: that when it comes to women politicians, even very minor incidents may lead to a political scandal. As an example Riddell mentions Jacqui Smith,

a former British Labour MP and home secretary (also the first ever woman in that post), who was hit by the expenses scandal in 2009. The scandal culminated in the fact that her husband had bought two porn movies on government expenses, and she had also bought a bath plug.

*These were relatively low-ticket items compared with male MPs, who were claiming many, many, many thousands of pounds, but it was this woman who attracted a great deal of harsh publicity over it (Riddell 2016, interview).*

The scandal ended the political career of Jacqui Smith, who resigned as home secretary in 2009 and later lost her seat in parliament.

## 4. The UK – a paradise for political scandals?

### 4.1. The golden age of political (sex) scandals

*There was no impropriety whatsoever in my acquaintanceship with Miss Keeler.*

—John Profumo (Brown 2001: 1963: The Profumo scandal)

The Profumo scandal of 1963 was the most significant political scandal in Britain in the twentieth century. The scandal culminated in the resignation of the married Conservative politician John Profumo, who was then secretary of state for war. The reason for the resignation was his sexual relationship with a young dancer, Christine Keeler. Profumo's illicit affair was well known in the inner circle of Whitehall. At the same time as having the affair with Profumo, Ms Keeler also had an affair with a Russian spy. The relationships were believed to be a potential threat to national security, and were carefully monitored by both MI5, the domestic security service, and MI6, the foreign intelligence service. (Thompson 2000, 93; Tweedie 2013: The Profumo Affair: "It was decided that Stephen Ward had to die")

Still, the ultimate reason for Profumo's resignation was not his original misconduct, but the fact that he tried to conceal what he had done. As was to become clear during the emerging scandal, he lied in the House of Commons, claiming that the allegations made in public about his relationship were untrue. Weeks later, he had to admit the truth. The scandal demolished Profumo's political career and severely damaged the Conservative party, who lost power in the next general election in 1964 (Brown 2001: 1963: The Profumo scandal)

Even though the Profumo affair took place over 50 years ago, it is still is a profoundly important British political scandal. (By Thompson's classification, it may be defined both as a political sex scandal and a political power scandal.) In the UK, it started a new kind of era of mediated political sex scandal, where a minister had to resign because an extramarital relationship became public knowledge. Historically, it was not unusual for British ministers to have illicit affairs. But in the Profumo scandal, the volume of the media sensation was something unforeseen, both in the UK and abroad. It was not just the tabloids that were covering the scandal, but the whole national press and the TV – already widely watched by the 1960s – as well.

The Profumo scandal has several characteristics that are typical of British political scandals: it was a sexual scandal, which included crucially damaging second-order transgressions. Without the ultimate public lie in parliament, Profumo might have been able to avoid his own political

destruction. It was not the illicit affair that upset people most, but the minister's suddenly exposed untruthfulness (Thompson 2000, 137).

The Profumo affair changed British journalists' conventions. Joy Lo Dico, the editor of the gossip column *Londoner's Diary* at the *Evening Standard*, says that by the 1970s, at the latest, it had become acceptable to write about people's personal lives. In her point of view – as well as that of the other British interviewees in this research – the golden age of political sex scandals is already over, having lasted from the 1960s and 1970s to the 1990s. This is how Joy Lo Dico describes the circumstances of the British press at the time:

*There are several things happening. Number one, the power. The media is at almost its greatest power in terms of advertising revenues. There's a hell of a lot of money flowing through the country. The newspapers are getting thicker and thicker. They can fight all sorts of legal battles. There is the point at which we allow personal stuff, personal sexual preferences into newspapers. It can now be openly discussed. It's what happens after '68, but it's also an age where, while various people are having all sorts of affairs, half the country is still quite moral and old-fashioned about their marriages (Lo Dico 2016, interview).*

Also in British politics, the relevance of scandals started to increase in the 1960s. In the UK, the Profumo affair became the benchmark scandal, as the Watergate scandal was in the US in 1974 (Thompson 2000, 90). Scandals were not a new phenomenon in the British press – quite the opposite. A modern mediated scandal had already appeared in newspapers in the late eighteenth century, and “has been with us ever since”, as John B. Thompson notes (Thompson 2000, 32).

In the UK, the development of the press and modern mass media has been exceptional compared to many other countries in Europe and the rest of the world. The press developed rather early. The first daily newspaper in England was the *Daily Courant*, which was established in 1702. By 1750, there were already five daily newspapers, several weeklies, and other periodicals in London, and a growing provincial press (Thompson 2000, 47).

