

“Really? She is an abuser?”

A feminist categorical-content analysis on Asia Argento
vs. Jimmy Bennet case on Facebook.

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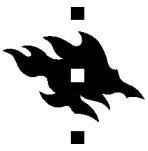


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Tiivistelmä/Referat – Abstract <p>The #MeToo campaign started on social media in 2017, empowering women who had experienced sexual harassment and violence. From the start the campaign was criticized for lack of intersectionality in representation. In the autumn of 2018, the leading figure of the campaign, Asia Argento, was accused of having sexual relations with 17-year-old Jimmy Bennet. The new story presented a differing narrative from the main storyline of #metoo, that eventually resulted in heated online debates where gender, power relations and sexual violence were present and debated. The campaign has inevitably shaped society, and the way we talk about sexual violence in an online setting.</p> <p>This thesis focuses on the narrative of Asia Argento on social media; how she is narrated in relation to her gender and categories of #metoo and sexual harassment. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to analyze how women are viewed on social media in the post #metoo context. The theoretical framework of this thesis builds on existing literature on feminism, gender as a cultural construct, sexual violence and power relations as part of gender and feminism, social media, hate speech and how these subjects are discussed on social media in the #metoo context in which its own communicative practices apply. The main source material is provided by Rossi (2015), Daniels (2016), Kantola (2015), Kitzinger & Thomas (1995) and Meikle (2016).</p> <p>The qualitative study applies feminist epistemology to analyze 75 comments collected from 5 news outlets: CNN International, the New York Times, CBS News, Fox News and ABC News. The data was collected with random sampling to enable a broad demographic of commentators, that were later fully anonymized apart from their gender. The analysis was conducted using categorical-content analysis.</p> <p>Argento is analyzed through three themes: women, #metoo and sexual violence. The findings indicate that white women are fair game on social media, as their appearance, merits and femininity is denied. The loss of credibility of #MeToo movement is highlighted through Asia Argento, whereas the women supporting her are processed similarly as Argento. The latest case further impacts the narrative of the victims, as the status of the victim is negotiated.</p> <p>The findings indicate that the power relation between genders strongly impacts how the society treats women. Victim blaming, and mob-shaming are apparent, as the social media has enabled freedom of speech.</p> <p>The findings further indicate that social media is a patriarchal environment, that nurtures misogyny. Hence, hostility, stereotypes and generalizations are apparent, resulting in an environment where the weak are silenced and dominant voices are being emphasized. This does not only apply to women, but to men as well, as they too are being faced with belittling and emasculation. The thesis analyzes the narrative of a woman in the era in which gender and gender roles are still being defined. It takes a closer look at social media, and how women are perceived on social media in the post #metoo context.</p>			
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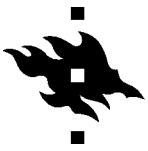
1. Introduction

The #MeToo campaign started on social media in 2017, empowering women who had experienced something horrible. Something that until 2017 was considered taboo on social media. Yet, stories about sexual violence surfaced along with debates on gender, promoting for change in society. However, Me Too faced heavy criticism from the very beginning, starting from where the hashtag originated (Guerra 2017) to the representation of the campaign (Onwuachi-Willig 2018).

In the autumn of 2018, stark controversies against the campaign started to rise, after the leading figure of the campaign, Asia Argento was accused of having sexual relations with 17-year-old Jimmy Bennet (Severson 2018). The Jimmy Bennet case presented a differing narrative from the main storyline of #MeToo; white middle-aged men, such as Harvey Weinstein, were not the abusers. The public was shocked, as the abuser was actually one of the victims of Harvey Weinstein. Moreover, it was something that nobody has anticipated; something that was not written in the narrative of a woman, a leader and vocal person of a feminist movement, or a victim.

The two events between Weinstein and Bennet are separate, but due to media headlines the two are oftentimes intertwined. This might explain why these events are seen as a continuum in the public narrative. In the media headlines Asia Argento is rarely an active agent without the #metoo campaign (see eg. Severson 2018), which probably increases the value of the news or provides a statement. Be as it may, her past actions are now contradicted, which can be seen in the way how the #metoo is suffering from credibility issues.

To date, the campaign has revealed the many sides of sexual abuse, and how it affects both genders. As more and more people have been caught, the online discussion has turned into heated debates, in which power relations and gender, boundaries regarding sexual harassment and the treatment of victims are being debated. The topic, which was taboo only a few years ago, is being discussed online.



My interest in this topic sparked as I noticed how the culture of abuse seems to treat both victims and abusers differently based on their gender – especially on social media, where there rarely is any filter for emotions or words. Instead, victim blaming, toxic masculinity and misogyny can be apparent in the discussions. These themes are prevalent, especially when we are culturally defining and re-defining the narrative image of the abusers as well as the victims.

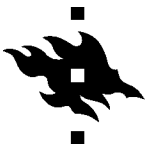
1.1 Research aim and research questions

I have limited my focus on one particular aspect of the #metoo campaign: Asia Argento and her narrative. The aim of my thesis is to analyze the narrative of Asia Argento through a feminist case study conducted on social media in the post #metoo era. I want to examine the connotations and metaphors of misogyny and gender through which the narrative is being delivered. By the post #metoo era, I refer to the time after the onset of the campaign.

From these premises there are two research questions for this thesis.

- 1. How is Asia Argento narrated through the Asia Argento vs. Jimmy Bennet storyline?**
- 2. What is the narrative of Asia Argento through the themes of #metoo and sexual abuse?**

The first question focuses on how the image of Argento is being narrated through the Argento vs. Bennet case: How is she described as an “ex-victim” and now-predator? What are the metaphors and connotations? The second question relates to the themes later drawn from the dataset used in this thesis: How is Asia Argento narrated in relation to her gender, to #metoo that she represents and to sexual harassment that has been the core of the #metoo movement? The second question further relates to the criticism of (white) feminism that both the #metoo movement and (white) feminism have faced. As the analysis will reveal, some of the narratives are created by comparing women to men.



The study was conducted on Facebook, where I searched for news connecting Asia Argento to #metoo. The comments were collected from five news outlets: CNN International, ABC News, Fox News, New York Times and CBS News.

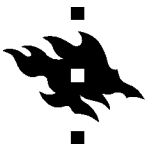
1.2 The scope of the study

The focus of this thesis is not gender (in itself), but rather how gender is being constructed in various cultural ways. Additionally, the thesis explores the power relations embedded in gender which dictate the lives of women and men.

Previous research exists that has value pertaining to this research. This research focuses on #metoo, feminist epistemology and sexual harassment. In *“What about #UsToo? The Invisibility of Race in the #MeToo Movement”* (2018) Angela Onwuachi-Willig discusses the lack of intersectionality in the #metoo movement. Her study provides important social background for the limitations of the #metoo movement.

Regarding the impact of the #metoo hashtag on women in *“Twitter for Sparking a Movement, Reddit for Sharing the Moment: #metoo through the Lens of Social Media”* (2016), Lydia Manikoda, Ghazaleh Beigi, Huan Liu and Subbarao Kambhampati examine how people use social media to share their stories on sexual harassment. Moreover, how social media platforms are used differently to either share stories on sexual harassment or to empower and encourage the victims. Their study relates to how the social media environment allows emotional and verbal involvement, that may vary on different platforms.

Feminist epistemology is crucial for this thesis as the frame of the analysis and the foundation of the perspective. Regarding the *feminist epistemology*, my thesis relies on Sandra Harding and her pioneering research *“Feminism and Methodology”* (1987), which provides a strong foundation for feminist methodology and its strengths to study social media and #MeToo. Harding’s writings are accompanied by Ann Ticker (2006), who discuss the methodological issues on feminism (within international relations). Despite being focused on



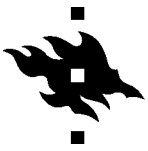
international relations, the discussion is very applicable to strengthen the feminist epistemology of this thesis.

Narrative analysis is also an important method. Narrative analysis has been previously applied to study social media. For example, Wen-Ying Chou, Yvonne Hunt, Anna Folkers and Erik Augustson (2011) examine cancer survivorship on Youtube in "*Cancer Survivorship in the Age of YouTube and Social Media: A Narrative Analysis*". They searched for videos using terms such as "cancer survivor" and "cancer stories", which they analyzed to identify the shared thematic and linguistic characteristics of these videos. The data collecting method used by Chou et al. (2011) provided some inspiration for my thesis, and the method was used to some extent and applied to Facebook comments.

I chose Facebook, since the comments are readily available without censorship. I was also interested in analyzing contagious emotions (Kraemer et al. 2014), that is to say whether there were similar opinions or emotions apparent in the comments sections. In addition, hate speech can be found in abundance on Facebook... (Finnish Ministry of Justice 2016). Thus I am able to analyze polarized feelings and opposites.

There are political and participatory aspects on choosing Facebook. Political issues often are both, personal and public, to the users due to news feeds in which public news blend into personal messages, which in turn result in more interaction and engagement (Landert 2017, pp. 49). Lastly, the comments on Facebook are frequently described as vertical communication (Landert 2017, pp. 38-40), as in they are not necessarily addressed to peers, but instead to the person the news are about.

Fox News, CBN News, CNN International, ABC News and New York Times were chosen to represent media outlets where the comments will be sampled from. They are different regarding their position on the political ideological spectrum and their amount of bias, thereby offering multi-dimensional insight into the narrative.



The news were searched by using the search bar provided by Facebook. Comments were an anonymous random sampling following Patrick Dattalo's (2009) methods. The random sampling was done to improve the demographics of the participants and to allow multiple voices to be heard.

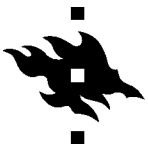
The analysis adapted categorical-content analysis (Lieblich et al. 1998) which is a dimension of narrative analysis. The content analysis enables creating a coherent understanding of how Asia Argento is brought up and perceived on social media in the post #MeToo context. In this thesis the comments were analyzed against their context to allow a more in-depth analysis of the comment's cultural junctures.

When talking about women and men in this thesis, I am referring to their cultural gender (Rossi 2015, pp.25) appreciating the feminist roots of the MeToo campaign. Hence, gender in this thesis is the *habitus*, the ways of "doing gender" (Bourdieu, 1990). Acknowledging the cultural aspect of gender allows analyzing how social media discussion constructs, produce and negotiate gender.

The concept of gender is crucial for this thesis. However, there are limits to gender from the feminist perspective that my thesis follows, as the gender system is based on the binaries (Butler 2002, pp.10). The binary gender system does not, for example, acknowledge the gender spectrum. The comments were analyzed from the perspective of gender (male, female, other gender) to see, whether the gender of the commentator impacted the tone of the comment.

Here, I follow the liberal feminist (Evans 1995 pp. 47, Osborne 2001) perspective when collecting and analyzing the comments. The perspective enables me to focus on the requirement of "sameness" between genders from a societal perspective: the equal rights for men and women. More specifically, it helped and allowed me to treat Argento and Bennet equally.

#MeToo is a sprawling phenomenon which requires precise scope and extensive theories. As a result, this thesis combines elements from various sources of



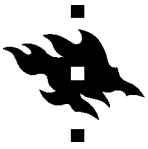
previous research to construct the narrative of Asia Argento in the post #metoo context from a liberal feminist perspective.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with a literary review that offers the theoretical framework for my thesis. The first part of the literary review examines (white) feminism, misogyny and toxic masculinity. The second part focuses on gender from the perspective of power relations, which is the core foundation of my thesis. Misogyny and toxic masculinity are examined with a theory and a discussion about gender, power relations and sexual violence. The last part of the literary review examines social media from the perspective of communicative practices and hate speech. The last part allows me to analyze how social media works as a communicative environment and how people utilize social media to share their opinions.

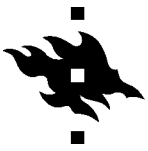
The methodology chapter begins with an extensive introduction to the #metoo movement through the themes of feminism, gender and sexual violence followed by an introduction to the feminist research method, with strong emphasis on methodology and epistemology. After establishing the feminist epistemology, I will present my method of categorical-content analysis which is a dimension of narrative analysis. The method will be followed by a discussion on the data collection phase including the challenges I faced, as well as some limitations and ethical considerations concerning the data and research.

The methodology chapter will be followed by an analysis, where I first present general thoughts regarding my data. The analysis will unfold in three sections. Each section (women, #metoo and sexual harassment) represents a category, that relates to the method and the research questions. Under each category there are themes, that derive from the dataset. These themes are the common factors within the comments. For example, the category of women was eventually divided into themes of credibility, talents and appearance. The narrative of sexual abuse, on the other hand, was divided into money, credibility and gender; the latter themes



further includes comments regarding stereotypes, toxic masculinity and power relations.

Lastly, I will discuss my key findings. Conclusions will be followed by a discussion considering the significance and the limitations of the results, as well as recommendations for future research.



2. Literary review

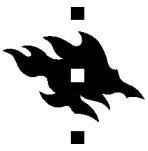
The #MeToo phenomenon has been the topic of many articles and studies. Strong criticism has been prevalent about the victimization and the limitations of #metoo, but these have been only journalistic opinions. (see. Williams 2017b). No groundbreaking research exist about the effects of #metoo, but there is a vast amount of research that generally focuses on the effectiveness of the hashtag that had such an impact of on women.

For example, in “*Twitter for Sparking a Movement, Reddit for Sharing the Moment: #metoo through the Lens of Social Media*“ (2016) Lydia Manikoda, Ghazaleh Beigi, Huan Liu and Subbarao Kambhampati examines public reactions and emotions through comparative analysis on Twitter and Reddit: how the victims shared their stories on social media and how the social media platforms impact on how and what kind of stories are being shared. Kristie Rearick has also discussed the global impact of the #MeToo movement (2018a & 2018b).

My thesis is intertwined with feminism which has been thoroughly researched. Jessie Daniels discusses the lack of intersectionality in feminism in the digital era in “*Trouble with White Feminism, Digital Feminism and the Intersectional Internet*” (2016). The study provides a strong foundation to problematize *white feminism* in the #metoo movement. Furthermore, the thesis focuses on *misogyny* and *toxic masculinity* on social media. My concept of misogyny combines elements from Ann Goldsworthy (2013) and Kate Manne (2017).

Alison Phipps has examined the whiteness of #metoo in “*Every woman knows a Weinstein: political whiteness in #MeToo and public feminism around sexual violence*” (2019). She argues that the survivor stories are shared in a neoliberal context which results in backlashes. Furthermore, Philipps argues that the leaders and the backlashes they have faced reflect political whiteness.

Even though a considerable amount of MeToo has been about empowering women and allowing them to share their stories, studies on the narrative of women



or studies conducted in the Facebook environment are still relatively unknown. Many social media platforms share similar traits, but Facebook's seems to be one of the most difficult ones as a data source.

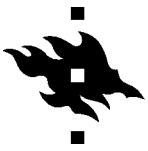
In this chapter I will present the theoretical framework for my thesis, which will enable more in-depth analysis. First, I will be discussing feminism; its history and criticism it has obtained. There will also be a discussion on gender and how it is shaped by power relations. Judith Butler (2002) and Leena-Maija Rossi (2015) have an excellent theory regarding gender and power relations, that will be utilized in my research. Gender and power relations are accompanied by a discussion on *sexual violence* as an act of overpowering, relating to Tina Skinner's (2005) and Celia Kitzinger & Alison Thomas's (1995) research on rape and sexual violence.

To provide more theoretical framework for my analysis, I will also discuss social media. My focus is set on the communicative practices on social media, and how social media functions as a public arena for opinions. Graham Meikle (2016) has provided a useful theory on the communicative practices on social media which will be applied to this thesis. In addition, there will be a short discussion about hate speech, that has been prevalent in the #MeToo context.

2.1 Feminism

According to *The Oxford Dictionary*, feminism is "advocacy of women's rights on the ground of equality of the sexes". *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* considers feminism as both women's emancipation, and a system of critique of patriarchy (system of male authority, which oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions).

