

Trashing *The Prime Minister's Bride*: Public Dismay and Intertextual Media

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In January 2006, Susan Kuronen, white-collar worker and single mother of three, and Matti Vanhanen, the Finnish Prime Minister, father of two and in the process of a divorce, met in an online dating service and began chatting—anonimously, on a first-name basis, and soon in person. During the relationship that ensued, Kuronen and Vanhanen attempted to avoid the public eye until their first joint appearance in late July. Media attention, however, grew intense particularly in the tabloid magazines and evening papers. Then, just as Kuronen had given two interviews in October declaring her love for Vanhanen and stating that she did not rule out marriage in the future, Vanhanen broke up with her. Kuronen went on to address their relationship in select interviews before publishing a book covering the affair, *Pääministerin morsian* (*The Prime Minister's Bride*), in March 2007. By this time, close to 200 paper and magazine articles had been published on Kuronen.

During 2006–2007, a plethora of banal anecdotes concerning Kuronen and Vanhanen circulated in the media, from the Prime Minister's dietary habits and sexual routines revealed in the book, to his use of SMS messaging to maintain and break off the relationship. Kuronen's persona was extensively scrutinized and public displays of disfavor and outright hostility towards her were abundant. As plans for publishing Vanhanen's private SMS messages in Kuronen's book became public, a wave of affect surged from the evening papers and online discussion forums condemning her. In March 2007, immediately after the parliamentary elections, Vanhanen sued Kuronen's publisher for infringing on his privacy (and Kuronen was consequently also indicted), whereas libel charges were made against online discussants on behalf of Kuronen. During their romance, the popular media depicted Kuronen in a highly positive light as the new partner of an influential politician: one story after another characterized her as youthful, friendly, pretty, and talkative. After the breakup, journalists began criticizing her style, persona, and body, while discussants in online forums vented their hostility and labeled her as greedy, unattractive, fat, a gold digger, promiscuous, a bad mother, and even mentally disturbed. All in all, a new consensus was quickly formed concerning Kuronen's public figure and its meaning.

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As feminist media studies scholars, we are interested in thinking through this consensus in order to determine what its formation tells us about the role of affect in constructing the boundaries between the private and the public in popular media. How did Kuronen become such an object of negative affect and how did the popular press use her media figure to negotiate the boundaries of privacy? In what follows, we address these questions through an analysis of the press coverage of the affair in the Finnish evening papers *Ilta-Sanomat* (IS) and *Iltalehti* (IL) from March 2006 to May 2007, using Sara Ahmed's (2004) theory of emotion as economy as the starting point. By affect, we mean a cluster of negative feeling, instead of one specific, nameable emotion, as well as its accumulation and intensification in the popular media. As Ahmed has pointed out, "affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation" (p. 45). Hers is a model of emotional contagion in which the objects of emotion (rather than emotions as such) circulate and consequently take shape as the effect of circulation (pp. 10–11). In the case of Kuronen and Vanhanen, affect was generated and circulated in tabloid magazines, evening papers, online discussion forums, and places of everyday gossip and debate. This affective production resulted in an intensity of feeling concerning the case, and it was encapsulated in the media figure of Susan Kuronen which was given shape through its continuous circulation in the media.

Ahmed has argued that, as well as circulating, affect also *sticks* to certain bodies, objects, and signs more easily than to others. According to her analysis, the accumulation of affective value is a form of stickiness that depends on historical associations between bodies and signs (pp. 90–92). The associations between lower class persons, women, and emotionality, as well as the accumulating articulations of distaste and dismay in the construction of Kuronen's public image, form one such site of stickiness. As the figure of Kuronen became saturated (or "sticky") with affect, it also became instrumental in the drawing of boundaries around the respectable, the proper, and the intimate that she was seen to violate. Articulations of emotion create the effect of boundaries between bodies or objects (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10).¹ We argue that the affective circulation of Kuronen's media figure is telling of the working strategies of the popular media, but equally of the ways in which the (gendered) categories of class are drawn and marked (cf. Tyler, 2008).

In what follows, two features central to this process of affective circulation are highlighted: intertextuality, and the cultural hierarchies of class and gender. As Graham Murdock (2004) suggests, "intertextuality has become the modal form of representation" (p. 31) in contemporary media, which requires that media studies pay increasing attention to the intertextual logics in the construction of meaning. Accordingly, we investigate the intertextual elements of the case: the other media that were referenced, who were quoted, what was circulated, and—equally importantly—what was not. The evening papers, our primary research material occupying a middle ground between gossip magazines and more prestigious papers, were key sites in the construction of the media event. In order to understand the intertextual logics of the case, also considered is the coverage of the affair in the gossip magazines *7 päivää* (7 days) and *Katsot*; the leading Finnish paper, *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS); as well as

Kuronen's book *The Prime Minister's Bride*. Our reading suggests that the hierarchies of class and gender underpinned the different ways in which the figures of Kuronen and Vanhanen were available for popular circulation and affective production.

The case of Kuronen and Vanhanen provides an opportunity to study the strategies that the popular media use to define and police the boundaries of privacy. The shifting boundaries of the public and private in contemporary culture have been diagnosed using concepts such as tabloidization and intimization that refer to the prioritization of the personal, the emotional, and the sexual over information or education (e.g. Calvert, 2000; Glynn, 2000; Grindstaff, 2002; Attwood, 2006). The case of Kuronen and Vanhanen would seem to exemplify several features of such development in the public fascination with the sexual, the intimate, and the banal, in the uses of the private for political ends, and simply in the vast media attention concerning the case. At the same time, the public/private boundary was policed intensely: the evening papers, often seen as prime perpetrators of tabloidization, did not merely make public the private lives of the couple, but also repeatedly condemned the intimate revelations they themselves were partly responsible for. All in all, the popular media used the media figure of Susan Kuronen to strategically construct and maintain the boundary between private and public. At times, she was used to open up new areas for public scrutiny; at other times, to maintain the moral sanctity of the private.