The circulations of many British newspapers have been high throughout their history. For example the *Daily Mail*, which was established in 1896, had already reached a circulation of 1.5 million copies by the beginning of the twentieth century, which made it, at the time, the biggest newspaper in the world. By World War II, the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* had become the biggest British newspapers, both with circulation over 3 million copies. (Engel 1996, 64, 172)

Competition in the media business was hard, and newspapers invented all kind of tricks and gave away freebies to boost their sales. Also journalistic values were flexible. In order to gain as many

sales as possible, for example, the *Daily Express* was not always too rigorous with facts. It sometimes published stories that were made up. War, murders, and colourful political stories and views were the basic content of the newspaper. The *Daily Mirror*, as another example, aimed openly to entertain, and was targeted at female readers (as was also the *Daily Mail*). Scandals, or “sensations”, were desirable content for the newspapers. During the war, the *Mirror* proclaimed on its front page: “The *Mirror* is a sensational newspaper. We make no apology for that. We believe in the sensational presentation of news and views, as a necessary and valuable service in these days of mass readership and democratic responsibility.” (Engel 1996, 172, 175, 179)

Many journalists also think that scandals have been and still are important. Various sex scandals are a result of the UK’s “fairly free and open press”, states Mary Riddell, a long-term political columnist of the *Telegraph*.

*While these are often grubby stories, they’re people’s private lives, they’re not going to change the price of cheese very much, they’re not going to alter things greatly. I do think that actually it is almost a compliment to the openness and the reach of the British press.* (Riddell 2016, interview)

Riddell is also making a relevant point by noting, that it is impossible to divide areas of life, where freedom of speech is, and where it isn’t.

*Sometimes you have to report more tawdry scandals if you’re going to report stories, scandals, that really do matter* (ibid.).

#### **4.2. The rise of data scandals: “They haven’t got a human element”**

The phone-hacking scandal of the mid-2000s changed media culture in the UK. This was not a political scandal, but a scandal created by the media, and caused by journalists themselves. British tabloid journalists from the *News of the World*, possibly also from the *Sun*, both owned by the media mogul Rupert Murdoch, had been hacking people’s phones and bribing the police. A special governmental inquiry, the Leveson Inquiry, was established to investigate what had happened, as well as official police investigations. When the report of the Leveson Inquiry was published on November 2012, over 90 arrests had been already taken place because of the scandal (Leveson 2012: The Leveson Inquiry). As a result of the scandal, the *News of the World* was shut down in 2011 and several journalists were sentenced in trials. Many people who had been responsible for the editorial policies at the Murdoch’s media empire lost their top positions. New trials, on journalistic practices in the *Sun*’s newsroom, are still expected. (Jackson 2016: The Sun to face trial over phone-hacking claims)



British journalism has become more cautious after the phone-hacking scandal, says Anushka Asthana, the political editor of the *Guardian*:

*There has been a clamp down in recent years on the ethics. I think it probably got worse and worse and worse, and probably it was really bad in the 80s and 90s.*

Question: Was it the phone-hacking scandal that changed it?

*I think so. We have this huge inquiry, the Leveson Inquiry, into media ethics, so it was a real spotlight on the way how press operated for quite a long time. One newspaper got shut down. So it was quite a big deal (Asthana 2016, interview).*

Paying public officials, most importantly the police, was common in the tabloids before the phone-hacking scandal. According to the interviewees of this research, paying for information has been common for tabloids, but not for broadsheets or the so-called quality press: *"I have never paid for information. I have always worked for the newspapers that haven't done that"*, says Anushka Asthana, who had worked at the *Observer*, *The Times* and *Sky News* before joining the *Guardian* in 2016.

The idea of what paid information actually is, and what journalistic methods are ethical, has still not always been clear. A good example is phone numbers:

*The one thing that used to happen, was a number of newspapers pointed out that they were using a private investigator, who they did pay in order to get direct numbers, so numbers you would not get otherwise. And I assume the way that how he got hold of those numbers was to take them from [phone companies such as] BT and then he would sell them to journalists, and people would pay for them. That was very, very common until a few years ago (Asthana 2016, interview).*

Another of the most important political scandals of the 2000s, the expenses scandal, which started in 2009, involved considerable sums of money. The *Telegraph*, the broadsheet newspaper which first broke the story, paid £110,000 to the unnamed source of the expenses file (Press Association Reporters 2009: *Telegraph reveals cost of MPs' expenses story*). The scandal consisted of series of exposures of how British MPs abused the parliamentary allowances and expenses system, and led to several resignations and convictions. The expenses scandal is a very good example of a mediated political scandal, which is essentially open-ended: even though the main happenings seem to be over, the scandal may start to flourish again, if the press gets some new information on the subject (Thompson 2000, 73).