According to Johanna Kantola (2015) there are four perspectives or traditions to feminist research. First, feminist research perceives that power is a shareable resource, that all genders should get their hands onto. Secondly, feminist research sees that there are oppressive forms of power with the concept of patriarchy. Third, there are the stabilizing forms of power that aim for refining the concept of



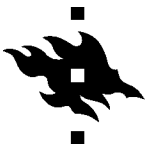
power and bringing out the various forms of power in a stabilizing manner. Fourth, tradition utilizes the power-analysis by Michel Foucault and draws attention to structural and gendering forms power, that reinforce the structural differences between males and females. (Kantola 2015, pp.80)

In other words, feminism focuses on the female subject; the representation and politics of the category of women. It has drawn attention to *sex* and *gender* and how culture constructs gender. (Butler 2002, pp. 3-4; 10) Besides gender, feminism focuses on all differences that produce hierarchies and inequality; *class*, *sexuality*, *race*, *age*, *disability*, *religion* and *ethnicity* (Juvonen et al. 2015, pp.11).

Feminism has its roots in the late 18th century and the French Revolution in 1789. Women, who had actively fought with men during the French revolution, were disappointed after their equality was denied in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1789). Mary Wollstonecraft supported her French revolutionaries and their rights, and replied with the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), in which she insisted upon better status for women in society, and for access to employment and education for women. Nowadays, Wollstonecraft and her reply are considered as the foundation of modern feminism. (Osborne 2001).

From a modern perspective, feminism is usually constructed through waves. The first wave of feminism (from 1848 to late 1920's) was dedicated to achieving political equality for women through women's movements. The second wave of feminism was active from the 1960s onwards. The gap between the first and second wave of feminism can be attributed to the world wars, world-wide economic hardships and societal change. (Osborne 2001).

The second wave of feminism, the *women's liberation* (Osborne 2001), is marked by radical, Marxist and liberal feminists. Radical feminists blamed male domination and the patriarchy for the oppression of women. They focused on male violence and rape. Marxist feminists on the other hand argued that male domination had resulted in class exploitation that could not be fixed by providing equal rights for women and men, as poor women would still be oppressed.



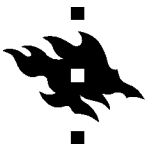
(Osborne 2001). Liberal feminists were somewhat calmer in their efforts. Liberal feminists claimed 'sameness' in relation to men (Evans 1995, pp. 47) by lobbying for equal rights and emphasizing changes within society instead of revolution (Osborne 2001).

The third wave, in turn, focused on including women who had previously been left out due to their class, race or sexual orientation. Besides inclusivity, the third wave drew attention to the lack of women in politics (the political representation), sexual harassment and body image. For example, the discussion regarding sexual harassment emphasized women's rights to dress however they wanted and their bodily autonomy. (Osborne 2001)

The discussion on sexual harassment has continued with the fourth wave of feminism. The fourth wave started around 2012 and focuses on sexual harassment, sexual violence and rape culture, with multiple high-profile cases (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019). Furthermore, it focuses on leading a change by empowering women (Munro 2013). What separates fourth wave of feminism from the previous waves is the usage of social media (Munro 2013).

The first and second waves on feminism were criticized for being white, since they were excluding everyone else outside the narrow identity of white, heterosexual women. Whiteness is a socially constructed ideology, that is being maintained by boundaries. Whiteness is oftentimes seen as invisible; white people are individuals without race whereas others are racialized. (Dyer, 1988) It shapes multiple constructions in society and is oftentimes presented in popular culture (Daniels 2016, pp.4-7).

White feminism, on the other hand, is rooted in colonialism (Daniels 2016, pp.7). Feminist movements have historically been accused of presenting white women as the translator of the experiences of women (Ott, 2018). Simultaneously, contemporary feminists have been criticized for not recognizing race in femininity, which has resulted some women struggling with being heard or situating themselves in the society. (Daniels 2016, pp.7-8; 25)



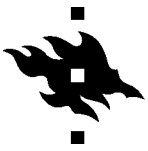
Besides women and femininity, feminism has also critiqued masculinity, or a certain type of masculinity, that has been seen as a threat to women – and men. Stereotypical characteristics of masculinity, such as competitiveness, aggression, strength, risk-taking and ambition are usually considered to be problematic and toxic. *Toxic masculinity* has been accused for all the things faulted in modern society. (Williams 2017a, pp. 157-158) Moreover, toxic masculinity has been seen as the ideal masculinity from men's perspective, that is socially transmitted and coded in their behavior.

For example, Sexism and alcohol fueled risk-taking have been explained by toxic masculinity (Williams 2017a, pp. 158). Moreover, the inability to show or process emotions has been explained as growing up in an environment of toxic masculinity. These features have been seen as socially constructed and initiable, but the perspective has gradually shifted as research regarding male submission has surfaced. Male submission is caused by the generalized masculinity that strengthens the idea of hegemonic masculinity and, simultaneously, diminishes the diversity of male identities (Kantola 2015, pp. 83).

Feminist concept of patriarchy has been criticized as non-historical and generalizing; critics have argued that the term indicates that females are oppressed similarly through place and time, (Kantola 2015, pp.82) and that all men are part of the patriarchy. Surely, oppression has intersectional features, meaning that there cannot be a unified experience of oppression amongst women.

Feminism also studies many negative phenomena relating to gender. One of these is *misogyny*, that divides people regarding its meanings and definitions. Misogyny can be simplified as an attitude of hostility or a property of individual agents, that feel hatred and hostility towards women. Misogynistic attitudes are psychological, but they are a political phenomenon. (Manne 2017).

Misogyny is usually used in place of sexism, but these terms are very different. Some have argued, that misogyny is just a “dressed-up” version of sexism. (Goldsworthy 2013) Even though misogyny is typically connected to men, that is not the case. Kate Manne (2017) argues, that misogyny survives in a culture, that



nurtures, contains and is dominated by misogyny. Misogyny is also connected to patriarchy, as Manne (2017) further states, that a patriarchal setting is misogynism's natural habitat, and that misogyny is actually "the system that operates patriarchal social order".

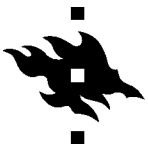
Anna Goldsworthy (2013) identifies three forms of misogyny: firstly, assessment of woman's appearance (often accompanied with the word fat), secondly, threats or acts of violence (sexual or other) and finally, the constant reminder of the shame of their sex. These different forms are used with the aim of silencing women. (Goldsworthy 2013).

2.2 Gender: power relations & violence

Gender and sex are oftentimes, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, seen very similar concepts (Harrison & Hood-Williams 2002, pp. x). Linguistical environment effects how gender and sex are understood. For example, in English the word 'sex' is used to refer to reproduction, sexuality and the gender defined by reproductive organs. The true meaning should be determined by context (Rossi 2015, pp. 21-22) Thus, sex roughly refers to the biological dichotomy of **males** and **females**.

'Gender' is broadly used to refer to the cultural gender, derived from feminist discourse, to emphasize the culture and social aspect of one's gender. (Rossi 2015, pp. 22) **Women** and **men** are oftentimes used to describe culturally constructed genders. However, the word **man** does not naturally refer to the male body, whereas **woman** does not describe the female body. Thus, gender does not naturally mirror one's sex, unlike the assumptions of a binary gender system (Butler 2002, pp. 10)

Gender is both a social and cultural phenomenon but it also has physical meaning (Rossi 2015, 21). Furthermore, we differentiate our gender on many levels. These levels are oftentimes seen in the way we speak about ourselves or how we



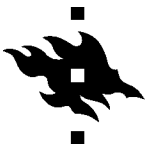
differentiate ourselves from the surrounding mass of people; physically and linguistically.

The sex-gender divination was established by Gayle Rubin in 1975, with her article “*The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex*”. By differentiating sex from gender, she sought to prove that gender repression is in fact result of gender related power relations, not caused by biology. Sex-gender divination eventually established how gender is a cultural and a historical term. (Rossi 2015, pp. 27)

The idea of gender is not unified. There are multiple conceptions of it around the world. Moreover, gender is in a constant change, impacted by its surrounding culture, time and policies (Rossi 2015, pp. 23). Throughout history, starting from the antiques, male gender was viewed as superior that females were being compared to (Juvonen 2015, pp.11). For example, in the the genesis women were presented as a byproduct, that were created for a man from a man. (Archer & Lloyd 2002, pp.3)

Later, this view was supported by many science disciplines, such as medicine and the natural sciences. Even popular culture applications of Darwinism are still quite often apparent in media. In these debates, the different gender roles and positions are taken as natural, defined by natural selection. (Rossi 2015, pp. 24) Gender assigned societal roles are still present in modern society.

Thus, gender has various time-dependent definitions that various fields of science do not agree upon. For instance, biology was used to explain certain differences between sexes (Archter & Lloyd 2002, pp. 4), such as the different physical appearance and the differences in societal roles. Biology was then used to counteract the feminist claims of differences between sex and gender in the 60’s and 70’s. (Archter & Lloyd 2002, pp. 3). Now, the growing usage of the term ‘gender’ has improved differentiating sex from sexuality (Rossi 2015, pp. 22). There have been many traditions in differentiating genders. Usually differentiation between genders has been done through linguistic confrontation, for example by using the term ‘opposing gender’ (Rossi 2015, pp. 23). This term creates strong



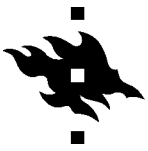
confrontation, and it acknowledges genders as opposing parts of the spectrum. It is problematic, since there is more than one gender.

Stereotyping also creates confrontation. For example, females have traditionally been the nurturers, whereas males have been considered as the providers with stronger aggression and greater, stronger physical traits (Archter & Lloyd 2002, pp. 3). This thought ties closely into gender roles; what is socially acceptable behavior or habitus for one's gender. The tradition of confrontation has many problems and it has been problematized by various feminist critics, such as Judith Butler and Anne Fausto-Sterling (Rossi 2015, 23, pp. 26).

Many academics have agreed that gender and sexuality are an ensemble of power relations, hierarchies and systems. Joan Scott, for example, has defined gender as the signifier of power relations whereas Michel Foucault gave gender the role of the facilitator in power relations (Rossi 2015, pp. 22-23). These arguments are still oftentimes debated when gender and power are combined.

Usually the power relations between genders is defined by oppositions, that were first raised into research by the radical and Marxist feminists in the 1970s. According to radical feminists, women were culturally equal to all men despite the class or race. Furthermore, Both the radical and Marxist feminist rooted power relations between the genders in women's position in society instead of biology or patriarchy. (Juteau-Lee 1995, pp. 8)

While the feminist movement has been vastly criticizing the patriarchy, the critics of feminism have claimed that the power relations between genders have, in fact, already turned upside down (Kantola 2015, 80), claiming that feminism has resulted in the oppression of men. Some critics have also suggested, that women's position in the worklife (eg. women do proceed in their careers) is a result of women being reluctant towards power (Kantola 2015, 80). These generalized claims indicate, that the failure many women face in work life is a result of their refusal of power. As a conclusion it might be pointed out that genders use power differently (Kantola 2015, 80).



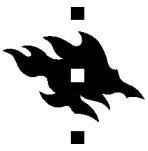
2.2.1 Sexual violence and sexual harassment

Sexual assault can be seen as one of the examples of power relations, as it is applying excessive power over someone. Literature about sexual harassment usually focuses on violence against women, and not so much on violence against men. For example, feminist research has been criticized to focus only on women's point of views, as it has been focusing on gender and gender inequality and grounded it into female experiences (Skinner et al. 2005, pp. 11).

The United Nations World Conference on Human Rights (1993) defined violence against women as any act of gender-based violence, resulting or like to result in harm to women, and occurring in the family, within the general community, and perpetrated or condoned by the State. This includes, for example, domestic violence, rape and trafficking. (Skinner et al. 2005, 2). However, the term "violence against women" maintains structural gender inequalities (Skinner et al. 2005, 2) that are tied to specific locations and times (Hester 2004).

Lin Farley (1978) was one of the first people to use the term 'sexual harassment'. She used it in *Sexual Shakedown* to describe a particular behavior in the workplace. Since then, the term has created vast amount of protocols and procedures to deal with the phenomenon. (Kitzinger & Thomas 1995, pp. 32). Sexual harassment is also a difficult term that, according to Celia Kitzinger and Alison Thomas (1995, 32), entails a problem and a triumph. The triumph is the codes of conduct created after the terms was popularized, but the rules and procedures to combat the 'sexualized male power' were ineffective (p.33).

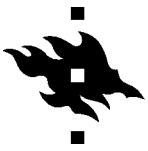
When the term first surfaced, it barely acknowledged the harassment males faced in the workplace. According to some studies, this might be a result of men's tendency to label behavior as sexual teasing rather than sexual harassment (see. Kenig & Ryan 1968; Powell 1986). Thus, the term is interpreted differently across different sexes and sectors. (Kitzinger & Thomas 1995, pp. 34)



The underlying issue is, that there is no unifying definition for sexual harassment (Aggarwall 1987), this is evident in the way victims are treated. They might face doubts and questioning about their own behavior or clothing during the act of harassment. There are also apparent patterns in how media and public discourse treats victims of violence and abuse. One distressing phenomenon can be identified as *victim feminism*, which means that the victims and their perception of “being a victim” is blamed on feminism. (Kitzinger & Thomas 1995, pp. 39). Thus, victimhood is seen as a product of an ideology indicating that there are, in fact, no victims, just an ideology of being a victim of something.

Some have even suggested that everything that happens between males and females is sexual harassment. Here sexual harassment has been seen a vital part of male and female communications, (Kitzinger & Thomas 1995, 40-41) indicating that everything happening between human beings has a sexual innuendo. Males might generally speaking be the more powerful gender, but violence and power are close separate concepts, even if usually seen together (Hannah Ardent, 1970). The term gender violence indicates that violence is influenced by or influences gender relations, that reflect and construct gender inequalities (Skinner et al. 2005, 2-3, 11).

The aspect of power relations is always central when talking about gender violence. The focus on power is best explained with Iris Marion Young (1990,1992), who has argued that power cannot be owned nor distributed. Instead, she argues, that power should be understood through actions, meaning that power exists only when it is used. Violence is always a battle of power; one demonstrating his or her ability to overpower another by committing a violent act



2.3 Social Media

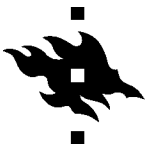
In order to understand the core of Facebook comments and the unique environment in which the comments were generated, one should first trace back to the fabric of social media. Social media platforms have slowly become publicly used arenas to discuss and share opinions, even on stigmatized topics.

However, the concept of social media is relatively new. The social media environment originated in the early twenty-first century (Eisenlauer 2017 pp. 227). In a short period of time the social repertoire of friending, following, tagging, liking, sharing and commenting have become essential to our everyday life (Meikle 2016, pp. viii). Many of the social media applications have been short termed (MySpace), but some of them are seemingly here to stay. For example, Facebook has dominated social media for a decade but lately it has been losing users (Edison Research 2019).

But what is social media after all and how does it differ from traditional media? Graham Meikle (2016, pp. ix) argues, that there is a social aspect to all media, but not all media is *social media*. In turn, social media is a networked database platform (Meikle 2016, pp. 6) where public life is being combined with personal life (Bös & Kleinke 2017; Meikle 2016, pp. 6) and media is done **by** the users rather than **for** them (Meikle 2016, pp. xi).

Social media has therefore blurred the line between readers and writers; users now replace the writers and readers as they produce the texts and participate more actively (Bublitz 2012 in Landert 2017, pp.42). This is what makes social media interaction special, but the collaborative content creation also emphasizes the importance of context on both, while actively participating and analyzing on social media, and while analyzing it (Landert 2017, pp.43).