A Public Breakup

The evening papers played a central role in scripting the media narrative on Susan Kuronen and Matti Vanhanen's relationship. As almost daily publications (there being no Sunday issue), the evening papers could report new developments quicker than weekly magazines. At the same time, they relied on gossip magazines such as *7 päivää* and *OHO!* for information on key events. In an interesting shift in hierarchies of value and credibility, *7 päivää* in particular, with its brief comments often attained directly from Kuronen, became a key source of information cited in both evening papers. As such, the evening papers functioned as nodal points for intertextuality, transmitting information from other publications. They also exercised cultural power in defining the stakes of the case: their advertisements and front pages, summing up the main stories of the day with attention grabbing headlines and images, are a central element of the urban landscape, placed in clear view of shoppers and passers-by. The headlines made the media narrative of Kuronen and Vanhanen accessible also to those not reading evening papers or gossip magazines, suggesting what the two were like, who behaved wrongly, and who were hurt. The evening papers were also active in inviting their readers to participate in the media narrative by posing suggestive questions such as "Has Kuronen gone too far?" for readers to address in online discussion forums (*IL Online*, 2006). All in all, the case made the negotiations concerning privacy, intimacy, sexuality, mass media, and information networks visible in unprecedented ways in Finland, a country of few kiss-and-tells to date (Kivioja, 2008).

Ilta-Sanomat and *Iltalehhti* are published in tabloid form, and, since they are not distributed through subscriptions, each issue must sell itself with an eye-catching front page. Like the tabloids in neighboring Scandinavian countries where papers need to attract large audiences among small populations, they differ from British tabloids in that they have tended to combine serious journalism with tabloid style reporting, emphasizing sensationalism and personalization (Gripsrud, 1992, pp. 84–85; Herkman, 2005, p. 288). *Ilta-Sanomat* (est. 1932) is the second largest paper in Finland with a circulation of 176,531 in 2007. *Iltalehhti* is newer (est. 1980) and somewhat smaller than its rival, with a circulation of 131,150.² Stories concentrating on the private life of celebrities (relationships, emotions, and sexuality) have become more important in both papers over the last decade (Saarenmaa, 2005, p. 117). In the 2000s, with circulations in slight decrease and competition with both tabloid magazines and online papers growing, the evening papers increasingly shifted their focus to entertainment news while still covering other current events (see Herkman, 2005, pp. 289–290). With its combination of politics, romance, sex, and scandal, the case of Kuronen and Vanhanen fitted the bill perfectly.

Narrating the relationship of Kuronen and Vanhanen during the spring and summer of 2006, the papers made frequent use of the conventions of romance: Vanhanen was described as more relaxed and more confident—“glowing” with his newly found love for Kuronen (*IL*, 2006a; *IS*, 2006a), a “dark-haired beauty” fond of children (*IL*, 2006c). *7 päivää*, the magazine that scooped the relationship, described the couple as “made for each other” (2006a): “Now the couple’s love is ablaze and [...] wild rumors are surging on Matti and Susan’s upcoming engagement” (2006b).

When Kuronen and Vanhanen’s relationship ended in November 2006, the evening papers used markedly different strategies in mapping out the parties’ feelings and actions. The breakup was front page news in both papers for two days, with lead articles and large photographs focusing on Kuronen. Although both parties declined talking to the press, *Ilta-Sanomat* in particular sketched out Kuronen’s inner life and emotional state through different sources, referring to speculations by “the couple’s close circle” and the two interviews she had recently given to *Ilta-Sanomat* and the women’s magazine *Anna* (*IS*, 2006b). On the next day’s front page, a photo of a solemn looking Kuronen was accompanied by the headline “Sadness, anxiety, and difficulty? Susan broke down after the breakup”—a quote from *7 päivää*. The paper continued to quote Kuronen’s anonymous friends (either directly or through *7 päivää*) according to whom she was “completely devastated.” Kuronen’s hopes and feelings—now crushed—were again described through her previous interviews (*IS*, 2006c). While *Iltalehhti* also recycled details harvested from other sources, it laid less emphasis on Kuronen’s feelings or “personal information” (*IL* 2006c, 2006d). Despite Kuronen’s silence, a highly emotional image of her was created by recycling things previously published and by inserting comments from anonymous sources.

In opposition to this gossipy and emotional strategy, Matti Vanhanen’s reactions were framed by his official status: “A private matter, Vanhanen said to *IS* from the prime minister’s car as he arrived at the parliament’s plenary session in the afternoon,” *Ilta-Sanomat* wrote. The paper also attempted to sketch out the private

side of Vanhanen by quoting an entry from his personal blog, interpreting his description of a quiet evening spent feeding winter birds as a sign of the lack of romance in his life (IS, 2006d). Whereas both papers searched out Kuronen's personal friends for anonymous quotes and tried to reach her at home, Vanhanen's Center Party MP colleagues were approached about him, who, rather predictably, guarded his privacy. Vanhanen's position obviously protected him from having his emotional life become the object of media speculation.