The expenses scandal was also a data scandal, based on a data leak. Some of the interviewees of this research consider the data scandal to be a new, modern type of scandal. They say that political scandals in the UK have changed – that the British readers are no longer greatly interested in people’s private lives and political sex scandals.

*Social values have changed. People have become much more tolerant. I think there’s less prurient interest now in people’s private lives. (...) Generally scandal now has much more to do with maleficence, with wrongdoing, with MP’s over-claiming on expenses, with corruption, dodgy business dealings, backhanders. That kind of thing (Riddell 2016, interview).*

The internet has also changed political scandals: all sorts of information that may not have been public before may now be available on the internet. This is how Joy LoDico sums up the recent big scoops in the UK: “*the MP’s expenses, the CIA files, WikiLeaks, and they’ve all been based on data*”. Data is “unarguable”, says Lo Dico. It may give a newspaper the necessary legal backup even to break the law, if the data concerns issues which meet the public interest criterion. In the UK, the concept of “public interest” has become crucial in political scandals. If the information is true, and it has some public interest, it can be published, no matter how the information was obtained in the first place. (There is a significant difference here to the Finnish political scandals: in Finland, many scandals concentrate on legality. In Britain, the content of the information – is there a public interest or not? – matters.)

Anushka Asthana remarks that in the expenses scandal, for example, the data on MP’s expenses was illegally downloaded. Still the *Telegraph*, a Conservative daily broadsheet newspaper, eventually ended up paying for it:

*Basically, if there is a public interest, or you can argue that it’s there, or there is a kind of grey area like the expenses was, nobody knew there was a public interest before they had already bought the file, and turned out that there was a public interest. But I think the other newspapers, The Times among them, was a bit cautious about paying for it.*

Question: So it was illegal?

*In theory, yes. But so was WikiLeaks, Edward Snowden’s information. But does that mean that you shouldn’t report it? It’s a grey area (Asthana 2016, interview).*

One fundamental problem related to data scandals is whether they interest people. Joy Lo Dico does not think they do. Even though she says that data journalism produces good scoops,

according to her they are missing something crucial for a good story – a human element. In the worst case, data journalism may be just “a list of names”:

*Are they as interesting as the good old-fashioned kind of overheard conversation, taped conversation with somebody saying things they shouldn't do? No, they don't actually ... they're not as sexy, they're not as fun. (...) They haven't got that really human element to them because they haven't got voice in it. They haven't got a person in it kind of revealing too much over a conversation, whatever it is (Lo Dico 2016, interview).*

The rise of the data scandals and financial political scandals may be connected, “*financial because that's where the data is*”, as Lo Dico notes. After the phone-hacking scandal, newsrooms in the UK have adopted a stricter approach than before to journalistic methods and press ethics. On the official regulation of the press, the situation after the phone-hacking scandal has remained unclear – for over ten years already. Some tightening of the regulation is expected, but how and by whom the regulation will be finally implemented is still not clear. The British state would like to play a part in the regulation process, but this has provoked criticism among journalists (Lloyd 2015, 393; Riddell 2016, interview).

#### **4.3. Lobby journalists and hit people – the differentiation of political journalists**

Many British newsrooms nowadays lack the “digging power” that would be essential in covering political scandals. According to Lo Dico, the best investigative journalism teams in the UK are currently at the *Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Mail on Sunday*, the *Financial Times*, and the *Guardian*.

*They've got the people who can blow away a story, look at the details, turn it over, get it through legal terms, they have lawyers who will back them up. Those are the ones to watch in terms of scoops (Lo Dico 2016, interview).*

The economic crisis of the media companies has affected their reporting of political scandals. In the UK, all prominent news media have lawyers to examine their stories and to judge which stories can be published and which cannot.

*Often you will find something that is almost a scandal in the newspaper and ... which might have been written as a full-blown scandal the previous ... before Leveson which has then become more balance, more nuanced. You have to make sure the other side has got a right to reply, you are to be fair in your judgements, you have to do this, that and the other (ibid).*

In the UK, many newspapers have historically had a political orientation. This was very common already in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when some newspapers were directly subsidised by regular payments from political parties. In the nineteenth century, mass media and big circulations changed that. The mass circulation newspapers trusted less to financing by political parties and proclaimed their political neutrality (Thompson 2000, 51). Since World War II, the British press has been mostly pro-Conservative. In 1945, the 6.7 million readers of Conservative-supporting papers outnumbered the 4.4 million readers of Labour papers. In the forthcoming decades Murdoch's influential tabloid the *Sun*, founded in 1964 – currently the biggest newspaper in the UK with the circulation of 1.7 million daily copies – increased the imbalance even more to the right. The *Sun*'s political turn into a pro-Tory newspaper happened in the early 1980s. (Jones 2004, 202; ABC 2016: UK national newspaper circulations, Chippendale and Horrie 1990, 141)