Social media enables open discussions with broad networks on any subject and everyone in the network can see the messages, even though they are not in the same space at the same time. Hence, social media communication combines

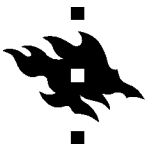


personal and public communication in a way, where personal communication and public messages are apparent in the same space, and available to anyone in the same network. (Meikle 2016, pp. 4).

Daniela Landert (2017) suggests that there are three concepts in user involvement and communication on social media: interaction, participation and involvement. Interaction refers to, for example, the exchange of messages, whereas participation is more than interaction; it is the power to impact and influence social processes. However, social media platforms are different in terms of how much participation they allow. Lastly, involvement refers to emotional engagement. (Landert 2017, pp.31-33; 35).

However, it should be noted that there are different forms of communication that relates to forms of user participation. Landert (2017) suggests, that communication can be vertical or horizontal. Vertical communication refers to interaction between professional communicators (journalists and public figures) and users, for example in online newspapers. Horizontal communication, on the other hand, is interaction between non-professional users (peers). The distinction is important since the two forms result in different forms of participation; vertical communication usually occurs on institutionally owned platforms, that can control the content and forms of participation. (Landert 2017, pp. 38-40).

Through the various possibilities that social media platforms offer, personal information has become more public and personalized. Each user is put at the center, with personalized timelines, profiles and individual histories (Meikle 2018, pp. 123) and the possibility to reach out to anyone. As the personal blends with the public, the public becomes more personal. This can be seen, for example, on political topics that become personal to the users. Landert (2017) suggest that on Facebook, the political content in presented with the personal posts in the news feed. This creates a personal layer on the political news that in turn stimulates involvement (Landert 2017, pp. 49).

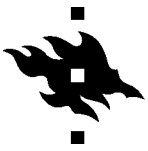


Social media communication is a unique form of communication, that can be described with a term from communication science; Mediated quasi-interaction (Thomson 1995) that refers to the possibility of multiple recipients; communication done to no one in particular. On social media this can be seen how users post on social media, without any particular people or audience in mind; the posts are shared to anyone in their network, that might be interested in the subjects.

From the perspective of content, social media messages are usually considered pieces of written text, and we usually tend to see them as finished thoughts (Meikle 2016, pp. 19) even though they might not be such. The language of social media imitates causal face-to-face communication (Bös & Kleinke 2017, pp. 86). However, we have no access to the cues, such as facial expressions and the tone of voice. As we can only analyze the texts from the words, misunderstandings are likely to occur (Meikle 2016, pp. 19).

Emotions are also harder to bring up on written language. As a result, emotions (and disagreements) are usually cued in written text through expressions, implications, descriptions and verbalization of emotional reactions (including smileys) (Langlotz & Locher 2012, pp. 1600-1601). Emojis have also provided a modern style to express emotion.

Social media is all about the communicative practices of the media environment. Sharing and connectivity are essential to social media (Meikle 2016, pp. 24), therefore, and they are, in a way, what makes social media “social”. Social media has generated new forms of communication practices. Hashtags have become a trade mark of social media, they stimulate interaction (Landert 2017, pp. 35) and enable sharing information and commentaries around a theme or a shared concern. In general terms, hashtags combine personal with the public, and perform simultaneously as performance, conversation and mobilization on social media (Meikle 2016, pp. 76). They are used with issues relating to anything and everything, enabling quick access to posts on the same topic.



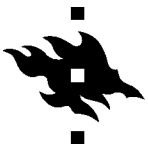
Social media interaction can also be measured. Measuring interaction can be done through analyzing the likes and contributions. For example, the length and branching of message threads can indicate how interactive and engaging the topic is. Here, deep and flat structures of interaction can indicate the level of interaction; flat structure indicates a lower degree of interaction than deep structure. (Landert 2017, pp 35-36).

The line between social media and non-social media is sometimes difficult to draw. The term social media is used to refer to user-generated, personal communication on profile-based platforms (Meikle 2015, pp. 5, Landert 2017, pp. 45), such as LinkedIn, Instagram or Facebook. However, smartphone apps, Uber or Wikipedia are not counted as social media, due to their lack of personal communication (Meikle 2016, pp. 5-6).

The rapid change on social media has various issues. Hate speech and online bullying have been under debate during the past few years. Social media has a dark side where trolling, controversies about cultural lines and freedom of speech (W. Philips 2015) enable persecutions and mob-shaming (Ronson 2015). The culture of social media shaming is being further stimulated by the repertoire of liking and sharing (Meikle 2016, pp. xi). This, in turn, generates a fertile environment for hate speech and online bullying.

It is possible that social media affects what people think and how they feel. Persons social network can also limit and curate what a person can see by deciding what content is important, or worthy of recommendation or sharing, leading to gatekeeping (Hermida et al. 2012, pp. 821). Gatekeeping narrows down the perspective of a user and can lead to filter bubbles (Parsier 2011), where we only see what our network shares with us, leaving less room for learning and new insight (Meikle 2016, pp. 77).

There is also a big issue with the databases of social media. For example, Facebook has a database that determines what material and interactions are shown in a user's newsfeed based on their previous actions on the platform (Meikle 2016, pp. 6; 78). These databases or algorithms can narrow what users see, leading to



similar issues as social network gatekeepers. However, there is little or no regulations against social network gatekeeping, which causes various ethical issues (Meikle 2016, pp. 78).

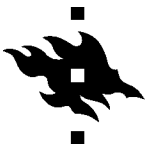
Moreover, a study revealed, that emotional states can be contagious. According to this study, emotional states can be transferred to others, leading people to feel and experience similar emotions. (Kraemer et. al. 2014, pp. 87-88). In a “gatekept” and filter bubbled networked space, these feelings can be more easily distributed, altering the way we see the world.

Social media is an immediate space, not tied to any space or time constraints (Meikle 2016, pp. 75). However, information can be updated anytime, leading to the acceleration of news as well (Hartley 2008, pp. 36-60). This has, in a way, created a culture of immediacy, that values speed and challenges the traditional values of professionalism and accuracy of news, and challenges the public to understand the contexts of the news (Tomlinson 2007, pp. 72). Even though social media allows a more involved form of citizenship, where anyone has the right and possibility to comment on current events, the immediacy and acceleration of the news creates challenges for citizens to focus on source criticism.

As personal information becomes more visible to anyone, users lose control over their own content and personal information (Meikle 2016, pp. x). Thus, they cannot control how social media companies use their personal data, or if they sell their content somehow. Additionally, they cannot control in what context their content might be shared and to what purposes it might be used for.

2.3.1 Hate speech

Hate speech is defined as “bias motivated, hostile, malicious speech aimed at a person or a group of people because some of their actual or perceived innate characteristics.” (Almangor in Naganna & Sreejith 2018, pp. 5), and it has grown in prevalence on social media during the past few years. Naganna & Sreejith (2018) suggest that hate speech is a byproduct of freedom of speech, that makes hate speech such a close relative to freedom of speech. However, they note that



freedom of speech is opposing freedom of speech and it violates human rights. (Naganna & Sreejith 2018, pp. 1).

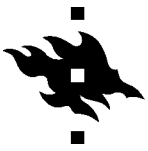
There are differing regulations against hate speech, but it is hard to fight against it, especially in the social media environment. One of the reasons is that it can be triggered in various occasions or events. It is usually most prominent at the time of the event (influence stage) and few days after (intervention stage) but it can spark again after some time has passed. (Naganna & Sreejith 2018, pp. 3).

Even though different genders adopt different behavior online (Herring 1994, pp. 278), there is no clear evidence as to which gender uses more hate speech. However, men tend to adopt an “ethic of anarchic self-determination and vigorous debate” whereas women rely on “politeness” (Herring 1994, pp. 278).

Kirstin Anderson and Jill Cermele (2014) argue in “*Public/private language aggression against women: Tweeting rage and intimate partner violence*” that verbal aggression against women reinforces binary gender construction that legitimizes women’s subordination. Their dataset consists of tweets, that are public and private at the same time; they are public speech protected by the status of “free speech”, and private in the sense that it is not “too serious”. (Anderson & Cermele 2014, pp. 289).

Hate speech on social media is a serious issue. There are certain groups that are more prone to receive hate speech than others. Gender, race and age are a few of the determining factors. Alarmingly, women receive most of the hate speech. The hate speech targeted towards women is oftentimes misogynistic and aims to humiliate and scare women. (Council of Europe 2014, pp. 3-4).

The hate speech goes to question their appearance – or aims to deny their humanity, sexuality and femininity. It can be also targeted to question victimhood in the occasions of sexual assault. It might be also targeted to threaten the reputation of a woman (Council of Europe, 2014). The questioning of victimhood can be done through victim blaming or slut-shaming, in which fault is put on the victim instead of the abuser.



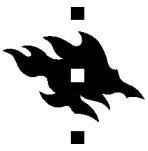
The issue of questioning is more pronounced if the woman is a public figure, such as an academic or an actress, or if they are ethnic. For example, female politicians have stated that the public status multiplies the received hate speech (Council of Europe 2014 4; Council of Europe 2016, pp. 8) and academics, journalists and broadcasters on the other hand, are subjected to abuse daily (FRA 2017, pp. 6-9). The hate speech relates closely to how women speak about the issues they face.

Threats might result in silence, especially with women of color or non-white ethnicity, who have a lesser voice in society. In these cases, hate speech can result in fear, and cause these people to be silenced altogether. Therefore, as the whiteness on social is pronounced, the rest are excluded, or withdrawn from social media (FRA 2017, pp. 7; 9; 10).

3. Methodology

In this chapter I will present my methodology that consists of narrative and content analysis and feminist epistemology. Instead of feminist methodology, I follow Shulamit Reinharz (1992), and opt for an epistemological perspective, when identifying the goals and orientations of this thesis, as the latter allows rethinking and challenging the knowledge of the lives of women (Reinharz 1992, pp. 243). In my thesis I will be analyzing comments posted on Facebook from a feminist perspective and using narrative methods. Narrative methods are identified as the "real-life measures" that investigate "real-life problems" (Bickman & Rog, 1998).

Paired with the feminist epistemology, I can focus on revealing hidden power structures in society and raise questions on how the social media environment treats women. The methodology is fitted for the social media environment and aims to construct a complete and coherent narrative from individual comments.



Social media environments attract people around the world. One crucial goal in my research was to include a versatile demography of the commentators, but the scope of the rambling comment section forced me to adapt a random sampling method in order to attain a comprehensive sample of comments.

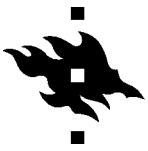
The aim of this chapter is to examine the #metoo-movement more closely and present my method and how the feminist perspective of the thesis comes through with the feminist epistemology I have adopted. Afterwards, I will be presenting the data and how it was gathered and analyzed using categorical content analysis. Some of the issues relating to the data collection and data analysis phase will be shared. The final part of this chapter includes the research design along with the ethical considerations of the thesis.

3.1 #MeToo as a phenomenon

#MeToo originated from the time before social media. Tarana Burke first used the phrase Me Too as supporting message to survivors of trauma (Guerra 2017).

Actress Alyssa Milano then popularized the phrase by encouraging victims of sexual assault and harassment to share their stories by using the hashtag Me Too, to reveal how enormous and widespread of a problem sexual abuse is. Soon after, celebrities and public figures began to join in the movement by sharing their stories. (Khaomami 2017)

As #MeToo spread all over social media, it became clear that sexual abuse and the dismissive attitudes towards it is an extensive and international issue. As Caroline Criado-Perez has put it, the campaign goes beyond Harvey Weinstein and sexual abuse is prevalent amongst women (Khaomami 2017). MeToo has brought up the discussion of sexual harassment, namely the systematic harassment in the movie industry, especially in Hollywood. The campaign has provoked people and heated up the discussion around male privilege and misogyny.

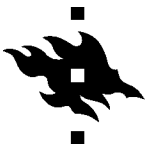


The #MeToo campaign reached the headlines in October 2017 after Hollywood Producer Harvey Weinstein was accused of sexual harassment by multiple women in an article in the New York Times. Soon after, more allegations surfaced and charges were pressed against Weinstein. Asia Argento was among the women who blamed Weinstein. She accused him of forcing himself on her in 1997. (BBC News, 2019)

Although the campaign has been mostly focusing on females and their experiences of sexual assault, some accusations have surfaced against actress Asia Argento, law-maker Christina Garcia and the professor of the New York University Anita Ronell. These new story lines have shifted the public discussion and generated a new narrative for the campaign, as will be presented in this study.

My thesis takes a closer look at Asia Argento, (legally Aria Argento), who is an Italian born actress. Publicly she is known as the girlfriend of now-deceased tv-chef Anthony Bourdain. She became the face of the #MeToo movement after the Weinstein scandal, in 2017. On August 2018, Argento was accused of sexually assaulting actor Jimmy Bennett in 2013, when Bennet was 17 and Argento was 37. Argento has denied the allegations and settled the case for the sum of \$380,000 (see. for example, Severson 2018 and Nyrén 2018).

Argento is not the only woman who has been in the headlines after the peak of the campaign. For a while there was a lot of heated discussion against Christina Garcia, a United States Senate assemblywoman and a lawmaker, and a leading advocate of the #MeToo in California. She was accused of groping her male staffer, Daniel Fierro, in 2014 (Gajanan 2018, K. Philips 2018). Fierro stayed quiet about the incident until January 2018, when he told Democratic Assemblyman Ian Calderon (Marinucci 2018). Garcia's name was later cleared and the news concerning the incident disappeared from social media.

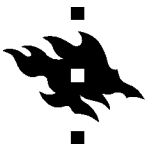


3.1.1 MeToo – Feminism, Gender and Sexual Violence on Social Media

When #MeToo surfaced, it was a feminist movement, grounded in female experiences with sexual violence. It has been questioning the patriarchy and systematic sexual abuse in the movie industry. The #MeToo campaign in its current form combines elements from male and female experiences. However, the campaign has been criticized as “white” from the very start: there is the issue of appropriation that relates to “owning” the hashtag. As mentioned above, human rights activist Tarana Burke was the first to use the hashtag, but it was later popularized by an actress, Alyssa Milano. No credit was given, and the hashtag was only noticed after it was “owned” by white person, which made it problematic. Moreover, it caused women of color to become upset, as it reflected the marginalization and exclusion of women of color in many ways (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018, pp. 107).

Digital social media is based on openness, networking and collaboration. Theoretically, this aligns with the feminist values of access, inclusion and cooperation, but actually the racial segregation from in-person has shifted online as well, thus complicating the value of openness (Ott, 2018). This has been very prominent with #metoo, for example, how the spokespersons of #metoo have been predominantly white. Simultaneously, the experiences have focused on female experiences. The participation and mobilization have taken place online, but the campaign does not necessarily follow the values of feminism, in the sense that portion of “women” has not been represented.

In a way, homogenous representation of sexual violence admits the abuse white women experience, but simultaneously excludes many others. The vocal people on media have been white actresses, and hence quite far from the average Jane. Moreover, the campaign has been centralized in the white experiences, even though women of color are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018, pp. 107). The example, of course, was something that caught the attention of the public, but the underlying issues concerning all women experiencing sexual abuse, has been brushed aside.

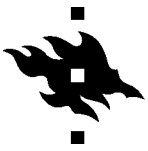


Additionally, the image of sexual abuse was drawn under the shared sisterhood in lieu of the feminist roots of the movement. However, many academics have spoken for intersectionality and emphasized how the experiences of women are not shared. The idea of “shared womanhood” emphasizes the discrimination that women of color face. (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018, pp. 108).

The focus on large-scale activism erases the struggles various women have faced. In many feminist “waves” the experiences have been white centric. Hence, the metaphor of feminist “waves” does not include the various battles poor women or women of color have experienced, as the focus in the suffrage of white women has been centralized. (Harnois, 2008). Similarly, the focus on the large-scale activism creates an illusion, that there is only one narrative of sexual abuse.