Kuronen gave two interviews discussing her feelings after the breakup: one to the women's magazine *Me Naiset* (2006) and another to *Ilta-Sanomat*. The blurb to the front page story in *Ilta-Sanomat* (2006e) promised: "Susan tells the truth about the relationship with Vanhanen: we met online!" The cover framed the interview as a confession where hitherto hidden truths were revealed: whilst Vanhanen had told the media that the couple met while shopping at IKEA—and hence lied—Kuronen revealed the true story about their encounter on a dating site. Textually, the article constructs a sense of closeness to the subject, beginning with a description of how much Kuronen had changed since the previous photo shoot a month ago: her characteristic smile had gone, she was subdued, and serious. The quotation in the headline "Matti broke my heart" produces a sense of immediacy and emotional expressiveness (cf. McGlone 2005, 511).

According to Laura Saarenmaa's (2005) analysis of the cover stories of Finnish evening papers, their confessional mode has been strongly linked to women. Particularly in the early 2000s, confessional interviews with young female celebrities were typically illustrated with sexy photos: as the women (framed as proper and decent individuals) revealed details of their daily lives, they were also shown revealing their bodies. Otherwise detached from the interview contents, the photographs served a purpose in the sense that sexuality has historically been constructed as the ultimate object of confession. The dynamics of the confessional, the decent, and the sexual were also at work in the interview with Susan Kuronen, albeit in a different manner. *Ilta-Sanomat* photographed her as both serious and decent, dressed in a white lacy cardigan and leaning on a table sporting a rustic coffee pot. The photo gives an impression of someone home alone with her own thoughts. This fits well with the interview's narration of her emotions, that ran from initial attraction ("At that point Matti did everything he could to sweep me off my feet and he succeeded"), to shame ("After the breakup I felt like the stupidest woman in the world"). Beneath this emotional narrative, the article uncovers a more sexual "truth" concerning Vanhanen's unwillingness to be seen together in public: "I felt dirty from being kept so completely hidden. I even said to Matti that as darkness falls you grab me from a bus stop, take me home and then back in the morning before sunrise" (IS, 2006e). The article implicitly suggests that Vanhanen used Kuronen for sex whereas she had believed in romance.

Inviting Public Judgment

While the evening papers were initially sympathetic towards Kuronen, describing her as the unhappy heroine of a romance narrative, this approach was not to last: three

weeks after the breakup, Kuronen's willingness to talk about the relationship in public was already condemned. *Iltalehти*'s front page article, headlined "Love turned into nightmare," stated that "Susan Kuronen's continuing opening up is already distressing other people besides Matti Vanhanen" (2006e). Curiously, no examples of "distressed" people were given. Instead, the article featured speculations from a Center Party MP and two communication studies scholars on whether the relationship and Vanhanen's silence in its aftermath would harm his political career. All three recommended that Kuronen, Vanhanen, or both keep their mouths shut (*IL*, 2006e; 2006f). This was repeated in an *Ilta-Sanomat* article titled "Shut up already, Susan" (*IS*, 2006f). Again, female Center Party MPs were enlisted to show their support for the prime minister and to question Kuronen's actions and motives.

It is noteworthy that by the time *Iltalehти* asked Kuronen to stop talking, complaining that "the nation's most famous ex-girlfriend has once again given an interview" (*IL*, 2006e), she had actually talked to the press only *twice* at any length since the breakup. Rather than a willingness on Kuronen's part to disclose all imaginable details of the affair, the common understanding of her compulsive "opening up" resulted from headlines, front pages, and tabloids citing sentences from these two interviews. Such intertextuality and self-referentiality were particularly evident in *Ilta-Sanomat* and *7 päivää*, which repeatedly quoted their previous stories and presented their earlier headlines as illustrations to stories covering more recent developments. Here the concept of intertextuality refers less to Barthesian theorizations of reading and interpretation—of texts carrying traces of other texts within them, of readers making sense of texts in relation to other texts—than it does to direct references and citations recycled in the press over a period of time (Herkman, 2005, p. 86). In their brief analysis of the Kuronen–Vanhinen affair, Laura Juntunen and Esa Väliverronen (2008) noted just how few elements its public depiction actually consisted of (pp. 83–84). Especially after the breakup, media ended up reporting on media, journalists began interviewing other journalists, and the media became the main source of new stories (p. 85). Independent of this, the tabloids created an impression of Kuronen herself as constantly and willingly "opening up." The number of interviews she gave was certainly not great, but it was quickly framed as excessive: by early December, *Helsingin Sanomat*, the largest Finnish daily, could address Kuronen's eagerness to talk to the media as something widely lamented (*HS*, 2006).

With the information on the impending publication of Susan Kuronen's book, both evening papers aligned their sympathies strongly with Matti Vanhanen. *Ilta-Sanomat* featured a photo of a laughing Kuronen alongside the headline "Susan reveals Vanhanen's intimate messages" on its cover (2007a). No longer pictured as a woman disappointed in love, she was turned into an active, even malicious subject. At the same time, references to the Finnish "people" (*kansa*) or "citizens" (*kansalaiset*) were in more frequent use. *Ilta-Sanomat* in particular appealed to the feelings and demands of the "people," constructed on the basis of a few interview comments, websites, and opinion polls. Following the publication of the covers of *The Prime Minister's Bride* a month before the book itself was published, *Ilta-Sanomat* announced: "A massive petition demands: Shut up Kuronen! The people got furious with Susan." The main

article “Vanhainen flooded with sympathy” featured comments from disapproving women and referred to an internet petition “Susan—stop that opening up already,” signed by 8000 people (2007b). Both the disapproving women and the people signing the petition were referred to as citizens, hence giving legitimacy and weight to the opinions expressed. Whereas earlier the case had been discussed mainly with Centre Party MPs, *Ilta-Sanomat* now consulted politicians from all the major parties (also 2007c). Their nearly unanimous condemnation (in Finnish, MP, *kansanedustaja*, literally means “a representative of the people”) supported the image of a people unified in its disapproval of Susan Kuronen.