The balance of the newspapers' political orientation has stayed about the same until now. In the 1997 general election, Murdoch's tabloids the *Sun* and the *News of the World*, which had traditionally been Conservative, caused a sensation by backing Tony Blair and his New Labour (Jones 2004, 202–204). But they soon changed back. In the 2015 general election, only the broadsheet *Guardian* newspaper and the tabloid *Mirror* supported Labour. In terms of traditional newspaper circulation, the *Mirror* is the third biggest paid daily newspaper in the UK with a circulation of almost 800,000 copies. The *Guardian*'s circulation is much smaller, 165,000. (On the internet, the situation is the opposite: the *Guardian*'s online edition has almost 9 million average daily visitors, double that of the *Mirror*.) (ABC 2016: UK national newspaper circulations)

The political orientation of the newspapers naturally has an effect on covering political scandals, too. For example, the expenses scandal was originally a breaking story in the Tory paper the *Telegraph*, and the then Labour government and its Prime Minister Gordon Brown were hit hard by the scandal. Only weeks after the scandal emerged in 2009, the already unpopular governing Labour party lost in the European Parliament election.

Investigative journalism is “very expensive”, claims Joy Lo Dico from the *Evening Standard*, “but it makes the reputation of a newspaper” (Lo Dico 2016, interview). She and the other interviewees in this research vividly describe the differentiation of British political journalists: there are professional investigative journalists, “hit people”, who can “bring the scandal home” and who “won't be rubbing shoulders with the politicians”. They are very different from lobby journalists, who work closely with politicians in the House of Commons. One of the latter is the *Guardian*'s Anushka Asthana, who has been working as a lobby journalist for seven years. For her, as well as many journalists who cover politics, it is essential to know people and to have good relations to possible sources:

*Contacts. So the main way you get stories is by talking to people. So you get to know the MPs and special advisers and press officers, you talk to them about what has happened. Basically, that's the way to get a story (Asthana 2016, interview).*

For Asthana, the best way to try to get information is to hang around and “*try to see as many politicians as you can*” in Portcullis House, which is an office building in Westminster where many MPs work. She also organises lunches, drinks, and dinners with politicians and other possible sources. Sometimes lobby journalists end up spending very much of their time, also in the evenings and in the weekends, with politicians. It is not unheard of, according to Asthana, for a lobby journalist to take a vacation with a politician. Asthana describes that as a political editor, she is in frequent close contact for example with special advisers:

*I think it's a difficult relationship, and it's a very ... inevitably, you spend so much time talking to special advisers, that you become almost friends in a way. But equally, you have to be able to write negative things about them, and they have to be able to give stories to other people. You have to have a professional relationship (Asthana 2016, interview).*

Even though political sexual scandals and coverage of politicians' private lives are common in the British press, the interviewees of this research didn't think that they would be their core tasks, quite the opposite. “*If somebody's having an affair now, then really I think it's accepted very much as being their own business*”, states Mary Riddell. Anushka Asthana doesn't cover a politician's private life as long as there is no public interest, and as long as they don't use their privacy, for example their family and their children, in their job. Joy Lo Dico also doesn't want to cover politicians' extramarital affairs, for example, and to “*manufacture horror*”, and this is also related to her newspaper's and column's brand:

*When I'm working at Londoner's Diary I think it would take something exceptional for us to write a story about somebody's private life that suggested they were doing something wrong. The Daily Mail doesn't think like that (Lo Dico 2016, interview).*

In other words, the interviewees of this research wanted to distinguish themselves from the so-called yellow press journalists – just like their Finnish colleagues.

## 5. Conclusions

### 1) In Finland, political scandals have increased. In the UK, the golden era of political scandals seems to be over.

The media coverage of political scandals since World War II has been different in Finland and in the UK for many reasons. In Finland the media environment was greatly affected by the presence of a strong leader, President Urho Kekkonen, until the 1980s, when the number of political scandals started to increase. The most common form of political scandal in Finland is still a financial political scandal, but there are strong tendencies which indicate that there are likely to be more sexual political scandals (and political scandals in general) in the future. Sex scandals in Finland have so far been comparatively mild, mostly so-called “sexting” scandals, where male politicians have been sent inappropriate text messages to women. On the other hand, even these sexting scandals have led to the ultimate end point of a political scandal: the politician’s dismissal. This may indicate, that despite the liberation of the press, Finnish moral codes and norms relating to private relationships and sexuality are still quite tight.