And yet, as Argento’s sexual abuse case towards Jimmy Bennet has surfaced on media, the public discourse has returned to the age-old debate whether a male can be sexually assaulted. Some have even questioned, whether males can be harassed at all and how a harassment can be defined here, which relates to Kitzinger & Thomas (1995, pp. 40-41), as it, in a way, indicates that all interaction between different genders is somewhat sexual. The issue with Me Too, as with sexual harassment in general, is that there is not an underlying definition for sexual harassment (Aggarwall, 1987). This can be seen in the way in which the victims are treated in various forms of media. Moreover, the lack of a coherent definition has generated strong wave of victim feminism (Kitzinger & Thomas 1995, 39), meaning that sometimes victimhood is seen as the product of feminism.

MeToo can be easily identified as feminist movement, but besides the issue of lack of intersectional representation, there is also an issue with MeToo and the male submission, that Kantola (2015, pp. 82-83) mentions. The strong focus on female experiences in the MeToo era has, in a way, diminished the male experience. As long as women were the only victims of sexual assault in the media, the public discourse had a certain type of tone, easily generalizing and stigmatizing all middle-aged or successful males. When the story line shifted, the idea of masculinity and victimhood was put under scrutiny.



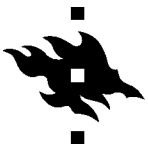
Hence, the terminology has shifted during the #metoo campaign from ‘gender violence’ to ‘sexual assault’ and all in-between. These terms describe the issues between the different genders in a more profound manner, that relate to power relation and gender roles.

Despite the issues relating to the movement, the campaign has offered women to share their experience with sexual violence, even years after the incident had occurred. With a simple empowering and mobilizing hashtag, women have come forward with their stories, turning something personal into something public. The hashtag has, in a way, joined women under the “shared sisterhood” and reflects the feminist nature of the movement.

Thereby, the Me Too campaign is a pure female empowerment movement, as it is trying to understand, reveal and tear down unequal power structures (Kantola 2015, pp. 84). During the campaign, multiple experiences have surfaced, mainly focusing on the female point of view and the female narrative of sexual assault. MeToo has become the modern symbol of female empowerment, drawing attention to the patriarchal power structures.

MeToo aims to empower females and the victims of sexual assault, helping them gain their voices and thereby, stabilize the power relations between various actors. Moreover, it draws attention to the structural and gendering forms of powers, where the physical dimension of power is more pronounced. Thus, the campaign puts power structures and systematical patriarchy under scrutiny, meanwhile others have been more open-minded and hesitant to take sides.

Power relations are the core of #MeToo. The debates reflect different opinions on how females and males use power. The heated debate between the supporters and the opponents of the campaign seem to have different ideas of power. Here, the debates might reflect an issue in a different conception of power, that reflect the conceptions on how females and males use power in a different manner (Kantola 2015, pp.80).



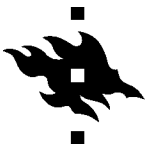
3.2 Feminist research: method, methodology & epistemology

Feminist research differs from mainstream research. It has focused on research questions that have not been answered or asked before. Usually, these questions require special methodologies, that feminist researchers have founded from borrowing various methods from social sciences (Ticker 2006). Hence, feminist methods are not a set of fixed methods. Instead, they include variety of methods that focus on revealing concealed power relations (Ackerly et al. 2006, pp. 4; Harding 1987, pp. 2-3, Ticker 2006, pp. 19; 22; 24).

The feminist methods have been slowly and gradually adapted. Sandra Harding has been one of the leading feminist scholars, who introduced feminist epistemology to social sciences. Harding separates three concepts that frequently get intertwined in various disciplines; *method*, that refers to the technique of gathering evidence. Second is *methodology* that refers to a theory and analysis of a research and finally, *epistemology*, which is the theory of knowledge or the justification strategy of a research. (Harding 1987, pp. 2).

In my thesis, the methods I will be using narrative and content analysis from literature and random sampling from statistic research. The feminist perspective of my thesis derives from the epistemology; the question of who the “knowers” and what things are known (Harding 1987, pp. 3) from the basis of the comments. Feminists have argued, that the traditional epistemology of research has excluded women as the agents (of knowledge) (Harding 1987, pp. 3), but in this thesis. women are set in the center of the research. Moreover, *in lieu* of liberal feminist, I emphasize the sameness of the gender and focus on the unequal power relations founded in the narrative of Asia Argento.

According to feminists, there is no correct standard or method to do research the “feminist way” (Reinharz 1992, pp. 243), nor is it ideal (Ticker 2006, pp. 21). This allows researchers to gather the methods and standards they see most suitable for their study. Despite the lack of set methods or ways of conducting a feminist research, there are a few characteristics for feminist research. First, the starting point



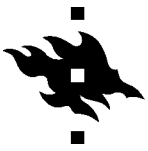
for a feminist research is the ontology of social relations. This is, to examine the various historical, social and economic structures in which individuals are embedded and constructed (Ticker 2006, pp. 24). For my thesis, this includes the social media environment in which the commentators are communicating in. Despite being its own environment, it is not excluded from the historical, social and economic structures that constitute behavior.

Second, the interest on women's lives is the motivator of the subject. The desire to change society and the lives of women dictates the subject while choosing the research topic (Ticker 2006, pp. 26). Third, feminist research is usually identified as focused on women or produced for them. One of these perspectives of research on women is to study women as the victims of male dominance. Such research includes, for example, observing the institutionalized discrimination against women or the white male dominance. (Harding 1987, pp. 5).

These last two align with my thesis as well. The research is focused on women, but not only through women's eyes or by a woman, but through social media. Not only do I focus on women, but also on women both as victims of male dominance and as active agents. The active agent aspect derives from Harding (1987) who has claimed that victimologies limit women, as they produce and emphasize the image of women as victims and passive social agents (Harding 1987, pp. 5).

Feminist methodology and epistemology is oftentimes belittled and criticized. Phyllis Rooney (2011) has argued that feminist epistemology is still marginalized and criticized due to misogyny, racism and sexism of philosophical history (Rooney 2011, pp. 3). Feminist research in general is oftentimes labelled as subjective, and less valuable than mainstream research. The subjectivity of feminist research is valid, since research results from feminist methodologies may vary from researcher depending on the applied theories (Ackerly et al. 2006, pp. 7) or the cultural beliefs of the research (Harding 1987, 9).

However, many defend the subjective standpoint of feminist research. Harding has argued that subjectivity is pre-requisite to "produce understanding and explanations which are free of distortion from the unexamined beliefs and behaviors of social



scientists themselves” (Harding 1987, pp. 5). Instead of considering the non-reliability as a weakness, it reflects the nature of feminist methodologies (Acker et al. 2006, pp. 7). Harding even suggests, that transparency and objectivity of the research can increase through the subjectivity of a research (Harding 1987, pp. 5).

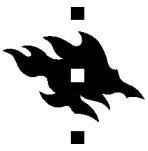
No perfect method exists. It is not about finding the perfect method; it is about finding the method that fits a purpose. Hence, the feminist methodology and epistemology provide a valid alternative for research that questions power relations, sexism and misogyny on social media. This is, since the criticism towards women as agents is already embedded in the method.

3.3 Narrative analysis

I decided to apply a narrative analysis on social media texts, since I have background in literary studies. I have found that social media comments have been overlooked in the way they transmit narratives and opinions of the public in a public arena, where political and societal subjects are discussed.

Literary theory has favored different concepts throughout history. In the 50’s and 60’s favored linguistic turn were favored that derived from Saussure’s linguistics, whereas the narrative turn in the 80’s set the narrative of the story in the center. The linguistic turn emphasized the meaning of the text and assumed that a single word could change the whole meaning of the text, whereas the narrative turn started to put more focus on the signified instead of the signifier. The shifting focus meant, that a story was seen as a cognitive construct, that could be transmitted and remembered even without a signifier. Moreover, it suggested that stories can be shared, adapted and even summarized, which, in turn, indicates that stories are not tied to language. Instead, they are released from the signs they are transmitted through. (Ryan 2016, pp. 11-12)

Narrative analysis is suitable for social media comments, since people are storytellers by nature, and our identities are constructed through stories (Lieblich

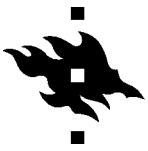


et al. 1998, pp. 7). Storytelling is, in a way, a built-in feature of humanity. It is a way for us to understand and construct the world. Our history and news are constructed as a narrative, that help us understand the events. Therefore, we usually tend to use storytelling as a tool to narrate and share our ideas and opinions, even on social medias. Moreover, people tend to construct meanings and identities from surrounding cultures; through the analysis of a narrative it is possible to access people's identities and personalities (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 7-9).

A narrative can be used to describe a character or a lifestyle of a "specific subgroups in society, defined by their gender, race, religion, and so on" (Lieblich et al, 1998, pp. 4-5). These social groups might be discriminated from an ethnic, social or cultural point of view. They might not be able to express their opinions in any other way than on social media. The social media narratives and comments by these people represent their unheard voices that are being transmitted through social media. Their voices (or comments) are as valid on social media as they would be in real life. The narratives are a representation of what they think, and who they are, defined by their personal characteristics.

Narrative is a discourse that represent a chain of events (Webster 1966). Narrative research is a research that uses and analyzes narrative materials (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 2). By putting together independent, smaller narratives, as in this data one can create a complete understanding of an event; thus, understand what the common opinion is that people have about Asia Argento and sexual abuse. The data of a narrative analysis can be collected and utilized in various ways; to compare or examine groups, social phenomena or personalities (Lieblich et al 1998, pp. 2-3).

The narrative method has been criticized due to the subjectivity of the results. Narrative analysis is oftentimes interpretive, personal and dynamic by nature. The interpretations might require more justification than other methods, as the narrative work requires vast amount of self-awareness and self-discipline (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 10).



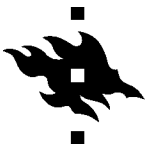
Therefore, narrative research is more or less subjective, as life stories themselves are subjective, containing the narrative truth (Spence 1982; 1986), which in turn is different from the historical truth (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 8). Life stories are variable as well, in the sense that they change through time and the context they are being narrated in. Hence, the mood of the narrator or the nature of the audience can affect the analysis.

This does not mean that narrative research is unreliable and subjective, but that they are vast number of things that need to be considered before conducting such study. For example, the researcher needs to be aware of the subjectivity of the life stories and consider the variables that might have impacted the way the life story is being presented. Moreover, the researcher should be aware of his or her own subjectivity and treat the text as subjectively as possible.

However, stories transmit and construct both cultural and individual meanings (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 8). As I treat the comments as pieces of the story and narrative of the public, I am able to create cultural and individual meanings, that are unique for myself based on my own life history. Therefore, my personal identity is inevitably going to be present in the analysis, on some level, as I am focusing on the comments and how they narrate sexual abusers and women of #MeToo from a feminist perspective. On the other hand, the feminist perspective provides me a guideline and a context in which the texts are analyzed in.

3.3.1 Dimensions of narrative analysis

There are various ways, in which narrative research can be conducted. Firstly, Mishler (1995) suggests a typology of three different categories for the narrative studies. These categories are divided based on their central issue: *reference and temporal*, *textual coherence* and *structure*, and *narrative functions*. Here, reference and temporal focuses on the relationship between the order of the events and their order in the narration. Textual coherence and structure, on the other hand, focus on linguistic and narrative strategies. Narrative functions deal with the wider context of the story in the surrounding society and culture.

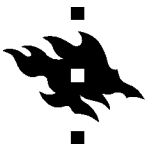


According to Lieblich et al. (1998, pp. 12) there are two main dimensions of narrative analysis. First dimension is the *categorical* versus *holistic* (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 12) (also known as *idiographic* versus *nomothetic* (Allport 1962) and *categorization* versus *contextualization* (Maxwell 1996).) **Categorical** here means that that original story is dissected and the sections (belonging to a particular category) are collected from the original story from various narrators. **Holistic** approach, in turn, refers to the life of a person in a whole. Thus, the sections of the text are interpreted in the text of the rest of the narrative. (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 12).

The second dimension is known as a *content* versus *form*, which refers to the actual reading. Besides the story, there are various other things that the reader can focus on. One can, for example, focus on the a) explicit (what happened and why) or b) implicit **content** (the meaning of the story, motives and the images and their symbols). On the other hand, one may also focus on the **form**; structure, complexity, coherence, feelings, style, choice of metaphors and words. (Lieblich 1998, pp. 12-13).

These two main dimensions can be combined into four different approaches. For my thesis I chose categorical-content approach, more familiarly a *content analysis*, that enables identifying and describing trends in the communication content and reflecting the cultural patterns of the public (Berelson, 1952). The *categorical* element allows examining the stylistic and linguistic characteristics, such as the metaphors and the *content* allows to analyze the meaning of the comments for the overall narrative.

However, my research approach will not be completely categorical, as it rarely is possible to do completely one or another. I will apply some *holistic* methods for this study in two ways. Firstly, I will observe the structure of the life story of the #MeToo, acknowledging the climaxes and turning points of the story (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 13). Secondly, the study will be done from a feminist point of view, blending the feminist perspective into the analysis.



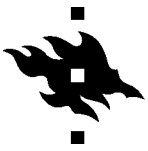
In general, the narrative method contains the narrative truth (Spence 1982) analyzed against the historical truth (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 8) of feminism; the battles of power and the history of women. Furthermore both, the feminist epistemology and narrative method are both subjective. Narrative method is also personal and dynamic. The feminist epistemology therefore acts as the frame for the analysis and creates the self-awareness in which the analysis can be conducted. Instead of being the weakness the subjectivity of the analysis it increases the objectivity and transparency of the research (Harding 1987, pp.5). This is, as the feminist epistemology combined with narrative analysis entails that I can compare the narrative material to analyze a person or a social phenomenon including themes such as gender and race (Lieblich et al. 1998, pp. 2-5). This in turn allows producing the deeper understandings of women's position in modern society.

3.4 Data Collection & Random sampling

The data consists of 75 comments, collected from 5 news outlets: CNN International, ABC News, CBS News, The Fox News and The New York Times's Facebook pages. One post was selected from each Facebook page, and the posts were searched for using the search bar provided by the Facebook pages. Three different search words were used: #MeToo, Asia Argento and #MeToo Asia Argento. I chose the first news piece that was linking Asia to Me Too campaign.

Part of a feminist research is to allow as many people as possible to get their voices heard. The random sampling applied in the data collection phase allows a versatile, objective demographic and provides justification for the data analysis. Moreover, it enables smooth and quick data collection phase.

Different Facebook pages were chosen to give a versatility and variety for the comments and themes that they relate to, as every news outlet presents news in a different manner; pictures, descriptions and the news themselves were all



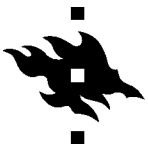
different, and the comments beneath the news were all different depending on the news outlets.

The political ideologies and audiences are all different. I treat every Facebook page as an independent unit or bubble, where similar opinions are shared on a particular subject. For example, most of the Fox News audience is conservative, whereas ABC, CNN, New York Times and CBS News audiences are mostly liberal. Moreover, New York times has the most liberal audience and positions as centre-right, whereas FOX News has the most conservative audience and leans towards the right (University of Michigan Library, 2018). Besides ABC, all these companies have been accused of being biased and Fox News and CNN being the most biased part of the spectrum (Ralph 2018).

With the variety media companies and ideologies, I decided to focus on social media application. I chose Facebook, due to its popularity, and since it is used as an arena for online debates. Moreover, I consider Facebook as a filter bubble (Parsier 2011). Unfortunately, time constraints prevented conducting a thorough research into multiple social media platforms.

The comments were collected via random sampling. I proceeded to collect 15 comments from each news outlet. The comments were then listed on a word-sheet and the comments were anonymized apart from gender (W for woman and M for men). In addition, each commentator was given a value based on at what time they were anonymized. As a result, the comments are listed as W1, M1, W2, M2 and so on. This was done to help with the feminist perspective with the research and to help construct more recommendations for the future research.