As the book’s publication was followed by a front page headline “Kuronen’s intimate revelations were too much: shameless!” it appeared no longer even necessary to specify for whom the revelations were too much—apparently for everybody (IS, 2007d). Under the headline “Disgusting and embarrassing!” both “politicians and the people” condemned the book. *Italehti* appealed less to popular opinion, although, referring to a recent survey, it too argued that “the people” had condemned Kuronen’s book (IL, 2007a). In an earlier online poll among *Italehti* readers on the potential damage to Vanhanen’s career caused by the book, respondents defined Kuronen as a “trollop keen for fame,” greedy, ridiculous, pathetic, and “a bad choice” (IL Online, 2007). These accusing “voices of the people” were balanced, and partly dominated, by voices of authority such as the former Parliamentary Ombudsman Jacob Söderman, who condemned the book and suggested that Vanhanen consider legal action—well before the actual publication of the book, and without knowledge of its actual contents (IL, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e).

The Prime Minister’s Bride consists of three parts: the first gives a chronological account of the relationship between Kuronen and Vanhanen (pp. 15–84); the second chronicles the relationship’s press coverage, with Kuronen commenting on each item (pp. 87–152); and in the afterword publisher Kari Ojala ponders the social implications of the case (pp. 155–164). The evening papers focused entirely on the first half of the book,³ framed it as an exposé and offered it for the MPs to condemn (IS, 2007d, 2007e; IL 2007a, 2007f). Since the MPs had not read the book, their comments were based on journalists’ descriptions of it. *Ilta-Sanomat* (2007e) condemned *The Prime Minister’s Bride* as containing “sub-standard revelations on the intimate life of Kuronen and Matti Vanhanen” and, arguing that Kuronen had crossed the line concerning what people have the right to know, announced that it would not publish revelations concerning the prime minister’s sex life. This did not mean refraining from sharing some of the more innocent banal details, such as Vanhanen’s penchant for steak and baked potatoes, or the way Kuronen’s romantic expectations were thwarted when she ended up spending a weekend chopping wood. *Italehti*, for its part, devoted several articles to the book’s contents, addressing Vanhanen’s character, his qualities as a romantic partner, and the couple’s sex life, while noting that 94% of the respondents to their online poll were not interested in Kuronen’s book (2007g, 2007h, 2007i, 2007j). The discrepancy between professed disinterest and the amount of space dedicated to the book was rather striking.

Both evening papers remained silent concerning the part of *The Prime Minister's Bride* that criticized the media and its working practices. The focus on private revelations discredited the book and hid from view its more critical elements. This is not to say that the media criticism in the book is sophisticated—it consists of short descriptions of the press stories, followed by unedited transcriptions of Kuronen's comments—yet it provides critical insights into the evening papers' operational tactics. For example, Kuronen relates how a well known celebrity reporter at *Ilta-Sanomat* repeatedly phoned her at work, despite being told that she did not want to talk to the press. Asked several questions in a row, Kuronen answered, "now I have to continue working, this isn't that simple, it's more complicated," which was turned into a headline of Kuronen describing the relationship as complicated (Kuronen, 2007, p. 106). She also writes about the difficulty of avoiding the press when going out with her children and not being able to afford a car (pp. 40–42, 101–102). The hardships of dealing with journalists and photographers, while a central theme of the book, did not come across in the evening papers which refused to acknowledge or reflect on their own role, agency, or tactics.

In the papers, Susan Kuronen's character was sketched out following a binary logic typical of the treatment of women associated with sex scandals. Joshua Gamson (2001) has argued that media representations of women involved in such scandals have fallen into two categories: the innocent good girl and the calculating gold digger. Both images have been used since the 19th century to characterize the same woman either at different points of the narrative or by different interest groups. Significantly, the woman's character becomes suspicious when she is seen to seek publicity. In this logic, "a woman's embrace of either sexuality or publicity goes to show that she was never an innocent victim, that innocence is merely a cover for lust for sex or celebrity" (p. 170). Whereas the relationship of Kuronen and Vanhanen did not constitute a sex scandal, Kuronen's revelations were seen as scandalous. Consequently, the media made sense of Kuronen through familiar templates.

This double characterization was neatly encapsulated in the *Ilta-Sanomat* article entitled "Is Susan a victim ... or a predator?" (2007f) presenting two contrasting views on Kuronen side by side. The first version recounts her relationship with Vanhanen as a romance narrative. Referring to Kuronen's accounts in *Me Naiset* and *Ilta-Sanomat*, the text explains her actions as the understandable reactions of someone "left and betrayed." The tone however is hyperbolic and ironic: Matti Vanhanen is described as "the dream man of many a woman, the son-in-law every mother hopes for." The second version focuses on Kuronen's press conference prior to the book's publication, and on the journalists' feelings: they feel ashamed and think that Kuronen has "gone too far, crossed the limits of decency several times." Kuronen is characterized as "the embodiment of the *kiss and tell* phenomenon" and is suspected of having consciously gathered material on Vanhanen in order to publish it. In this version, the journalist makes explicit her own moral point of view: "A woman who feels herself forsaken and betrayed may harbor revenge and even seek justice, but at some point she becomes nothing more than calculating, greedy, and pushy." According to the final verdict, Kuronen's reputation and credibility have been

destroyed. As in the narratives analyzed by Gamson, Kuronen's motives became suspect when she appeared to actively seek publicity—by impudently staging a press conference. This interest in publicity made it impossible to see her as either guileless or credible. Significantly, it was not possible to combine the romantic framing of Kuronen, created very much by *Ilta-Sanomat* (and *7 päivää* as its main source) through the spring and summer of 2006, with the new image of her as a scheming temptress. The two images had to be separated and the first one discredited, without acknowledging the media's own role in the construction and promotion of the first.