Many of the British sexual political scandals, which are regularly reported, are much more dramatic. The latest example of a “good old style” sexual political scandal in the UK was Lord Sewel’s cocaine scandal in 2015, when a married peer – who had been deputy speaker of the House of Lords – was caught snorting cocaine with prostitutes, wearing an orange bra. The sex party, of which a video was leaked to the *Sun*, took place in central London in an apartment that Lord Sewel had rented at a low cost, with the taxpayers’ money. On the video, he also brags about using the taxpayers’ money to pay for the prostitutes. The financial circumstances of the scandal aroused opinions that Lord Sewel’s scandal should be regarded also as a financial one (Moore 2015: The real Lord Sewel scandal is financial, not sexual).

In the UK, political scandals have been the basic content of newspapers for centuries. The most typical British political scandal has been a sexual one, and the large number of scandals can be seen as an endorsement of the freedom of the British press. Still, the golden era of political scandals in the UK was in the 1980s and 1990s, and seems to be over now. Since the phone-hacking scandal, which started in the mid-2000s, newsrooms and journalists have become much more cautious than before on reporting politicians’ wrongdoings, as well as many other issues. “*There is a spotlight on the press*”, says Anushka Asthana, the political editor of the *Guardian*, one of the interviewees of this research.

## **2) The nature of political scandals has changed. In the UK, the trend is towards political financial or data scandals.**

All kinds of political scandals have started to increase in Finland, but in the UK their nature seems to have changed. Because of the current “spotlight on the press”, newsrooms and journalists are less willing to take risks in their coverage of politicians’ private lives. Expensive appearances in the courts are now actively avoided by the newspapers, and many media are keen to report more “serious” political scandals and do investigative journalism. The rise of data scandals (WikiLeaks, Snowden, Panama Papers) is a new phenomenon linked to financial political scandals, representing the direction in which British political scandals appear to be developing. Challengingly, professional investigative journalism is very expensive. Despite the fact that it makes the reputation of the newsroom, only a few of the biggest newspapers in the UK are now able to do investigative journalism on a large scale (Lo Dico 2016, interview).

Some of us may not like political scandals, but it is unlikely that they will go away. In the UK, there will be more financial political scandals, or data scandals, and some of the coverage of these scandals will become very specialised work demanding data expertise. The differentiation of political journalists will accelerate in the future. Even now in the UK, the lobby journalists, who need good relationships with politicians, are quite a different group from the investigative journalists (“hit people”).

## **3) Morality: people expect higher moral from politicians than from common people.**

Politicians are trusted less than ever, but are still expected to manage their private life more morally than average people. This paradox might make one wonder what kind of person in today’s mediated world is crazy enough to choose a political career (Blåfield and Rätty 2015). Still, most of the interviewees of this research do not have too much pity for the politicians. One of them is Olli Ainola, a special correspondent of the Finnish tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat*, who happens to be married to a politician:

*If you have become a professional politician, even though you are formally in public office, it means that you have to tolerate all kind of things. You are there voluntarily – although I have heard politicians say that they are not actually doing it voluntarily, because they do not have any other profession! I do not accept this politician’s quibble at all, even from my own spouse, that it [the publicity] is somehow unreasonable. It is not unreasonable as long as nobody is intruding into your home or hacking your e-mail – as long as there is not a crime against the target. The Finnish Guidelines for Journalists should be obeyed, however (Ainola 2016, interview).*

According to some sociological theories, political scandals are a common way to (re)define society's moral norms (Allern & Pollack 2012, 19). The press may be seen to have taken the role of the church: if a politician's norm violation is condemned in the media publicity, it is almost defined to be a sin. Still, a scandal does not always lead to the demolition of a politician's career or reputation. It is possible for a politician to survive the scandal. In some cases the politician's reputation may even grow, and they may become even more popular as a result of the scandal. In that case, the scandal has functioned as a test of the politician's credibility. (Thompson 2000, 112)

#### **4) Circumstances in society affect the dynamics of the scandal.**

Finland has a history rife with political correctness, which the press also values. In a small country, it is much harder to confront political opponents dramatically in public, because defeated opponents have almost nowhere to go. Ministerial resignations have been rare in Finland compared to the UK, but they do happen occasionally. Typically, just one or two ministerial resignations have actually taken place in every government since 1992, as Henna Virkkunen has pointed out in her research on the resignation of Finnish ministers (Pernaa and Pitkänen 2006, 127).