The comments were then analyzed in multiple ways. Firstly, the general tone of the comment was analyzed and marked as positive, negative or ambiguous. Secondly, the key message of the comment was examined and labeled. The third and fourth steps were more focused on the form and content: the third step focusing on the most popular themes or words, and the fourth step analyzing the metaphors.



The challenge I faced with Facebook was its unstable database, which caused the page to reload multiple times. This was especially evident, if I was forced to search for more comments, for example if the random sample value was too high. Returning to find the same comment became too tedious, which caused me to restrict both the values and the way the comments were collected. Thereby, I decided to focus solely on the upper level comments. Moreover, it seemed that the comments underneath a certain upper level comment were usually answers to a certain issue and targeted towards the original commentator.

The second problem with the database were algorithms that dictate the order of the comments based on their “relativity” or what would interest me the most. based on my previous behavior on Facebook. I decided to go for “show all comments”, which meant I did come across multiple irrelevant comments, pictures and “tags”, but this was tackled with other measures, that are presented in the random sampling chapter.

In the beginning of the data collection process, the order of the comments was static after opting for “show all comments”. However, at some point the comments started to change place. For example, every time the page was reloaded due to stress and too much information, the comments were set in a new order, thus searching for a particular comment from hundreds of comments required strong nerves and devotion. I decided that when the particular comment was found, I would continue with my random sampling method as usual. If the next comment was already taken, I would move on to the next comment.

However, this provides better grounds for the random sampling and less evidence for opinion researcher’s opinion bias. Moreover, it enables more comments and opinions to be selected and more voices to be heard, instead of manually choosing comments that are the most valuable for my research question. After the data collection process, there were still irrelevant comments, which indicates that the process was successful.



3.4.1 Random Sampling

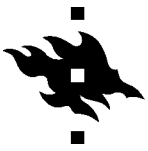
Random sampling is a common practice, especially in the statistics. The term *random* has been under the debate especially amongst mathematicians and philosophers, where one part of the debate argues that random event mirrors the human ignorance and the others conceive the random events as parts of the fabric of nature (Dattalo, 2009).

Jerzey Neyman has been considered as the pioneer of modern statistical sampling theory. In his paper “*Two Aspects of the Representative Method*” (1934) he compared non-random and random sampling (later RS) by describing simple random sampling methods (stratified sampling, cluster sampling and purposive sampling). He outlined the conditions under which sampling estimates could and could not be unbiased. By the 1950’s his practice had become nearly universally accepted amongst most statisticians. (Dattalo 2009)

Randomized sampling methods are considered as the golden standard for methodological procedures. Some researchers rely on sampling and randomizing strategies to minimize selection bias, that refers to the error in a study due to systematic differences in the characteristics of nonparticipants and participants in a study. (Dattalo 2009).

Patrick Dattalo (2009) has identified two types of selection bias: assignments and sampling bias. Sampling bias here is what my thesis is trying to avoid, meaning that want to ensure that all the members of the reference population (social media discussion) have a chance of being selected in the comment sample. To ensure a broad demographic, I want the comments to be selected randomly, instead of choosing them consciously.

There are two common practices to avoid sampling bias, called random sampling (RS) and random assignment (RA). RS is related to external validity whereas RA relates to internal validity of study’s results. However, internal and external validity are not mutually exclusive. (Dattalo 2009). They are both crucial to any research, but I have chosen to focus on RS.



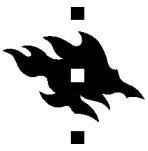
RS (or probability sampling) describes a type of sampling, that is free from sampling bias. Unbiased sample refers to a sample where every combination of elements in a population has a chance of being selected. (Dattalo 2009) A biased sample would be a sample where the researcher makes conscious choice to choose any comments she sees to fit in her study and oversee any other comments. Hence, without RS, my research results would have restricted utility, whereas now I have broader demographic, which reflects the opinion of the audience.

Using RS and RA is not completely unproblematic, since there are multiple barriers (legal, ethical and practical) make them difficult to apply (Dattalo 2009). Some have even argued, that the whole population cannot be identified using RS, and that RS consumes more time and money. (see. Cook & Campbell, 1979; St. Pierre & Cook 1984). In a study like this it might be impossible to include every single opinion, but the RS improves the demography and allows more justified sampling method.

There is also the issue regarding sampling biases, that might occur due, for example, incomplete randomization process, measurement errors or non-sampling biases, too small or homogenous samples or having too few participants. Moreover, the RS does not allow causal generalizations across multiple populations. (Dattalo 2009)

These have been tackled in this thesis by randomizing the comment values and the places in which comments have been collected. I have counted how many comments I need to make valid analysis and allowing Facebook to show me all comments, instead of the most relevant ones. The number of participants was 15 from each news. To allow generalizations, I have chosen only one social media platform, thus removing replications across units, setting and time (Dattalo 2009).

My thesis is qualitative, not statistical; therefore, I will apply RS only for the data collecting. My data collection practice follows random number method, where I used random number generator offered by Google. It follows the three important



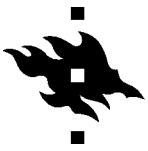
properties Dattalo (2009) has given, meaning that it's unbiased, unpredictable and not reproducible.

Conditions were set, that the number can be anything between 3 and 10. If the generator gave me number 3, every third comment was chosen. Values 1 and 2 were discarded, to avoid getting similar comments (eg. someone replying something within the same subject or someone replying to someone above and not using the subcomment). Values above 10 were dismissed as well, so that the amount of comments in any news piece selected would be enough, since it would have been too time consuming to count how many sub-comments there were in one comment section.

Every news piece was handled with different number. When selecting the comments, I opted "Show all comments" to avoid Facebook blocking comments that algorithms have marked as "spam". However, this led to the comments being put in a "most relevant" order based on Facebook algorithms. I did not see this as a problem, as it made it possible for me to sample comments in non-chronological order. Every comment was chosen based on the number given earlier and copy pasted on a word sheet, and later anonymized.

Comments that were discarded included a picture or reaction comments, numbers, symbols, comments pasted on a different language and tagging comments. As these comments were to be anonymized anyway, I decided they would not give qualitative content for my research. If a comment was any of the comments mentioned as "discarded", the next comment was chosen instead. After a discarded comment, I proceeded to count the following comments with the RS method.

RS made it impossible for me to impact the political orientation, gender, age or nationality of the commentator of the comments section, which was what I hoped for, but also has a limitation based on the personal algorithms of Facebook. Based on the determined sample size (15 per news piece) I am able to create a semi-accurate narrative combining comments from more than one news outlet. The sample size was determined based solely on how much comments I needed for my



analysis, considering how many hashtags or irrelevant comments there most likely will be.

3.5 Data analysis: Narrative & Categorical-content analysis

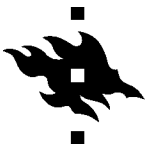
The random sampled data was collected on a word sheet using copy paste, allowing links to commentator's profile. Afterwards, I checked commentators' gender, removed hyperlinks and anonymized the commentator, making it more difficult to get an idea who they actually are. This process enables me to analyze from the text, instead of considering the identity of the commentator.

First, I counted how many comments were positive, negative or ambiguous towards women. The calculation was then moved to an excel sheet and counted. This was set as the preliminary analysis, to obtain an idea of what the overall tone of the social media debates are and to count how many positive and negative comments I got from each gender.

Furthermore, I was interested in hashtags and how many times different hashtags were used in the comments. Hashtags have a special significance to this campaign, since the campaign has evolved from a simple hashtag, that was spread all over social media as a form of female empowerment.

The comments were then analyzed through three categories or trends; women, #metoo and sexual harassment. The categories were established after all the comments were collected. The categorical-content enables identifying the trends in communication content and reflecting on the cultural patters of the public (Berelson 1952). Through these categories the implicit content (Lieblich et al. 1998 pp. 12-13) was analyzed; what is said and what does it mean for the overall narrative of Asia Argento? After the categorical-content analysis was finished, I started constructing the narrative of Asia Argento.

The comments I have collected, I will treat as finished pieces of thoughts and as credible piece of text, as people tend to do on social media. I am unable to access



the cues and tone of spoken conversation, which might make it difficult identify notes and undertones of sarcasm and might cause some comments to be misunderstood (see. Meikle 2016). However, there are many variables I cannot impact, but with random sampling, feminist epistemology and an adequate data set, I am able to construct a credible narrative.

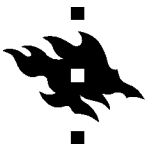
Every comment sample from each news was analyzed first independently and treated as an individual unit. Each Facebook page has their own ideologies that their followers find worth following. Moreover, I wanted to treat each post as a unique context; the prevalent trend was to post negative news, but besides the overall tone of the news, the choice of words, images and styles were all different. Afterwards, these singular opinions or units were combined into one, coherent narrative.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Facebook is an open arena, meaning that the comments are posted publicly. With a few exceptions, people usually present their opinions as who they are. For this thesis it became a problem, whether I could use social media comments as a data for my study. However, part of the social media is that user, in a way, loses power over how their content will be used (Meikle 2016, pp. x), which allows using open Facebook comments as an indicator of public narrative.

Next, there was an issue whether I should anonymize the comments. I decided to play it safe and anonymize the comments, as it would have been too tedious to consult 75 people independently. In the anonymizing process I wanted to have the least amount of data of the commentator as possible to avoid it becoming the determining factor. Hence, I decided to omit all other information, besides gender, that bears a significant value for this research.

I was afraid that even after the anonymizing process, the identities of the commentators would be identifiable. Luckily, the way the comments were shown through the algorithms made it more difficult to identify these people, even after



anonymizing them. Even I struggled to find particular comments when there were still profile pictures, names and time stamps provided, therefore it will be nearly impossible to identify each commentator from dozens of similar comments.

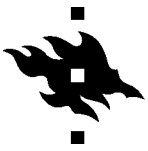
The subject of this thesis is usually considered as taboo as it includes a long and painful history of both genders. The subject also usually divides opinions depending on the gender and experiences. What makes this research so ethically fragile, is that both Argento and Bennet are victims of sexual harassment; they are protected by laws. Hence, the subject has to be researched in a way, that appreciates the victims and does not take a stand for or against to either of them.

I have spent a vast amount of time making sure that the theory, method and analysis do not diminish the experiences of the victims. Instead, I want to value their experience and produce an analysis that is independent and does not take any sides. In addition, it has taken me quite a while to focus on not letting my own emotions impact the analysis and ultimately the result of this research.

4. Analysis

The analysis chapter of my research will unfold as follows: first, I will lay out my main findings and themes from the comments which I have attained from the news using categorical-content analysis. This general introduction to my analysis includes general tones, common themes and the usage of hashtags. Moreover, I will go through each individual cluster of comments and elaborate on the themes relating to each news context. Elaborating more on the individual postings helps identifying the differences between different filters that these Facebook pages offer and their impact on the general tone of the comments.

1. How is Asia Argento narrated through the Asia Argento vs. Jimmy Bennet storyline?



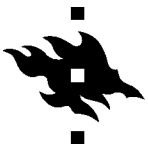
2. What is the narrative of Asia Argento through the themes of #metoo and sexual abuse?

From the preliminary analysis I have set three categories in relation to my research questions, through which I will analyze the comments. These categories are **Women, #metoo and Sexual Abuse**. The first theme includes comments regarding Argento and other women mentioned in the news and hence, on how Asia Argento is narrated through her gender. The second is about comments focusing mainly on #metoo and how the campaign has shaped Argento's narrative. The third category includes the narrative of sexual abuse (and women). These categories have different foci in relation to one another. However, they derive from both, the research question as well as the data. The subcategories are named in the beginning of each category.

I will analyze the comments using categorical-content analysis and discuss and analyze how these different themes or categories were present in the data in the light of my research questions. Each chapter includes the analysis of the comments as a whole and closer observation of certain symbols and metaphors. These three themes with their findings create the narrative of Asia Argento in the post #metoo context (Asia Argento vs. Jimmy Bennet -case) which I will then present in a concluding chapter.

The amount of the #metoo-postings by women indicates, that victims and survivors of sexual abuse might never disclose their experiences, or they might do it years later (Quadara, 2008) whereas the reaction to these posts reflects how the stigmatized subject has been brushed aside from the social media platforms (Manikoda et al. 2018).

Hashtags have been an important part of the online discussion, mobilization and empowerment of the #Me Too – campaign on social media, reflecting the urge to share and connect on social media, that Graham Meikle (2016) theorizes. One hashtag became a symbol of shared concern and enabled people to comment a



shared concern (Meikle 2016, pp. 76). #MeToo was an effortless way for women to share an experience of a stigmatized subject and show compassion.

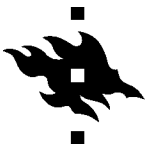
As the posts and news presented Argento in a polarized light, there was a motion of contradicting hashtags. In this context, the usage of hashtags bears significance, that reveal public attitudes. #YouToo (M16), #MeToAsiaIsAPervert (W17), #hertoo (M31) and #YouToo (61) hashtags were used in mocking or blaming manner. These hashtags were used to intensify the anti-#metoo attitudes as well as indicating the negative attitudes towards Asia Argento's actions as the spokesperson of the movement. #HerToo and #YouToo indicate blaming. Whereas #metoo indicates "I too have experienced sexual abuse", #youtoo and #hertoo, here indicates that "you too abused someone sexually".

One of the comments under the CNN International-news piece accuses Asia a pervert.

"M17: #MeToAsiaIsAPervert think that is what she meant."

The comment was posted under the CNN International post with a picture of Argento with young Bennet in bed. The comment is targeted towards her actions but does not necessarily discredit her as a person or remove her credibility as some of the people do.

These hashtags focus on the power relations between genders. Furthermore, these hashtags indicate that the motion #metoo generated has turned the power relations upside down, relating to what Kantola (2015, pp. 8) mentions about the opposers of feminist movements.



4.1 General overlook on the comments

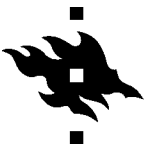
Commenter gender	Men	Women	Total
Positive comment	10	9	19
Negative comment	22	16	38
Ambiguous	10	8	18
Total	42	33	75
Grand total	75		

Table 1. Spread of comments

Most of the 75 comments analyzed were negative (38). Positive (19) and ambiguous (18) comments were nearly even but there were slightly more positive comments. As ambiguous comments were marked all of those, that were irrelevant to the research questions. Most of the comments were written by men (42). Men were slightly more negative than women; 52% of all the comments written by men were negative, whereas the same percentage was 48% for women. 23% of all the comments written by men were positive whereas 27% of all the comments by women were positive. Both genders were nearly equally ambiguous.

Ambiguous comments were anything from talking about Tupperware lids or announcing they do not know who Argento is, to ambiguous sentences that did not make any sense. Some of the latter category comments were merely unfinished thoughts, that I could not use for analysis, as they might have easily been misunderstood.

Three main themes could be identified from the comments relating to my research questions which all relate to the same issue; how society, and social media, brought up sexual violence and the victims of sexual harassment. The categories I



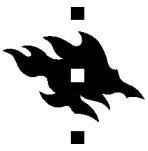
draw upon were, as mentioned above, **Women, #MeToo and Sexual Harrasment.**

Under the first theme, there are comments regarding Asia Argento, Alyssa Milano and Rose McGowan, who are all part of the Me Too movement; Milano has been the mobilizing force of the movement, whereas Argento and McGowan have shared their experiences as the victims of Harvey Weinstein. Surprisingly, the comments regarding these women were rather negative and harsh, but they reveal how society treats Asia as a victims and strong, vocal women in the post Me Too - era.

The second theme was clear, as I intentionally searched news around the #MeToo theme. The comments reveal how the latest news have impacted the credibility of the campaign; and how it personates through Asia Argento. In addition, as mentioned in the introduction, the Argento vs. Weinstein is separate from the Argento vs. Bennet incidents. However, based on the tone of the news and the social media comments, people see these incidents under the same narrative of the Me Too-campaign. The uniting view was apparent in the comments as well.