The Public and Private Lives of Matti Vanhanen

Matti Vanhanen declined to comment on his relationship with Kuronen, arguing that it belonged to his private life. His private life has nevertheless played an important role in the construction of his public image. Before the parliamentary elections of 2003, Vanhanen, the prime minister to-be, gained attention by stating that children should have the possibility to grow up in the countryside since this was good for them. Living in a large house in the semi-suburban countryside of Nurmijärvi with his then wife, two children, and pets, commuting to work, and living a healthy alcohol-free life, Vanhanen indirectly framed himself as exemplary of a good life, the kind of life that any Finn would generally strive for (see *City*, 2005). His public image has been constructed as both highly ordinary and decent—a good family man and a humble public servant—in publications such as the book *Se on ihan Matti* (*It's so Matti*), authored by Timo Laaninen (2005) and illustrated with family snapshots of Vanhanen and his children.

In a 2005 interview with *City* magazine, Vanhanen argued that, “It’s part of being Finnish that people don’t peek in through bedroom windows, and I don’t think that politicians have any exceptional position in this matter” (*City*, 2005). In this demarcation, Finnish culture and the Finnish public were marked from their foreign counterparts as ones respecting privacy. This fiction was already highly unstable at the time of its articulation. As Vanhanen and his wife had announced their impending divorce earlier the same year, the popular media had begun circulating stories of his intimate affairs: “Kaarina” went public, claiming to have been a second woman during his marriage, and having been mistreated by Vanhanen; rumors concerning an old romance between Vanhanen and Tanja Karpela, minister of culture and former Miss Finland, resurfaced; and eventually Vanhanen’s hairstylist confessed to having received flirty SMS messages from him. As *Ilta-Sanomat* wrote about the mobile messages, Vanhanen claimed that his privacy had been infringed upon and that he was considering legal action, which merely fuelled the tabloids (*IL*, 2006g, 2006h). After the relationship with Kuronen and its epic aftermath, Vanhanen was associated with a green MP and has since introduced his new partner, a well established businesswoman, in public. Kuronen’s descriptions of his sexual appetites—which, fittingly in terms of his decent public image, were characterized as vanilla—worked to reframe Vanhanen as something of a ladies’ man. His popularity merely increased in the process (*IL*, 2007k).

Vanhänen also used publicity as "damage control." Soon after the breakup with Kuronen, Vanhanen gave interviews to both evening papers on personal rather than political issues. For the *Ilta-Sanomat* interview Vanhanen was photographed at home, dressed informally, and smiling (2007g). The writer, a well known female celebrity journalist, described Vanhanen as a "single, handsome and intelligent" a man able to "make any woman's heart flutter," and expressed sympathy for his recent experiences with Kuronen, whose interviews "must have" bothered him. Vanhanen made cautious comments on his divorce, family life, and the media's interest in his private life, stating that, "If I had to describe myself, I'd say that I'm just a wholly ordinary person who enjoys being by himself." The *Iltalehti* interview, again, was illustrated with Vanhanen's family photos (IL, 2007l). As these examples make evident, Vanhanen has made use of his private life when constructing his public image, as long as the private life has been of the "right" kind, with an emphasis on "ordinariness" and family life (cf. Fraser, 1998, pp. 315, 320). Vanhanen's private life has obvious political underpinnings and has been used for political ends.

In *The Fall of Public Man* (1992), Richard Sennett criticized the increased focus on the personal, the psychological, intimate, and private, and its influence on public life. For Sennett, this "self-absorption" draws attention away from professional competence, as "A political leader running for office is spoken of as 'credible' or 'legitimate' in terms of what kind of man he is, rather than in terms of the actions or programs he espouses" (p. 4). According to Sennett's argument, public life has become colonized by the ideology of intimacy, one of self-indulgence and individualism (p. 259). Rethinking the division between "an 'a-emotional' public sphere and the private sphere saturated with emotions," Eva Illouz (2007) has pointed out that "throughout the twentieth century middle-class men and women were made to focus intensely on their emotional life, both in the workplace and in the family, by using similar techniques to foreground the self and its relation to others" (p. 4). This development has involved therapy practices and discourses, feminist claims for the personal as political, as well as the language of economic accountability (p. 37). All these have, in different ways, directed the gaze inwards and brought forth the public performance of the self and its harnessing "to the discourses and values of the economic and political spheres" (p. 4). Ken Plummer (2003) has offered a similar analysis in his discussion on intimate citizenship as public discourse on the personal and the intimate. For Plummer, the interpenetration of the public and the emotional presents not a downfall of the public but a new configuration that gives rise to multiple voices contesting the very notion of it (p. 71).