In the Finnish multiparty system, politicians need to be able to collaborate with each other, sometimes even forming the most imaginative coalition governments. Because a political scandal usually demands someone to disapprove of the offender's behaviour, a scandal in Finland may sometimes just die because no one is willing to play the disapproving role in these circumstances.

This was one of the reasons why the former Finnish culture and sports minister Paavo Arhinmäki, who ended up drinking too much vodka in Sochi in 2014, got to keep his position. Nobody powerful enough wanted to stand up and judge him for what had happened. Arhinmäki quickly apologised for his behaviour, which made him politically less vulnerable. Also, the sitting prime minister at the time defended him. In Finland, where a heavy-drinking culture still prevails, the norm violation of drunkenness and passing out may be seen as a mild transgression, or, in some circles, even nationalist or heroic. This kind of praiseworthiness was clearly visible just after the news of Arhinmäki's drunkenness in Sochi started to spread on the internet. According to a recent study, if something is about to go viral, it will usually happen immediately, or not at all (Margetts et al. 2016). From the instant reaction on social media it could be concluded that the Finnish people did not take Arhinmäki's encounter very seriously. For the next couple of days, the Finnish Facebook and Twitter filled with jokes and memes about the subject. As the meeting between Arhinmäki and the prime minister did not have any serious consequences, and no more new facts about the event came to light, the emerging scandal gradually died in less than a week.



One core feature of a sexual political scandal is, that unlike other kind of scandals, a sex scandal does not necessarily need anyone to disapprove of the actions of person at the centre of the scandal. Simply that a politician breaks commonly accepted norms relating to sexuality or even to normal private relationships may be enough to create a sex scandal, at least in Finland. For example, Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen first told the press that he met one of his partners when he was shopping at Ikea. After the relationship ended, the woman revealed that they actually met in an internet chat room. The prime minister's made-up story about how the relationship started produced some critical stories in the Finnish press (Saroniemi 2006: Älä häpeä, Matti!).

In terms of scandal theory, Vanhanen's public lie actually fulfils the requirements of the damaging second-order transgression. In that case, the original transgression would have been meeting a woman on the internet. This is a very common practice nowadays in Finland, but for some reason Vanhanen wanted to conceal it. (It should be noted that this relationship, or scandal, if it can even be defined as such, was not Vanhanen's only public action that eventually led him to voluntarily leave the prime minister's office in 2010. There were several other sensational stories relating to Vanhanen's love life as well. However, the most serious was the Finnish campaign-finance scandal that broke out in 2007. Dozens of candidates belonging to numerous parties had hidden the sources of their election campaign funds, which in some cases came from clearly corrupt connections. The scandal hit the Centre Party, which Vanhanen led at the time, particularly hard. There were claims about his personal misconduct, too, but they were never fully proved.)

##### **5) Most ambitious Finnish and British journalists are scalp hunters, but only Britons admit it.**

Compared to their British colleagues, Finnish political journalists seem to be less aware of, or less willing to admit, the power that they possess as journalists and media representatives. Finnish political correspondents describe their work more as reporting just pure facts, without any awareness of their own possible agenda, which would, in political scandals, typically be to get politicians sacked. According to Mari Haavisto from MTV3:

*Journalists, or me, we cannot have that sort of agenda. Is it the journalist's mission, to take things so far that the politician is going to be sacked? No, it is not. I am doing my job as a political correspondent in a way, maybe the others do differently, that I cannot have any agenda of my own. I cannot promote anything. The facts have to speak for themselves. Also, it [the result] is heavily dependent on the target's reaction on the sensation, how he or she comments on it (Haavisto 2016, interview)*

Their British colleagues say openly, like Anushka Asthana: *“it is regarded as a good story”*, if a political journalist is able to do some reporting that leads to a politician’s dismissal. The higher the target is in the political hierarchy, the better. British journalists call these achievements “scalps”, as Joy Lo Dico from the *Evening Standard* describes: *It’s called getting a scalp. Getting a scalp is really big deal. It’s kind of a badge of honour. When you see a politician fall, you, the media, you yourself, and your newspaper, and the whole media feels very proud that it’s exerting its power over politicians. Yeah, it’s a great badge of honour* (Lo Dico 2016, interview).

But the concept of getting scalps is not unknown in Finland. Pekka Ervasti’s journalism prize in 2003, for his reporting of Anneli Jäätteenmäki’s prime ministership scandal, was awarded because of “the historic dismissal of the prime minister” (Suuri journalistipalkinto 2003: Palkitut 2003). This is one of the rare occasions when this issue has been mentioned in public among Finnish journalists.