The last theme relates to sexual harassment (or violence or abuse) and victimhood and how society discusses victimhood. To my surprise, the urge to tear down the double standards against sexual violence did not always extend to how society treats victims of sexual violence. Even though some people treated Argento similarly as male abusers, toxic masculinity was also very present. Toxic masculinity discredited the experience of male submission and called for gratitude towards Argento's behaviour. Victim feminism (Kitzinger & Thomas 1995, pp. 39) was also clearly apparent, indicating that the movement itself has created victims.

The prevalent trend regarding women reminded of mob-shaming (Ronson 2015), that reflects how social media provides more fertile environment for hate speech. The mob-shaming was not as prevalent under all themes, indicating that the independent posts, with their tones and angles performed as filter bubbles (Parsier



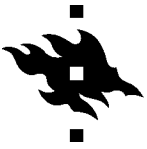
2011), whereas the Facebook pages with their own ideologies performed as gatekeepers (Hermida et al. 2012, pp. 821). Moreover, it seems that some of the emotional stages were contagious (Kramer et al. 2014, pp. 87-88), since there were little dissenting comments. Hence, people felt similar emotions and had similar opinions.

Based on the length of the contributions and deep structures of interaction (the lengths and branching of the message threads), the news and comments sections are engaging people to participate. #MeToo hence fulfills what Landert (2017 pp. 45) considers as the most interactive and engaging topic. In addition, following Landert (2017, pp. 49) the increased stimulation might be a result of the Facebook News feeds, and thus indicates that the news regarding #metoo have become personal through Facebook news feeds. Lastly, the communication on the comment sections seems to be vertical, aligning with Landert (2017, pp. 38-40). The comments are most often participation and involvement targeted towards Argento or Bennet, not so much debating between peers.

However, the comments were not aligning with Herring's (1994) findings, in terms that women adopt politeness whereas men are more vigorously debating. Instead, it seems that the verbal aggression against the women indeed strengthens binary gender constructions, that emphasizes the subordination of women. (Anderson 2014, pp. 289). Moreover, the people might not label their comments as hate speech, since they are simultaneously protected by the ideology of freedom of speech and private, that reduces the level of "seriousness" (Anderson & Cermele 2014, pp. 289), even though these comments seem quite serious in their allegations and statements.

4.2 Women

Although I was searching for news with Asia Argento in mind, there were two other women that were named in the posts. These three women, Asia Argento, Rose McGowan and Alyssa Milano were all commented on in the comments collected and therefore they constitute the narrative of strong #metoo leaders in



the post #metoo era, however this thesis focuses on solely Argento's narrative even though Milano and McGowan were also crucial for the narrative of Argento and the #MeToo campaign.

The general tone in the comments regarding these Argento was rather negative. There were 3 themes that the comments focused on; **credibility, talents and appearance**. The three themes derive from the dataset and were not previously chosen.

Argento received very controversial and harsh comments that reflect how the society on social media treat victims of sexual abuse, and especially strong women who talk publicly about stigmatized subjects. For example, under the most scandalous news piece by The Fox News, the comments were indicating the stark aggravation of the public.

W1: Really? She is an abuser? And had the nerve to 'me too' ? Seriously? What a cesspit Hollywood is.

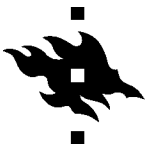
W2: woman is a total hypocrite and so very disgusting! She is no better than the man she accused, Harvey Weinstein. Hollywood! And these people want to shove their morals and political ideologies down our throats. Hollywood and all that they produce is a big part of what's wrong with this country!

M2: The thing about it is they slept with someone to become an actor or actress, the bad part is the people with a lot more talent and morals didn't get into acting

M9: She should be charged for "her" crime plain and simple. Really tired of privileged individuals getting away with crimes that would see others jailed by taking out a check book.

M11: Maybe this was instead of "suiciding" like her boyfriend Anthony B. ? Shut her up for good by removing credibility.

All of these comments discredit Argento's talents and morals. W1 indicates, that Argento should not have been allowed to be part of the movement in the first place. W2 goes further, accusing Argento of being disgusting and a hypocrite. She compares her to Weinstein. M2 continues, suggesting that women, namely Argento, become something and receive their status in society through sexual encounters. Furthermore, he says that Argento has no morals, or talents as an actor. M11's comment raises attention to the suicide of Argento's late boyfriend.



He sees that the action was a “suicide” to her career, that removes her credibility completely. All of these comments are straight-forward attacks against Argento’s merits and personality.

W5: Hypocrites

(New York Times)

M27: The hypocrisy is so real!

(CNN International)

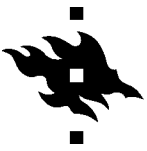
M31: #herto

(ABC News)

The case of Argento is problematic, since she has been part of the #metoo movement as a victim of sexual harassment. Now that she has faced sexual abuse allegations for abusing, people are eager to remove her victimhood and merits. People consider her as hypocrite (W5, M27, M31). Her actions remove her credibility to speak for the victims of sexual harassment. In the public discourse she is described as hypocrite, disgusting, pervert and even compared to her assaulter Harvey Weinstein (W1, W2, M9, M11).

Here, the complexity of sexual abuse is brushed aside, and the case is simplified, which enables erasing the humanity of a previous sexual assault victim, if the victim does anything similar. People do not only see her unreliable due to her latest actions, but the fact that she has settled her case instead of facing imprisonment, makes her privileged (M9). Besides the attacks against her credibility, the public discourse takes an attack against her personal life and merits. The commentators discredit her talents and morals altogether. One commentator (M11) even raises attention to the suicide of her late boyfriend, while the other puts her gender pronoun in quotation marks, removing her femininity and sexuality. This indicates, that the certain vulnerability and compassion is expected from the victims of sexual abuse. If these expectations are not met, they can be ripped apart.

On a more advanced note, W1 and W2 can be analyzed from the perspective of white feminism, as well as W5 and M27, who are presented below. W1 seems to question whether somebody so hypocritical should have access to power (from the



perspective of #metoo). The comment also aligns with supremacy and privilege. The hypocrisy is targeted towards how once a victim is now held accountable for her own crimes that she settled with money, but on a broader scope it is targeted towards the privileged white women who have generated the movement.

W28: Hmm, she was 38 and desperate from the sounds of it. More of her victims need to come forward and expose the wolf in sheeps clothing. These organizations need to start vetting their biggest advocates, they only end up hurting real victims.

(CBN News)

W28 argues that Argento was “38 and desperate”. She considers this to be a pattern for Argento and calls for the movement to put their leading figures under scrutiny. The first part of the comment reflects a broader issue with ageism, where a woman over a certain age becomes unattractive and non-sexual – hence, desperate. She sees Argento’s actions as a desperate measure. She calls Argento a “wolf in sheeps clothing”, which strongly connotates with predator. Hence, she refers how Argento has been the spokesperson for victim as a ‘predator’ and, in a way, questions the credibility of the movement through Argento.

Some of the comments focused on the appearance of the women.

M13: Isn’t that the chick who shaved her head?! Anyone remember that saying from back in the day?

“Takes one to know one” 🤔😂

Similar comment could be found under the CBS News post, where she accuses her hypocrite and predator.

W29: Hypocrisy. What a farce. Founder of me too movement does same exact thing. Gives 17 year male actor old hush money. He played her such...she is a freaking predator! She is Harvey Weinstein.

The comment (M13) posted under the Fox News post, focuses on Asia Argento shaving her head, and then proceeds to indicate “takes on to know one”, accompanied with a wondering and laughing emoji. Here, both commenters (M13



& W29) also make a reference to Weinstein; they compare Argento to the person who has abused her. Moreover, they discredit the credibility and victimhood of Argento by indicating that she has been the vocal person of the #metoo movement as an abuser. The reference to shaving hair refers to an act of defeminization, that can be seen to diminish her gender, sexuality and femininity.

Under the New York Times post, there were comments in which Argento and McGowan are accused as “mentally-ill lunatics” who are irrelevant celebrities, talented only in capturing men and ruining their lives. (M15). McGowan is described as “nasty piece of work” (M16) and a possible molester (W9). Whereas Argento is merely “damaged goods” (M21).

M15: Two mentally-ill lunatics desperate to perpetuate their C-level fame in lieu of ever displaying any actual talent (other than capturing vastly more famous men and ruining their lives--Bourdain and Marilyn Manson).

M16: Rose McGowan seems like a very nasty piece of work.

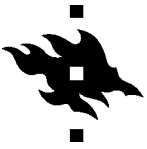
W9: I bet Rose molested someone too...just wait for it. She seems so sketchy, even more than Asia

M21: Damaged goods is damaged goods.

The New York Times post is about McGowan supporting Argento, by saying that she is different from Weinstein, as she has admitted to sleeping with a young actor. However, it seems that by supporting Argento, the image and personality of McGowan is now open for criticism as well. By supporting an abuser, she becomes one as well, enabling criticism towards her victimhood, mental state, merits, appearance and past. Argento has become “damaged goods”, ruined by her experiences as victims. Her sexuality, merits and humanity are denied from her after her trauma. On the other hand, everyone who dares to support Argento, gets their part of Argento’s narrative as a predator who is not humane anymore.

W18: Why did Anthony decide to quit life for this, he could have just quit this woman!

Some of the comments were referring to suicide (M15, M11, W18), and could be seen under variety of posts. Either they were indications to the suicide of Anthony



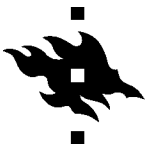
Bourdain or indicating that instead of Bourdain, it should have been Argento. In these comments the life of a man is valued over the life of a woman. Furthermore, statement by W18 “he could have just quit this woman” normalizes violence as an effortless action. On the other hand, their comment also aligns with misogyny that can also be produced by women (Manne 2017).

M22: Look at the time he was 17 and more importantly, she was a director and him a lowly actor. There is the issue of age and balance of power at play
(CNN International)

Here, we have a commentary, that takes up the theme of power relations: “there is the issue of age and balance of power play.” Although this comment is not directly about Asia, it provides insight into how the public perceives her. Against the traditional gender roles and the idea of male superiority, M22 considers Bennet as the vulnerable part. Argento is the one establishing her power by using it (Young 1990, 1992) or showing her superiority by committing a violent act.

Almost all of these comments presented above represent hate speech and misogyny: hostility towards women. The comments, that either assess the appearance of women or remind and shame their sex fulfil what Goldsworthy (2013) identifies as the example of misogyny. As Goldsworthy has argued, these forms of misogyny are used with the aim of silencing women; especially white strong women. Moreover, it is targeted at humiliating and scaring women.

The comments further prove what Kate Manne (2017) has argued before; that patriarchal system nurtures misogyny and that misogyny survives in a culture that nurtures and contains misogynists, and that women too can present misogynist characteristics. It seems, that in some instances social media might be the systems that operates patriarchy.



4.3 MeToo

The credibility of MeToo campaign was one strong subject under debate in all of the posts. I decided to include it as well, as it further represents how Asia's past is narrated with the current events.

In some comments the campaign and Argento's abuse case were seen as separate subjects.

M14: This shouldn't put the metoo movement in jeopardy. Just because a person was a victim at one point doesn't mean they aren't capable of being a predator. Metoo is about accountability. You do wrong, you are held accountable. Doesn't matter if you're powerful or what your gender is or what your orientation is or whether you were ever abused yourself.

(The New York Times)

W11: Funny to see how many guys think this somehow discredits Me Too movement. Well boys, the fact that I was assaulted by my boss when I was a 22-year-old summer student has nothing to do with Asia Argento – it happened, it was wrong and nothing some film star did changes that. What she did only takes her right to be part of the movement, it has no bearing on mine. And what I told was just one of many incidents.

(CNN International)

Here Argento's actions do not remove the credibility of the campaign. However, her experiences do not determine that she *could not have done* similar actions. Furthermore, she should be held accountable and removed from the movement. M14 in a way, differentiates Argento from Weinstein, and discusses how social status, gender, sexual orientation or past do not dictate whether you become an abuser or not.

However, the supporting tones were only the minority on my data. Most of the comments considered, that the movement has lost credibility:

W12: Age of consent in California is 18. Thanks for setting the movement back, Asia.

(CNN International)



M36: This. Is. Hilarious. Gives #MeToo a whole new meaning.

M38: Me too has no credibility left.

M42: There does the whole #metoo movement

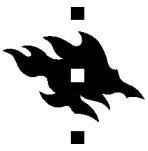
(CBS News)

The opinions were everything and anything between the movement having contracting meanings (M36), to the downfall of the movement (M38 & M42). To some, Asia's actions have only set back the movement. In these occasions the men were more eager to deny the credibility of the movement through Argento's actions. Hence, the rallying point is that the downfall or loss of credibility is personalized through Argento. Here, she is considered as the active agent.

The three different attitudes might depend on three factors. First, how these people attach the Argento's allegations to present the #metoo movement. Thus, how much agency they give for Argento for the movement. Second, what kind of news have they been reading and from where; how much their perception of the society is filtered. Especially the readers of the CBS News seemed to be more hesitant to remove all credibility of the campaign, whereas according to the commentator in the CNN International, the movement had faced a setback. Finally, their experiences in life; if they have experienced sexual violence before.

M33: The #metoo conspiracy has an agenda. They pick their victims in advance in then go to find women they may have slighted. It's purpose is to destroy the careers of prominent men and ruin their lives.

Here, the commentator (M33) of the ABC News discusses how the #metoo has as an agenda which is targeted against successful men; it ruins their lives and takes away their status of power. Moreover, he indicates that the agenda of the "conspiracy" campaign has shifted the power relations between genders setting all men under submission. This comment has anti-feminist undertone that simultaneously discredits the experience of sexual abuse. He indicates that men are victims instead of women; the action of sexual violence is less wrong than ruining the life of a prominent men.



All of these comments above indicate, that even if the incidents are considered as separate, in the public discourse they are oftentimes intertwined, which causes generalization, as well as stereotyping in the public discourse. A woman, especially if she is a victim, is expected to behave in a certain way, and if her or his actions are thereafter put under scrutiny. The actions of a victim should not contradict what is expected of them, otherwise their words and actions lose their credibility.

4.4 Sexual Harassment

The experience of victimhood has been under debate on social media. The Argento vs. Bennet case has raised a new narrative where double standards can be used to mean anything and everything. The general themes of the narrative of sexual abuse were money, credibility and gender. The former latter term includes stereotypes, toxic masculinity and power relations. The themes are not excluding, meaning that in some cases they go hand-in-hand.

The most common theme was money, and it was present in many of the comments, relating to the settlement of the allegations.

W14: Most of those allegations and media humdrums about it are just means by which some individuals get publicity and money 😏 “poor little 17 years old boy”



(CNN International)

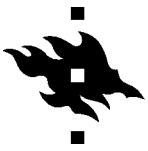
M32: All this BS is about money 😏😏😏

W24: yeah a money grab is always strong

(ABC NEWS)

M23: A great deal for him! \$380K for a tumble with a cougar. And she got Bourdain to pay. **(CNN international)**

M35: Do You feel like SOME people might be gaming the system for money and attention? #MeToo **(CBN News)**



Money is present in all of these comments. M32 and W24 indicate that the money has been the motivator for the scandal; either for both of them or for the victim. M35 indicates, that the allegations are false; created to bluff the system and to get money and attention. W14 in turn calls Bennet as “poor little 17 years old boy” with quotation marks and laughing emojis, questioning his credibility. She also calls the allegations as a mean for Bennet to make publicity and money. In a way, these comments construct a narrative, where sexual abuse is compared to prostitution. Instead of involuntary or illegal actions, the status of the victimhood and incident are being debated.

M23 calls the scandal a “deal”. Toxic masculinity can be seen from his choice of words; sexual assault is a light “tumble” and Argento is a passive “cougar” who settles her allegations with money. Moreover, he indicates that Bourdain paid her out of the trouble; she is the passive party who required a man to save herself from the trouble. As a result, Argento to him is a gold-digger who uses her boyfriend’s money and hence, has less power. In a way, he is establishing superior masculinity by diminishing the credibility and experience of the victim; Bennet is active subject whereas Argento is always in the passive position in the scenario.