Vanhänen's media appearances focusing on his private persona—his thoughts, feelings, and values—make explicit the fundamental intertwining of public image, agency, and emotional discourse based on constraint. The debate on the appropriateness of Kuronen's book has concerned its general relevance, namely whether the intimate affairs of a politician do or should influence his public actions, and the ways in which his character is perceived. As the examples above illustrate, the question is equally one of "personality management" and the ability to control one's displays of private life and character in the public eye (cf. Goffman, 1990). What was at stake in

the case of Kuronen and Vanhanen was authorship over public performances of the self, and, more broadly, the division between the private and public as a media strategy. The notion of media strategy helps to understand why family snapshots of Vanhanen's children published in a book or a newspaper article with his permission are deemed appropriate but Kuronen's passing mention of their appreciation of computer games is seen as an infringement of privacy. Kuronen's anecdotes of Vanhanen's backstage persona disturbed the image he had constructed of himself in (and with the aid of) the media. Private photographs and carefully chosen intimate anecdotes have been a means of softening or "humanizing" the public image of politicians. Such sharing is a media strategy used by politicians internationally, but also one highly vulnerable to outside intervention (as in the form of scandals or other unwanted revelations).

Privacy, Taste, and Class

The evening papers' way of handling the affair both supports and complicates Nancy Fraser's (1998) argument on the gendered character of the categories "public" and "private." Fraser has argued that their very constitution "reflects an asymmetry or hierarchy of power along gender lines" (p. 322). This asymmetry lies in "women's greater vulnerability to unwanted, intrusive publicity and lesser ability to define and defend their privacy" (p. 318). As an example, Fraser analyzed the publicity surrounding the Senate hearings on Clarence Thomas, whose appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court became contentious when Professor Anita Hill accused him of sexual harassment. Fraser showed how Thomas was able to define which areas of his life were private and as such of no concern in the case. To the contrary, Hill's motives and character became objects of great public speculation. Fraser suggested that while protecting his privacy, Thomas was also protecting his masculinity, for "To be subject to having one's privacy publicly probed is to be feminized" (p. 323; on the dynamics of race at play, see Berlant, 1993). In a similar way, Matti Vanhanen safeguarded the boundaries of his privacy and the privileges of his position.

Vanhansen's ability to define the boundary between the public and the private may seem less definite than in the case analyzed by Fraser. After all, Vanhanen did have his personal life—private conversations, habits, sexual preferences, and eventually even his erotic SMS messages—brought into common view against his will, while his private habits became running jokes in the media.⁴ Finnish male politicians are more vulnerable to attention of this kind than they used to be. Whereas the extra-marital affairs of the former president Urho Kekkonen were only widely discussed after his death, the scandalous relationships of contemporary male politicians have received considerable media attention. In the spring of 2008, the minister of foreign affairs had to resign after lying about intimate SMS messages sent to an erotic dancer. Nevertheless, Vanhanen had more power than Kuronen to guard his privacy. This owed not only to gender but to class and status: a high-ranking male politician has quite different resources to deal with the press than a low-income single mother with no previous media experience. Kuronen had little control over the stories written

about her, and her privacy was considerably more fragile to start with. Already in the spring and summer of 2006, Kuronen's private life was made public by detailing her relationship history and interviewing her former lover on her possibly altered breast size (e.g. *7 päivää*, 2006c, 2006d).

Initially the evening press downplayed the class differences between Kuronen and Vanhanen, and her suitability as the prime minister's partner was not questioned. Vanhanen's public image has drawn heavily on references to ordinariness: his image has been that of a grey everyman (e.g. *City*, 2005). In Finland, there is strong insistence on the nation's population consisting of one great middle class devoid of class differences such as those evident in the U.K. or France (Tolonen, 2008, p. 9). The early representations of Kuronen and Vanhanen's relationship maintained this image of middle-class Finland and kept questions of status and power hidden. Soon after the breakup, the evening papers started fashioning class differences through distinctions within the category of the ordinary: Vanhanen became representative of the respectable upper middle class, and Kuronen of the lower middle class with its vulgar tendencies. In sum, her ordinariness was redefined as commonness.

Kuronen's commonness was marked first of all through references to her apparent lack of proper cultural capital. If Kuronen stated that Vanhanen's treatment had made her feel dirty and cheap, she was subsequently marked as such by journalists and online discussants (as having "gone too far, crossed the limits of decency several times"). *Iltalehti* devoted space to criticizing her taste: while columnists mocked her choice of clothing already before the break-up (2006i, 2006j), by February 2007 a style specialist defined Kuronen as "an ordinary woman whose sense of style leaves much to be desired" in more ways than one (2007m). Comments on her lack of dress-sense extended to critiques of poor taste in general. Accusations of dressing "too young for her age" (of 36) rendered Kuronen immature and even "tarty," while accusations of overall dowdiness helped to mark her apart from the echelon of privilege represented by Vanhanen. These accusations resonate with Imogen Tyler's (2008) discussion of "class marking," namely "attempts to distinguish the white upper and middle classes from the white poor" in contemporary Britain through the figure of the "chav" and articulations of distaste towards it (p. 18). Marked by a lacking sense of style or appropriate demeanor, "The figure of the chav is imbued with negative affect, this affect then travels, circulates and leaks out into public space" (p. 29). Kuronen, although nominally middle-class, was similarly marked as distasteful and too common to be a prime minister's bride.