According to some experts, scalp hunting as such is something that Finnish journalists are not interested in. As Risto Uimonen, an experienced Finnish editor-in-chief and author writes: *“Many Finnish journalists want to do their work during office hours, without great journalistic passion or the need to push the boundaries.”* He also claims that British, American, and Swedish journalists are more critical and feisty than their Finnish colleagues (Uimonen 2009, 90).

The origins of this kind of press activity are in the Watergate scandal that led to the resignation of President Nixon in the United States in 1974. Being aware of this “sacking desire” in political scandals does not necessarily mean that British political journalists are more cruel than their Finnish colleagues. Rather, it is possible to claim that the British journalists just have a less idealistic perception of themselves, or the media they represent.

*“The journalist must aim to provide truthful information”*, it says in the Finnish Guidelines for Journalists, point 8 (Council for Mass Media 2014). This guideline is of course very important, but it also reflects the Finnish idea of objective journalism – as if there was a simple truth about every subject out there, which is just waiting to be told by objective, impartial, and right-minded journalists. In the real world, and in political scandals in particular, the world is more complex than that. Political scandals are often versatile, messy, and continuous happenings. Often much of the dynamics of the scandal is dependent on media and journalists. What is their view of things? It may be useful to evaluate the British concept of “public interest” in Finland also, to judge whether some piece of information should be published or not. (In Finland, the corresponding question currently asked in newsrooms is: “Does it have social relevance?”)

## 6) Openness about political and other orientations helps journalists and readers to position journalism.

The open political orientation of most British newspapers helps journalists to position themselves. It also helps readers to position the journalism that they are consuming. In the UK, only a couple of newspapers position themselves as neutral. In Finland, the majority of newsrooms see themselves as neutral, excluding only the official party newspapers. But are Finnish newsrooms really neutral or impartial in the end? This is a question that the newsroom representatives would strongly refute, by arguing that their political journalism is “objective” and “based on facts”. (If that were completely true, would that not automatically mean that all the political news in Finland would be the same?)

In Finland, the idea of journalistic objectivity also touches journalists personally. In the major Finnish media newsrooms it is nowadays hard to find political correspondents who have an open political alignment – in contrast to the over-politicised 1960s and 1970s, when this was very common. Journalists may have political sympathies or views (for example about immigration, NATO, or gender equality) but are usually not outspoken. In the UK, political correspondents still come from more varied backgrounds and may have been politically active. All the British interviewees in this research could place their own newspaper on the political map of the UK, and for example Anushka Asthana said that she shares the *Guardian's* “values”.

The Finnish interviewees either did not speak about their media's or their personal values or political alignments, or placed themselves as neutrals. In Finland, there has been some public discussion in recent years about journalists' political views. Matti Apunen, the leader of the pro-market Finnish think tank EVA and former editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Aamulehti*, suggested in 2010 that Finnish journalists should publish their political alignments. According to one concise, non-academic survey, about half of Finnish journalists are leftists (Vasala 2010: Mediaviikon kysely: Toimittajista puolet vasemmistolaisia, puoluekanta vaikuttaa sisältöön). There has been strong resistance to Matti Apunen's suggestion. In 2015, 78% of Finnish journalists objected to the publication of journalists' political alignments and only 16% supported it (Jokelainen 2015: Matti Apusen ehdotus puoluekannan kertomisesta ei saa kannatusta toimittajilta). Of the Finnish newsrooms, only Apunen's former workplace *Aamulehti* has implemented his idea. In *Aamulehti's* survey, the most popular party was the Greens, which got 37% support among *Aamulehti's* employees, who answered the survey anonymously during one work shift (Iltalehti 2010: Aamulehti selvitti toimittajiensa poliittiset kannat). The most recent suggestion about publishing journalists' political alignments came in 2015 from the Finnish populist party The Finns' (“True Finns”) MP Olli Immonen, who is also a member of the administrative council of the public broadcaster YLE. He argued that there was no single reporter working at YLE who would “think conservative or patriotic” (Turunen 2015: Olli Immoselta uusi avautuminen FB:ssa – professori tyrmistyi: “Niitä ei voi eikä

pidä kysyä”). It should be noted that none of these surveys that have claimed to examine the political alignment of Finnish journalists have been academic or comprehensive. Often the motives seem to have a political origin: by doing this sort of public suggestion or survey the actor means to imply that Finnish journalists will not be impartial, or somehow will not favour the actor.