The comments revealed that sexual assault is related to gender. First, maybe the most distressing and prevalent theme was toxic masculinity, that was prevalent in many comments written by men:

M4: Poor guy. Having to lay there while an attractive woman goes down on you. Then being FORCED to have sex with her!!! I can only imagine the horror he went through..

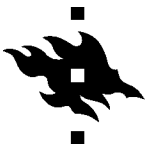
(Fox News)

M23: A great deal for him! \$380K for a tumble with a cougar. And she got Bourdain to pay.

(CNN international)

M37: Good for that 17 year old!!! Got some pu**y and got paid 380,000 for getting it!!!

(CBN News)



M43: This is a sad day, when U sue the woman you were fantasizing about, when she actually has sex with YOU. She is a hero, if only all the ladies would act on there impulses.

M44: Isn't getting paid for sex basically being a prostitute? (CBN News)

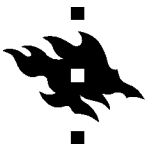
M4 has clearly a sarcastic comment, accusing Bennet as “poor guy”. He indicates that Bennet experiences most likely were not forced, instead he was the active subject. Hence, the allegations should not be disclosed on media. M37 congratulates Bennet whereas M44 compares the incident to prostitution. M43 indicates Bennet was “fantasizing” about Argento before the case.

All of the comments above discredit the experience of being assaulted. Although Bennet has raised allegations against Argento later on, the commentators discredit this experience. M4 refers to the sexuality of a young man, that in this case diminishes the credibility of law and Bennet's own experience. M37's congratulations reveal, that young males should be grateful for the sexual encounters, never mind in what circumstances they occur.

Even though there were many calling out the double standards in a way how the abusers were treated, these themes were not apparent on how the victims were treated. Comments about prostitution (M44) and fantasy (M43) sexualize the abuse, where young men should be grateful for the sexual encounters. Other commentator even calls Argento a “hero”, that other ladies should follow. These comments remove the active subject of a woman and spread the values of toxic masculinity.

M26: I'd like to give a solid thanks to all the cougars!
(CNN International)

Similarly, to M32, M26 uses the word “cougar” to describe Argento in this occasion. This further sexualizes women and sexual assault. Moreover, it is jointed to the perception, that all interaction between different genders sexual (Kitzinger 6 Thomas 1995, pp. 40-41). In a way, sexualizing the male victim traces back to male fertility, where sexual encounters are idealized.



The comments relating to toxic masculinity, reflect how different genders interpret sexual violence differently (Kitzinger & Thomas 1995, pp. 34). Moreover, the comments reflect our men are more likely to label sexual harassment as something else (Kenig & Ryan 1968; Powell 1986) In the public discourse this can be seen as diminishing other's experiences. Moreover, toxic masculinity relates to victim feminism (Kitzinger & Thomas 1995, pp. 39), and can clearly be seen here in how victims of violence and abuse are treated. Here, the "being a victim" is clearly a product of ideology. Something, that can be diminished.

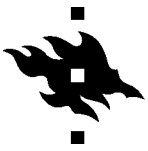
Combined with the rest of the comments, the narrative ties back to power relations; men are stereotypically strong and independent, sexual creatures. When sexual encounter is labelled as assault, it takes away the men's status of power. Denying the victimhood, on the other hand, might act as a way to empower. In a way these comments align with the issue of different conceptions of power between genders that furthermore, reflect the issue of male submission (Kantola 2015, pp. 80; 82-83) and how these issues are perceived and discussed on social media.

M22: Look at the time he was 17 and more importantly, she was a director and him a lowly actor. There is the issue of age and balance of power at play
(CNN International)

Aligning with the previous comments, under the same post there was a comment about power relations. "There is the issue of age and balance of power play", he states. Here, the violence constructs gender inequalities (Skinner et. al. 2005, pp. 2-3; 11), even inside the same gender. This statement reinforces the narrative of power play between genders; Argento is empowering herself by reproducing more violence.

W32: Predators can be females, just like all these teachers & student relationships.
#MeToo is not reserved for females only.
(CBN News)

W32 reminds that abusers or #metoo are not reserved label certain genders. Aligning with the power play narrative, she mentions the teacher & student



relationships. Hence, the comment indicates that sexual abuse and harassment are about power, instead of gender roles. Victims and predators can be representatives of any gender; anyone can misuse their power, and anyone can be a victim. Moreover, everybody has the right to empower themselves and come forward with their experiences despite their gender.

W26: These women aren't liars it's the men that say they never didn't , I don't know her or it never happened.

(ABC News)

W26 goes against men, by arguing that women do not lie about their experiences. The men lie by not being honest about the events or if they knew their victims. The comment relates to Alyssa Milano's quote about how Argento's allegations do not erase the experiences of the millions of men and women who have shared their stories of violence. Her comment implies that one controversial case cannot erase the narrative of millions; their stories are not lies even if one of the victims has done something similar. By putting men and women against each other in the discourse of sexual violence, she reinforces the division of the genders and their power relations.

The third theme concerned the credibility of the victim.

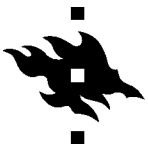
W13: He does not look like he is being assaulted. He might even be taking the picture. This is a lame assertion. Another waste of paper and ink.

W16: Something shady about this period. Why is he smirking?

(CNN International)

Under the CNN International's post, with a picture of Argento and Bennet attached, W13 discredits Bennet's experience of sexual violence, by saying that "he does not look like he is being assaulted." She argues, that Bennet was the one taking the picture. W16 questions why Bennet is smirking.

W13 and W16 refer to Bennet's facial expression in the picture and argue that they do not remind what a victim's expression would be like. In a way, they are blaming Bennet for the case. These comments reflect how the victims might not



immediately disclose their experience of sexual abuse (Quadara 2008). Some younger victims might understand how inappropriate certain actions were, later in life. However, in the public discourse the behavior of the victim is put under scrutiny, no matter what the gender is.

M7: Here it the thing, I can accuse anyone of sexual assault but how do I provide evidence if there is none? Anybody can accuse someone with money of this and force them to have to pay.

M5: The problem is the real abuse and exploitation is getting caught with looking for a payday or settling a grudge. It only takes a few of the latter to call into doubt many of the former. The penalty for making a false charge like this should equal that of the other.

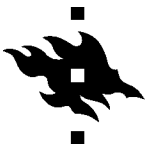
(FOX NEWS)

M7 argues that money was the only motivator for Bennet to raise the allegations. He argues, that Bennet has no evidence, and that he himself too could accuse anyone. More closely, the narrative indicates that sexual assault requires evidence. It seems, that the word of the victim might not be enough. M5 argues, that the Argento & Bennet case derails attention from real abuse and exploitation. He questions the credibility of Bennet (false charge like this) and calls that there should be no double standards.

These comments might raise from the context of these news and how they are represented in the media as simplified and generalized version of the events. Without taking a stand on what has happened, the comments reveal the dismissive attitudes on how victims are treated on media.

Besides the variety of the negative comments, some of them were more supportive towards the victimhood.

W3: Preach Rose! 🙌🙌🙌 “There absolutely should be no leeway or tolerance for sexual assault. Hard stop. NONE. Victims also shouldn’t be told how they should react or what they should say about their abusers. However as allies to the victim and voyeurs of an event we should find a better way to balance support of the



victim with due process for the accused.”

(New York Times)

W19: Victims often become abusers. It is still wrong, but has nothing to do with other victims.

(ABC News)

W3 quotes McGowan and discloses, how the Argento vs. Bennet case does not mean that sexual assault is right or wrong, even if an ex-victim has done so. Moreover, she agrees that accusing and blaming are not the right way of handling the situation. W19 reminds, that being a victim does not mean that one’ could not become an abuser. She reminds, that Argento’s case does not however mean, that all victims become abusers. These perspectives reveal, that some people do differentiate Argento’s allegations from the #metoo movement. They do not question the credibility of the movement. Moreover, they endorse equalizing treatment and freedom for the victims to disclose their experiences.

The obvious type of commentary, prevalent on all of the news was the call for double standards.

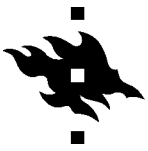
M30: Every accusation should be looked at and there should be no double standard !

(ABC News)

M41: Double Standard

(CBN News)

The cry for double standard (M30, M41) reflects, how both the men perceive the abuse conducted by women is treated differently than abuse conducted by men. Call for “double standard” performs, in a way, as a counteract to balance the gender stereotypes in society, where women still sometimes seen as nurturers and men are the aggressive providers. The roots of the argument trace back to power relations. However, “double standards” only deals with how the representatives of different genders are prosecuted, not how the victims are treated.



5. Discussion and concluding remarks

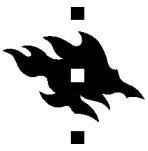
5.1 Key findings

Sexual abuse, white feminism and hate speech are all related to power relations. Sexual abuse and hate speech focus on “overpowering”. White feminism is empowering those, who are already more powerful than the others. Activism always raises emotions, positive and negative, that are easy to share online with the communicative applications. The sharing of those emotions is freedom of speech, but sometimes the expressions can be identified as hate speech.

The white feminism of the #metoo movement has caused many issues. The inclusion of white excludes the experiences of women of color and creates generalizations that can discourage others from sharing their stories. Moreover, it has parallels in the history of feminism, and how ideology has been white for centuries. The whiteness in #metoo can be seen in how the campaign gained traction and to whom the public connotes it, as well as in who has been represented in the media. The stories shared have been prominently white which traces back to exclusion the women of color. Moreover, the campaign seems to overlook how women of color usually are the most vulnerable demographic for sexual abuse and harassment. For some reason, they are not part of the narrative of #metoo.

The latest events regarding Asia Argento and Jimmy Bennet have created another issue relating to white supremacy. The narrative reinforces how white women are treated differently than women of color; a person can be a spokesperson of an empowerment movement and supported by her peers, even if she has done suspicious things in her past.

The campaign has also generated hate speech online which can create an environment of fear, that further amplifies the silence of minority groups. The hate speech, however, is in part related to freedom of speech, which in turn makes it hard to regulate and monitor. The hate speech is usually targeted towards strong



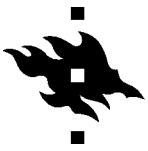
women, to humiliate and threaten them. Currently, it has been targeted towards white women but somehow it manages to touch everyone.

Additionally, the hate speech received during this campaign has mostly been targeted towards white women. But it has, in a way, been targeted towards women of all colors. The invisibility of white women results, that “women” in public discourse includes all women. But activism for “all women” oftentimes includes only white women. The hate comments that white women get might further emphasize the environment of fear where women of color are excluded and silenced.

In this thesis I have analyzed 75 comments. The narrative of women is constructed through dialogue with different social media posts through liking, sharing and commenting. The latest case between Argento and Bennet has generated heated debate for and against of #metoo and has forced redefining genders and power relations. Moreover, how much western society still relies on stereotypes and generalization while narrating the image of women. While the narrative and image of women is being refined, the debate over the latest #metoo events are still being shared.

As seen in this thesis, the narrative of strong white woman is being narrated through a strong white woman: Asia Argento. The overall narrative has become negative with strong connotations. In the post #metoo context, there are variety of things that define how women are seen. Strong women are seen as a threat as the power relations between genders are being redefined.

In Argento vs. Bennet case, Argento is seen as an active subject, that has been aware of her doings. She is considered as an old, cougar, hypocrite, predator and untalented. She was a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” that had no morals. Her latest actions have diminished her credibility, and the social media audience tears her identity apart. She is compared to Weinstein. Her credibility and victimhood are under scrutiny, and her humanity, sexuality and femininity are denied. Comments return to the suicide of her boyfriend, implying that she should have committed it instead of Bourdain. In a way, the life of a woman is less valuable than a life of a



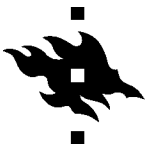
man. In this process, the comments take away her dignity. The comments aim to shame her and threaten her.

The overall connotations are harsh, reflecting on how certain type of behavior is still expected of someone vulnerable; woman who has faced abuse. Moreover, some connotations suggest, that the public sees her actions with Bennet as a way of either reproducing violence or empowering herself. Be as it may, through her actions, the credibility of the movement she represented has been put under scrutiny.

The feminist “united sisterhood” is questionable in the post #metoo context. The feminist movements have predominantly been white. The #metoo has fallen into the same category, as white women have been presented as the translators of the experiences of women on social media – with a hashtag that was appropriated from a woman of color. Hence, the white women who support a controversial white woman are fair game in the social media. In the sensitive #metoo context, allies easily become enemies.

The #MeToo movement empowered victims, but the credibility of the movement is still debated. Similarly, so is the credibility of the victims. However, the downfall or loss of credibility is highlighted through Argento. Based on the comments, some believe these victims have gained too much power. The old stereotypes and dichotomies are still strong, but the battle of power is apparent. Taking away their empowerment might perform as a way to equalize the power relations. Victim feminism is one way to equalize the power relations; some comments indicate that #metoo has created victims instead of empowering them. Victim blaming, toxic masculinity and gender stereotypes were also prevalent.

Some comments argued, that men and women are treated differently in the #metoo context. Double standards are yelled left and right; Harvey Weinstein and Kevin Spacey were accused and faced persecution, whereas Argento settled her case with money. On the other hand, the double standards parallel with the whiteness of the movement; can white women get away with her crimes using money?



The double standards reach only how the abusers are treated, not how the victims are talked about. For example, some of the comments were sexualizing the abuse of Bennet. One reason for this might be toxic masculinity, that tries to gain the superior status back to men, by denying the act of abuse. “Congratulations” empowers the men as a whole, but discredits the experience of the individual male submission. Sexualization reinforces the stereotype of male.

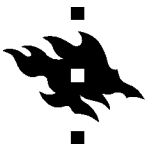
On the other hand, comments with apparent tones of toxic masculinity were also emphasizing the active ‘male’ subjective. Bennet is seen as the active, aware subjective, who got what every man dreams of. By presenting the events from perspective of sexual man, they diminish the active role of a woman in the sexual encounter. Thus, Argento has either been a predator or the passive agent, depending from the commentator and the news.

Besides toxic masculinity, the credibility of the victim is still matter of a debate in the #metoo era. Women questioned about their clothes and behavior in regard to sexual assault, whereas the expressions and appearance of men are also discussed. Comments indicate that money is still the motivator for accusing someone. Evidence is required. The stories and events are questioned.

Men are not treated similarly, but the suspicion and questioning of credibility are alive and well there too. While men’s appearance does not get critiqued in the same manner, the victims never looks like a victim. This indicates, that there are more deep-rooted issues in the society than just unequal power relations.

The hate speech targeted at men views them either as predators or victims. As I was collecting the comments for my thesis, the comments regarding Bennet were sexualizing the case abuse. This proves, that the campaign includes the men as well. However, the lack of focus on male submission and the pronounced narrative of female suffrage combined with toxic masculinity results in social media environment with stigmatization and marginalization.

The negative comments and mob shaming raise a question of when does a critique become bullying? Analyzing the comment has revealed the dark side of the social



media, where mob-shaming and blaming can take place even on a public platform. Instead of trial, Argento is faced with a social media prosecution. The underlying issue seems to be the lack of unifying term for sexual harassment. No matter what term is used, the power relations are essential. Both when discussing how society should treat victims and when defining how to relate to sexual violence.

The social media environment has become more sensitive about sexual assault. After being brushed away from public discourse for such a long time, we still struggle discussing the social norms for it. In the light of #metoo, society has become less hesitant to accuse someone of sexual abuse or harassment. In a way, society has stepped away from “innocent until proven guilty”, which is well personified through Argento. Whereas usually society will offer the benefit of the doubt for the accused, in the #metoo context (and especially in the Argento vs. Bennet case) the person is deemed guilty until proven innocent.