Kuronen's ordinariness was also cast as problematic by linking it to excessive emotionality. As Laura Grindstaff (2002) pointed out in her study of TV talk shows, in order to be heard in public, so-called ordinary people must speak in terms of emotion and personal experience, for this is their assumed arena of knowledge and credibility (p. 31). Consequently, "ordinariness is associated with emotional expressiveness rather than emotional restraint" (p. 38). Kuronen's expressiveness seemed to be precisely the issue as she made public intimate aspects of her relationship with Vanhanen. Sharing her experiences, feelings, and disappointments with journalists, readers, and media audiences, she also shared details concerning the

prime minister, hence obscuring “the class privilege associated with keeping one’s private life off-limits to public scrutiny” (p. 32). This upsetting of class privilege is the offense for which Kuronen was publicly condemned. Class hierarchy also explains why the evening papers considered it appropriate to make Kuronen’s personal life public in more intrusive ways than that of the prime minister.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the differences in societal make-up, media forms and landscapes in question, the dynamics at play reverberate Grindstaff’s conclusions made in the context of U.S. television, according to which public emotional displays operate implicitly as markers of class difference (p. 262). “Culturally legitimate bodies reflect the bourgeois aesthetic that privileges restraint, control, distance, and discipline over excess, impulse, and sensuality” (p. 266). Juxtaposed with a figure of restraint such as Vanhanen, Kuronen’s excessiveness—opening up verbally, airing her dirty laundry in public, and, later, exposing her body in nude pin-up photographs in a tabloid magazine, and even allowing her liposuction to be taped and shown online—is in violation of the bourgeois esthetic. As Grindstaff has argued, proper and improper bodies have different positions in the field of media: respectable media (news) and media forms deemed vulgar (tabloids), respectively. Susan Kuronen is not a media figure appearing in women’s magazines or other respectable forums as other than a fleeting reference: her arena has become confined to evening papers and the yellow press, particularly *Hymy*, the most traditional of Finnish tabloid magazines.

The class-taste nexus outlined by Grindstaff is intimately linked to an understanding of the private as something “sacred, inviolable, and exclusive,” and to perceiving the making of intimate and private affairs public as “a moral breech” (p. 267). Such boundary violations risk being shameful, and mark the people responsible for them. This kind of dynamic was at play in evening papers defining Kuronen as shameless and demanding her to keep quiet, or in articulations of hate and disgust accumulating in online forums. These expressions of outrage took the form of moralizing, which, as Michael Warner (2000) has suggested, has less to do with moral than self-righteous control and “complacent satisfaction in others’ shame” (p. 7). Marking someone as shameless and her acts as shameful is an explicit act of boundary maintenance across the categories of the public and the private, but also those of gender and class. In fact, as Imogen Tyler (2008, p. 25) argued in her analysis of online forums dedicated to the chav, affective articulations of distaste tend to grow increasingly intense online as anonymous discussants respond to each others’ postings and craft communal spaces for sharing and accruing reactions of disgust. As the media figure of Susan Kuronen’s gained an affective stickiness through its perpetual circulation, online discussions concerning her alleged poor taste and shamelessness intensified into threats against her life.

The case of Vanhanen and Kuronen makes it evident that despite claims to the contrary, class matters in Finland. Within the discourse of national middle-classness (see Urponen, 2008, pp. 123–128), a heterosexual relationship could naturalize or mask status differences between the partners, yet once the relationship unravels, such class differences become manifest. In her analysis of the making of the British

national moral public culture, Beverley Skeggs (2005)—like Tyler—has argued that class is centrally made through “cultural values premised on morality, embodied in personhood and realized (or not) as property value in symbolic systems of exchange,” in a process where the middle class is able to maintain a position from which it can stamp others as immoral and disgusting (pp. 965, 969, 977). Skeggs has suggested that white working-class women are used to demarcate the limits of national propriety (p. 968). A comparative process is also discernible in the Finnish popular media. Although not originally framed as working-class, Kuronen was marked as lower class and morally objectionable as the case progressed. Meanwhile, the evening papers offered their readers a position from which to judge her behavior and character. By doing this, they could both profit from the scandal and distinguish themselves from “lower” media such as the gossip magazines. Kuronen herself was not able to profit from her exchange value: the Finnish media pay little, if anything, for interviews (Kivioja, 2008, pp. 96–97) and her book was not a financial success.

Kuronen addresses questions of social status and income in her book, writing how she found Vanhanen's large house luxurious with its room, showcasing gifts received from world leaders, larger than the apartment she shared with her three children (Kuronen, 2007, pp. 26, 45). Kuronen represented herself as a single mother used to economizing at the grocery store and suggested that Vanhanen did not understand what everyday life was like for people with small incomes. Such differences were encapsulated in their romantic rituals: Vanhanen always served Kuronen steak, a treat Kuronen could not afford to cook for her children (pp. 47–49); Kuronen, not owning a car, used to wait at the bus stop for Vanhanen to pick her up. (p. 41). The evening papers did not take up the theme of their different standards of living: *Iltalehти* (2007j) only mentioned it once briefly, while *Ilta-Sanomat* remained silent.

Discussions on media ethics, to the degree that have been addressed in the case here, have dealt with Vanhanen's right to protect his privacy and the freedom of speech (Juntunen & Väliverronen, 2008, pp. 87–90). Meanwhile, there has been hardly any discussion concerning the lost privacy and the public trashing of Kuronen. These silences are telling of the workings of class, gender, status, and taste within Finnish popular media, which, while speaking in the name of the “people,” considerably often realign their sympathies with those in positions of power.