There is some academic research on the political alignments of the Finnish elite and of the also the journalistic elite. Surveys made in 1991, 2001, and 2011 at the University of Tampere show that the Finnish Conservative party (the National Coalition Party) has become the most popular party among the Finnish journalistic elite in two decades. At the beginning of the 1990s, 21% of the journalistic elite supported the Conservatives, but in 2011 their support among the journalistic elite was 50% – clearly more than it has been in general elections (Laurinolli, Heikki 2014: *Valtaeliitti kannattaa kokoomusta*). What has not been examined is whether this powerful swing to the right among the journalistic elite has somehow affected media companies’ news content. However, some tension must prevail in Finnish newsrooms, if it is true that journalists are likely to be leftists and their bosses right-wingers. This is the conclusion that could be drawn from the available information, not all of which is academically reliable.

## **7) An idea for further research: Examining the political alignments of Finnish newsrooms?**

The increased number of political scandals in Finland indicates that the freedom of the Finnish press and openness of the government administration has moved to a new level. The change seems fundamental and permanent. The world of news has become very quick. Much of daily political news follows events online in real time, or with only a slight delay. For politicians, the world has also become increasingly transparent. Anyone who chooses a political career must be prepared for every single issue in their life to become public. This changed reality also sets new challenges for political correspondents, as well as for all journalists who cover political scandals. What are their own political and moral alignments?

It has become clear, as a by-product of this research, that examining the political views that Finnish newsrooms reflect in their news production would be something new and interesting in Finland. (In a way, it would also be following the British path in political openness.) To gather some reliable information about the subject, an academic approach would be required, as well as concentrating research on the news organisations, their leaders and their financing, not on individual journalists. At the core of the possible political alignments of different media is how the readers perceive the news from different news organisations – not what the news organisations themselves claim to represent.

One thing the Finnish media has done well is building trust in news. Finns trust news more than Britons. In Finland, the proportion of the population who agree that they can trust most news most of the time is 65% (“strongly agree” or “tend to agree”). In the UK, the figure is only 50% (Reuters Institute: Digital News Report 2016). Finnish news may not always be the most exciting and entertaining, but false information is rare. That is partly a result of the well-functioning self-regulation system of the Finnish press. For the same reason, media-related law suits are quite exceptional in Finland. The system is independent of the state, financed by the media itself, and operated largely on a voluntary basis. The Finnish model of self-regulation would be worth exploring in the UK also.

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### **Semi-structured interviews:**

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Haavisto, Mari. Interview 15 February 2016, Helsinki.

Lo Dico, Joy. Interview 8 June 2016, London.

Pernaa, Ville. Interview 15 February 2016, Helsinki.

Riddell, Mary. Interview 12 May 2016, London.



# Appendix

## Interview questions

### Basic information

- Name, age, work position, media
- How long have you been working as a political editor / covered politics?

### Political scandal

- How do you understand the concept of political scandal?
- Are political scandals common in your country?
- Are they now more common than before?
- Has the scandal publicity changed since World War II? How?

### Your work

- How have you been in touch with political scandals in your work?
- Have you/your media done a scoop that has led to a political scandal?
- Describe the process of a scandal news story / How a political scandal develops?
- What kind of things in your country typically lead to scandal? Are there things that will not cause a scandal?
- Are there tendencies for political actors to try to use scandals as weapons? Does your editorial department get lots of leaks, in order to harm one's political opponent? How do you deal with (anonymous) leaks?
- Do you personally possess information that might cause a political scandal, if it became public? (What kind of information? If you possess information of this kind, why don't you publish it?)
- When a political scandal occurs, do women politicians get harsher treatment in publicity than men? (Why?)
- Do you see any ethical problems related to scandal news stories? (If yes, what kind of problems?)
- Related to political scandals, do you see there a media agenda / the journalists' attempt to try to sack the politician in the middle of the scandal?  
(– Are political scandals connected to the hostility towards the elite? Do you see connections between political scandals and the rise of right-wing populism in the 2000s?)

### Politicians

- How much political/scandal publicity can be mastered by the target? Do you see much effort to try to do that?
- Can you name some examples of successful behaviour? How about mistakes related to politicians who have been facing a scandal?
- Are there some ways to avoid political scandals? (How is it possible?)
- If the scandal occurs, what should one do?
- Does the media consulting, spin, have any effect? (Have you noticed, how, if a politician that you are interviewing has been spun?)
- Does it matter what politicians do in their private life? (If for example a minister wants to keep his/her private life away from publicity, should media respect it?)
- Have you experienced bribery attempts? Have you been asked money, or something else, for a piece of information? (Would you pay for information in some circumstances?)
- How close relations do you think that a political editor may have with politicians? Is there some line that you cannot cross (Where does it go)?