5.2 Significance

The most important aspect of this thesis is how the feminist methodology is formed by combining elements and methods that are suitable for social media research. The methods as their own would not have provided similar answers without the feminist epistemology, that enables focusing on the undisclosed and hidden power relations in societal structures, that are also prevalent on social media.

The method has lost content for the study, hence it allows analyzing, objectively speaking, a small data set in a profound and comprehensive matter. The texts themselves are short and there are 75 of them. Here, the methodology provides the focus on the societal issues that shape have shaped the lives of women. In other words, the thesis proves that with the right ‘toolkit’ it is possible to conduct a study by using a rather small data set.

The conducted research is feminist and is done by women for women, but it also carefully focuses on not excluding any pieces of the feminist theory which has



been previously criticized; the intersectionality and the subordination of men are included in the narrative of women, as they are all embedded in the power relations between and within genders. Hence, it has focused on how women's lives are being constructed on social media, without separating women from the rest.

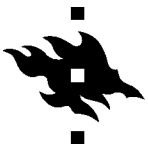
Moreover, the thesis analyzes the narrative of a woman in the era, in which gender and gender roles are still being debated and defined. It takes a closer look on how Argento is perceived on social media and what stereotypes are still prevalent. In a way, the research also takes a closer look at how one's past can dictate the future. Moreover, how a feminist empowerment movement combats with the loss of credibility, and how this impacts the narrative of victims of sexual assault; without taking a stand for or against the victims.

5.3 Limitations

In this case, the data set allows more profound analysis of the text and their meanings. Despite providing qualitative and in-depth analysis, the data sample is still quite small. A bigger data set could be beneficial in producing a more comprehensive analysis, but too much data limits in-depth analysis.

The media outlets chosen to represent mostly American media outlets. Even though the commentators were all around the world, the results are very much western and America centric. Furthermore, the women mentioned in this thesis are also white and representative of western nationality, which means that the constructed narrative itself might be limited to only certain ethnicity.

In addition, the focus of this study is limited to only Asia Argento after the Argento vs. Bennet case. The study cannot be generalized without considerations, but it still provides a glimpse into the social media environment and the narrative of a women as a victim and abuser.



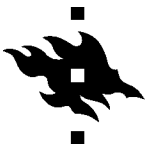
Some might argue, that narrative analysis and feminist epistemology emphasize the researcher's subjectivity. The tools chosen were fitted purposefully for this research. The methodology might produce different results depending on the culture and personality of the researcher. The subjectivity of the narrative analysis was limited with the feminist epistemology, that, in turn, was supported with the random sampling. "Limited" in this sense refers to feminist history and liberal feminist perspective; the analysis is conducted with a frame, in which the subjective findings are placed into. Furthermore, the context of the comments was retained and combined with the methods, that produces an analysis that can be aligned with the surrounding culture and the history of women.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

The subject of this thesis enables future research; while giving an answer to one question it has raised many more. All of the themes I was interested in regarding this theme could not have been included, but there are certain questions that were raised.

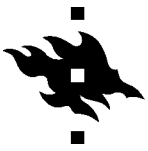
This thesis provides insight into one woman and how her narrative is constructed in Facebook comments. What results would it provide, if the target (not epistemology) was changed? For example, what is the narrative of group of women or men in a broader sense, or for other women and men, for example Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey or Alyssa Milano?

Facebook is only one of the many platforms in which women and #metoo are being discussed. Twitter and other platforms are still providing data that could be analyzed. The subject also enables quantitative research, which could focus on the most used themes and motives of the comments. This thesis allows understanding the general trends, but it would be interesting to see, how often certain words are used across the social media.



The media samples in this research have provided different level of bias and ideological perspective. Raising from the media samples, future research could focus on international media outlets. On the other hand, the dataset could be collected in another manner; for example, from the comment sections from online news outlet's websites. This would decrease the impact of algorithms and possibly reveal how the ideology of the news outlet impacts the tone of the comments.

Lastly, there is more to research on how media and the way the events are presented on the media impact on people's commenting behavior. For example, how much does the tone of the headline or the attached image impact of what can be found from the comment section.

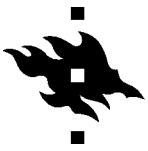


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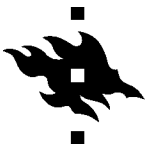
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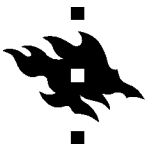
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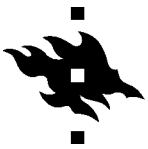
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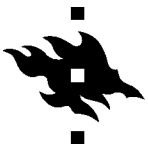
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7. Appendix

7.1 News

The first post chosen was from Fox News. “Weinstein accuser Asia Argento made a deal to pay her own sexual accuser, bombshell report says.” The news headline revealed how Asia Argento settled her own sexual abuse allegations with money. There were 1600 comments in total, and every 9th comment was chosen.



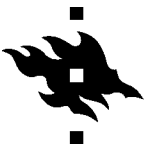
Second post chosen was from New York Times. “Rose McGowan Says Asia Argento Admitted to Sleeping With Young Actor” had 106 comments. The post was referring to actor Rose McGowan, who was offering supportive tones towards her colleague Argento. The tone of the post was more positive than Fox News. Every fourth top-level comment was chosen.



CNN International “Photo of Asia Argento with 17-year-old actor surfaces” offered a picture with Argento and Jimmy Bennett. was following the same theme with Fox News. The post had 622 comments and every third top-level comment was collected.



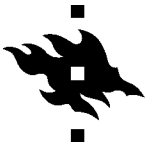
ABC News posted a picture with picture of actress Alyssa Milano, quoting “The millions of women and men that have come forward telling their #MeToo stories cannot be erased from one story that may be hypocritical”. A link to the actual



news was attached as well. The post had 76 comments and every third was collected.



Final post that was chosen from CBN News. Their post was about Asia Argento's sexual abuse case settlement: "Actress paid \$380,000 shortly after she said last October that movie mogul Harvey Weinstein raped her, the New York Times reported." The post had 85 comment, where every sixth comment was collected.



CBS News

20 August 2018 · 🌐



Actress paid \$380,000 shortly after she said last October that movie mogul Harvey Weinstein raped her, the New York Times reported.

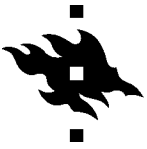


CBSNEWS.COM

**Report: MeToo activist Asia Argento settled sex assault
complaint for \$380,000**

👍👎👏 252

85 Comments 45 shares



7.2 Collected Comments

7.2.1 FOX NEWS

"Weinstein accuser Asia Argento made deal to pay her own sexual assault accuser, bombshell report says"

Actress Asia Argento, one of the first prominent women to accuse disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault, agreed to pay \$380,000 to an actor who accused her of sexually assaulting him when he was 17 years old, a report said Sunday night.

Every ninth comment was collected

W1: Really? She is an abuser? And had the nerve to 'me too' ? Seriously? What a cesspit Hollywood is.

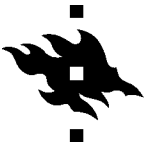
W2: woman is a total hypocrite and so very disgusting! She is no better than the man she accused, Harvey Weinstein. Hollywood! And these people want to shove their morals and political ideologies down our throats. Hollywood and all that they produce is a big part of what's wrong with this country!

M1: I feel awkward commenting and typing this but I've never heard of this woman in my entire life. I'm 58 and don't partake in much movie watching because most of the movies are bad sequels and remakes that probably suck.

M2: The thing about it is they slept with someone to become an actor or actress, the bad part is the people with a lot more talent and morals didn't get into acting

M3: Interesting..... very interesting! But I have one question. May I interest you in this fine five quart harvest gold Tupperware container with matching lid? It seals In freshness

M4: Poor guy. Having to lay there while an attractive woman goes down on you. Then being FORCED to have sex with her!!! I can only imagine the horror he went through..



M5: The problem is the real abuse and exploitation is getting caught with looking for a payday or settling a grudge. It only takes a few of the latter to call into doubt many of the former. The penalty for making a false charge like this should equal that of the other.

M6: Kneelers for police brutality, then brutalize the f out of their females. Me too's out here me too-ing people?

M7: Here it the thing, I can accuse anyone of sexual assault but how do I provide evidence if there is none? Anybody can accuse someone with money of this and force them to have to pay.

M8: Funny these people come out of the woods after they have already made it... which I in no way condone what happened but find it rather convenient....

M9: She should be charged for "her" crime plain and simple. Really tired of privileged individuals getting away with crimes that would see others jailed by taking out a check book.

M10: Ok this article is confusing. Who sexually assaulted who. To me it just sounds like they had a lot if sex.

M11: Maybe this was instead of "suiciding" like her boyfriend Anthony B. ? Shut her up for good by removing credibility.

M12: These libs are disgusting to try an protect a rapist like weinstein. I knew they would pay someone off to make up a crazy story

M13: Isn't that the chick who shaved her head?! Anyone remember that saying from back in the day?

"Takes one to know one" 🤔😂

7.2.2 The New York Times

Rose McGowan Says Asia Argento Admitted to Sleeping With Younger Actor
Rose McGowan, one of the leading voices of the #MeToo movement, has spoken out on the Asia Argento allegations. She implored Argento to "be the person you wish Harvey could have been."

Every fourth comment was collected



M14: This shouldn't put the metoo movement in jeopardy. Just because a person was a victim at one point doesn't mean they aren't capable of being a predator. Metoo is about accountability. You do wrong, you are held accountable. Doesn't matter if you're powerful or what your gender is or what your orientation is or whether you were ever abused yourself.

M15: Two mentally-ill lunatics desperate to perpetuate their C-level fame in lieu of ever displaying any actual talent (other than capturing vastly more famous men and ruining their lives--Bourdain and Marilyn Manson).

W3: Preach Rose! 🙌🙌🙌 “There absolutely should be no leeway or tolerance for sexual assault. Hard stop. NONE. Victims also shouldn't be told how they should react or what they should say about their abusers. However as allies to the victim and voyeurs of an event we should find a better way to balance support of the victim with due process for the accused.”

M16: Hahaha #YOUTOO.

W4: I'm more shocked that Rose McGowan's partner is Rain Dove. How did I miss that?

W5: Hypocrites

W6: We just don't care

W7: It's about time.

M16: Rose McGowan seems like a very nasty piece of work.

W8: I thought this was a picture of a hufflepuff for a second.

M19: who cares? those were wild chicks probably on drugs 20 years ago.

M:20 Did it say when charges are being filled?

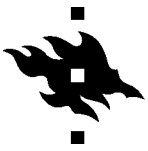
W9: I bet Rose molested someone too...just wait for it. She seems so sketchy, even more than Asia

M21: Damaged goods is damaged goods.

W10: So, she got sent "unsolicited" nudes from a twelve-year-old whom somehow had her number and it continued up until he was seventeen and she raped him, all the while she never once told him that it was entirely not ok? All when she was between the ages of 32 and 37?

This was to be an excuse?

Bye, Asia. Enjoy your blacklist and hopefully your prison time.



7.2.3 CNN International

"Photo of Asia Argento with 17-year-old actor surfaces"

A photo appearing to show actress and #MeToo movement leader

Asia Argento lying down with young actor Jimmy Bennett has surfaced

Every third comment was collected:

W11: Funny to see how many guys think this somehow discredits Me Too movement. Well boys, the fact that I was assaulted by my boss when I was a 22-year-old summer student has nothing to do with Asia Argento - it happened, it was wrong and nothing some film star did changes that. What she did only takes her right to be part of the movement, it has no bearing on mine. And what I told was just one of many incidents.

M22: Look at the time he was 17 and more importantly, she was a director and him a lowly actor. There is the issue of age and balance of power at play

W12: Age of consent in California is 18. Thanks for setting the movement back, Asia.

W13: He does not look like he is being assaulted. He might even be taking the picture. This is a lame assertion. Another waste of paper and ink.

W14: Most of those allegations and media humdrums about it are just means by which some individuals get publicity and money 🤔 "poor little 17 years old boy"



M23: a great deal for him! \$380K for a tumble with a cougar. And she got Bourdain to pay.

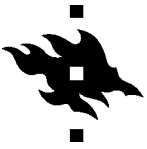
M24: who give a **** if she sleep with a 16 years old boy or 20. The only person give a **** is the one that don't get **** for a while and wanted some.

M25: Interesting not to see all the idiots/Trump clowns complain about cnn being fake news. Guess they are ok with this one. You fools believe cnn now?

M26: I'd like to give a solid thanks to all the cougars!

W15: Nothing to do with the me too movement..

M27: The hypocrisy is so real!



W16: Something shady about this period. Why is he smirking?

W17: #MeToAsiaIsAPervert think that is what she meant.

W18: Why did Anthony decide to quit life for this, he could have just quit this woman!

M28: He that will come to equity must come with clean hands.

7.2.4 ABC News

Alyssa Milano says Asia Argento allegations only prove MeToo movement is still "strong" <https://abcn.ws/2woivEs> "

With an image quoting Alyssa Milano: "The Millions of women and men that have come forward telling their #MeToo stories cannot be erased from one story that may be hypocritical"

Every third comment was collected:

M29: Of course it doesn't. What it *does* say is that anyone can be an abuser given the opportunity. Perhaps we all need to stop blaming at a moment's notice and look at our own lives first - then give people the benefit of the doubt until we no longer can.

Sanity.

M30: Every accusation should be looked at and there should be no double standard !

M31: #hertoo

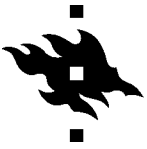
W19: Victims often become abusers. It is still wrong, but has nothing to do with other victims.

W20: Millions?? Wow. (sarcasm)

W21: We shouldn't forget the women's that spoke against president Trump



W22: #metoo



M32: All this BS is about money 😂😂😂

W23: What this proves is that we have turned away from innocent until proven guilty!

W24: yeah a money grab is always strong

W25: One bad apple...

M33: The #metoo conspiracy has an agenda. They pick their victims in advance in then go to find women they may have slighted. It's purpose is to destroy the careers of prominent men and ruin their lives.

M34: Pound me too. You guys got it all wrong.

W26: These women aren't liars it's the men that say they never didn't , I don't know her or it never happened

W27: Rise and rise again until lambs become lions.

7.2.5 CBN News

Report: MeToo activist Asia Argento settled sex assault complaint for 380,000.

“Actress paid 380,000 shortly after she said last October that movie mogul Harvey Weinstein raped her, the New York Times reported.”

Every sixth comment was chosen.

M35: Do You feel like SOME people might be gaming the system for money and attention? #MeToo

M36: This. Is. Hilarious. Gives #MeToo a whole new meaning.

M37: Good for that 17 year old!!! Got some pu**y and got paid 380,000 for getting it!!!

W28: Hmm, she was 38 and desperate from the sounds of it. More of her victims need to come forward and expose the wolf in sheeps clothing. These organizations need to start vetting their biggest advocates, they only end up hurting real victims.

M38: Me too has no credibility left.

M39: Ironic, considering she was the female lead in XXX.

M40: She accepted money. This should never be done. This is wrong. I don't understand why not one of these women's men fold did end that pos Weinstein. Mutherfucker like this rapes my family member I'll personally put him or her in a hole

M41: Double standard

W29: Hypocrisy. What a farce. Founder of me too movement does same exact thing. Gives 17 year male actor old hush money. He played her such...she is a freaking predator! She is Harvey Weinstein.



W30: Well, she lost ALL credibility

W31: Gross

M42: There does the whole #metoo movement

M43: This is a sad day, when U sue the woman you were fantasizing about, when she actually has sex with YOU. She is a hero, if only all the ladies would act on there impulses.

W32: Predators can be females, just like all these teachers & students relationship.
#MeToo is not reserved for females only.

M44: Isn't getting paid for sex basically being a prostitute?