Conclusions

The circulation of affect is a central feature and function of popular media that has nevertheless been left with considerably little analytical attention. Affective forms of address are one of the central dynamics through which audiences become invested in media narratives and their characters. They are also a central strategy used by the media in the construction of such narratives and their main protagonists. Tabloid magazines and evening papers, for example, highlight incidents, individual characters, and actions through various affective modalities, inviting responses and expressions of empathy, sorrow, anger, or dismay. As the same topics and media characters are circulated in headlines from day to day (and even year to year), they

gain particular affective stickiness, as theorized by Sara Ahmed (2004). Importantly in terms of the contemporary media landscape, such 'sticky objects' travel from one media or platform to another—from print media to television, radio and online forums—giving rise to fundamentally intertextual media narratives that involve different possibilities of participation. As our analysis of the affective circulation involved in the case of Susan Kuronen and Matti Vanhanen makes evident, the construction of affective media figures also comes with gendered and classed underpinnings.

The analysis suggests that lower (middle) class women are particularly vulnerable to this kind of intertextual circulation and risk becoming figures invested with considerable affect (in the sense of collective, social, and shared intensities of feeling). This is evident in how the media figure of Susan Kuronen emerged in an intertextual process of circulation as the evening papers quoted material from the tabloid magazines and repeated the same interview comments over and over again. The process was highly selective and material that might implicate the evening papers in the case—such as the media critique in *The Prime Minister's Bride*—was excluded. The evening papers positioned Kuronen, as an "ordinary" woman, as the party expected to express her private emotions in public. When unable to interview her, the papers fabricated her inner life by using quotes from other media or anonymous sources. And as the evening papers turned Kuronen into a morally objectionable character, they began to mark her as lower class: publicly trashed, she was also marked as trashy. In contrast, prime minister Vanhanen exerted some control over his public image which was cultivated in favorable interviews at strategic moments. Comparable processes can be observed in other media narratives concerning male politicians and women of lower social standing. For example, even though the Finnish foreign minister Ilkka Kanerva had to resign after a scandal involving an erotic dancer in 2008, his political career seems to have suffered no serious long-term harm as a result. In the meanwhile, the dancer Johanna Tukiainen has become an object of hatred and ridicule in the popular media, and her body and style are vilified aggressively on popular Internet sites. Internationally, the case of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky may provide possibilities for similar readings.

The analysis of the case of Kuronen and Vanhanen also brings out some of the central strategies employed by the popular press in defining the boundaries of the private. The popular press can make use of the figure of the ordinary woman to access not only her own private life but also the private life of members of the elite that would otherwise be off limits to public consumption. At other times, the figure of the common woman can be used to police the very boundaries of privacy by condemning her for excessive openness, emotional expressiveness, or simply commonness. Ironically, the image of Kuronen as someone who "opens up" shamelessly in public was very much crafted by the same evening papers that criticized her with notable abandon. While Kuronen initially gave few interviews, the media circulated her comments in a way that made them seem frequent and excessive. This kind of double strategy is useful for the popular media in many ways. It allows the evening papers both to present themselves as close to the ordinary person and to guard the interests

of the powerful and, by changing viewpoints, to create new twists to ongoing media narratives.

Our analysis suggests that affective responses intensify through their circulation, and by accumulating on online discussion forums in particular. As different media feed (on) one another, members of the audience are invited to join in the evolving media narrative. The Internet in particular contributes to the accumulation of affect as comments, critiques, and observations circulate from print media to everyday talk and online discussion forums. Whilst online forums do provide platforms for publishing diverging opinions or analyses of the kind not seen in the evening papers, they also seem to facilitate, if not encourage, uniformity of opinion that further orients and narrows down the range of the articulations of affect (cf. Tyler 2008, pp. 24–25). The affective responses to Kuronen both accumulated and intensified through their circulation. As a result, a cluster of negative affect—including dismay, disgust, shame, anger, boredom, and outright hatred—was oriented towards and attached to her. Evening paper articles and postings in online discussion forums continued to accumulate since the autumn of 2006, becoming increasingly harsher. At the time of this article's writing, some 65,400 people had signed the petition for Kuronen “to stop that opening up”—by no means a minor amount in a country of some five million people. The petition is telling of the affective value attached to Susan Kuronen as a media figure. This affective value was largely generated and intensified by the evening papers in their circulation of references, characterizations and citations related to Kuronen, and invitations for readers to respond and discuss the case online. All this gave rise to a particular kind of affective stickiness that Kuronen herself continues to have little control over. Methodologically, such analyses of the circulation of affect—as well as the affordances of gender and class tied to it—provide alternatives to considering intertextual media events solely in terms of narrative and representation, while both supporting and enriching such investigation. Considerations of affect help to make visible the dynamics involved in the construction and appeal of popular media figures (and celebrities), enabling a more complete understanding of the operating logics and cultural power of contemporary popular media.

Notes

- [1] Ahmed has used the concepts emotion and affect interchangeably.
- [2] *Ilta-Sanomat* is published by SanomaWSOY, a media concern that publishes Finland's largest paper *Helsingin Sanomat* and owns Nelonen, the second largest local commercial television channel. *Iltalehти* belongs to the Alma Media group.
- [3] The afterword received attention only when it became news abroad. Following Ojala, the Swedish evening paper *Expressen* speculated on the security hazards of the prime minister's love life and internet use. *Iltalehти* (2007b) labelled such concerns as “paranoid” and based on action cinema.
- [4] Especially the weekly *NYT* supplement of *Helsingin Sanomat* ridiculed Vanhanen in virtually every issue between November 2006 and April 2007 in its listing “Nousussa/Laskussa.” The listing on February 23, 2007, was dedicated to the affair and its aftermath in its entirety, and featured ten pointed comments.

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