Journal of Religion, Media & Digital Culture (JRMDC)

<http://jrmdc.com>

Weary and grateful: The power of expressed emotions on the internet among Conservative Laestadians

By Meri-Anna Elina Hintsala

University of Helsinki, Finland

Contact: meri-anna.hintsala@helsinki.fi

Keywords: internet, gender, emotion, contraception, Conservative Laestadianism

Abstract:

Emotions have been interpreted as a social glue and as a vital foundation for active internet discussions as well as lived bodily experiences. In this article, I will analyse emotional expressions that are based on a teaching of rejecting contraceptives in the Finnish revival movement Conservative Laestadianism (CL). The emotions are expressed through internet discussions in autobiographical narrations, which are analysed qualitatively. The article illustrates three emotional positions in relation to the teaching on contraception – believers, doubters and surrenderers – as a part of a religious emotional regime. I will argue that context and meaning of emotions are significant in order to understand them as part of a religious system, and the embeddedness of emotions should be taken into account when analysing emotions on the internet.

About the author: Meri-Anna Hintsala is a PhD student in the Sociology of Religion at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She works as a doctoral student on the research project “Embodied Religion: Changing Meanings of Body and Gender in Contemporary Forms of Religious Identity in Finland”, funded by Academy of Finland. Her doctoral thesis elaborates embodiment in relation to religion in digital media, especially concerning Conservative Laestadianism. The basis of this article was created during exchange studies at Lancaster University, UK.

To cite this article: Hinstala, M., 2016. Weary and grateful: The power of expressed emotions on the internet among Conservative Laestadians. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 5(2), pp. 356-375.

Weary and Grateful: The power of expressed emotions on the Internet among Conservative Laestadians

1. Introduction

Conservative Laestadianism (CL) is a Finnish Protestant revival movement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Laestadianism took its name from its founder, Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), a Lutheran pastor in northern Sweden. Laestadianism now has up to 20 branches, operating mainly in Scandinavian countries, but also in Russia, North America, Africa and South America due to missionary work (Andreassen 2012, p. 191; Palola 2015). CL is the largest branch of the movement: the estimated number of adherents of CL is approximately 100,000, mainly in Finland (Talonen 2001, p. 11). CL is known for its pietistic exclusive ecclesiology as an interpretation of Lutheran theology and for its family-oriented religious life (Pesälä 2004, p. 155; Talonen 2016, p. 2). Its conservative family politics encourage the creation of large families, often numbering more than ten children.

In CL, God is emphasised as the Creator and master of life and death, and humans are not allowed to interfere with that process by using contraceptives (Hinstala 2017, p.3; Finnäs 1991, p.340). According to CL teaching, God “gives” children and parents “receive” them as a gift. This theological understanding influences the ways Laestadians perceive their life to a remarkable extent. The processes of coping in everyday life demonstrate the tensions between the conservative theological understanding and the western secular welfare state (Minde 1998, p.16; Wallenius-Korkalo 2011, p.10).

During the first decade of the 21st century, Laestadianism has been a very visible topic in Finnish discussion forums due to its visibility on the Finnish media landscape overall. For instance in 2011 on Kotimaa24.fi, the largest Christian news portal in Finland, the most often read, commented and shared discussions and news concerned Laestadianism (Hinstala & Kinnunen 2013, p.95). Additionally, the topics of Laestadianism were on the TOP 10 list over the whole year of 2011 on the most popular Finnish discussion forum Suomi24.fi (Suominen 2013, p.44, p.111; TNS Gallup 2012). Laestadians themselves have actively participated in these discussions.

Laestadians avoid TV entertainment or films, but exploit digital technology elsewhere, which creates an interesting inner contradiction in Laestadian religious culture. On social media platforms, opinions around the teaching of rejecting contraceptives vary and attract argumentative and emotionally rich negotiations. In online discussions, some Laestadian men and women talk about the unbearable burden that emerges because of the teaching of the movement. In the same discussions, other adherents defend and respect the teaching. The

emotionally rich content of these internet discussions is therefore a window into the lived Laestadian religious life. These discussions create a question about wellbeing, but also raise the issue of the significance of the internet as an active participant in contemporary religious worlds.

It is said that internet discussions have offered space to empower Laestadian mothers and change the gender regime toward more flexible structures of family life (Hintsala 2010, p.230; Linjakumpu 2012, p.163; Nykänen et al. 2013, p.10). Conservative religious women's internet discussions have been quite widely studied as opportunities for empowering and increasing agency (Baumel-Schwartz 2009, p.25; Lieber 2010, p.633; Midden & Ponzanesi 2013, p.202; Whitehead 2015), but religious men are not that often studied (see however Burke 2014). In this article I ask what emotions are expressed in discussion forums and how these emotions are related to the teaching on contraception. I will focus on both women's and men's views.

2. Emotions on the Internet

In cognitive science, emotions are defined as lived bodily experiences and “the fundamental manifestation of our embodiment” (Maiese 2011: 50). In this definition, emotions are tightly bound up with the rest of one's life, as well as bodily situations such as illness and wellbeing in both the physical and mental sense. In sociology, emotions have been described as a sort of glue for social networks: they maintain social cohesion, vitality and capacity. Additionally, they challenge the existing order and demolish the structures of communities (Turner & Stets 2005). Emotions also seem to be learned behaviours, which are transmitted culturally (Evans 2000, p.3). Expressed within religious contexts, they form a particular religiously ordered emotional regime, which legitimizes, challenges and transforms the religiously motivated social order (Riis & Woodhead 2010).

Emotions are highly significant in Internet discussions in general. The richness and variety of emotional expressions in online threads sustain the activity and length of the discussions (Chmiel & Sienkiewicz et al. 2011, p.5). Emotion can therefore be seen as the fuel that propels the continuation of discussions, especially in blogs and forum posts (Garas et al. 2012, p.3). Negative emotions boost discussions the most (Chmiel & Sobkiewicz et al. 2011, p.3). Negative hegemony is said to be typical for public internet discussions in Finland (Strandberg 2008, p.85) and in media in general toward traditionalist religious groups (Kerr & Moy 2002, p.66).

Discussions with emotional content have been regarded quantitatively as vast datasets with thousands of messages and posts (Serrano-Puche 2015, p.10). However, particularly in the field of sentiment analysis, emotions are not that often studied qualitatively in terms of their content and context. In the light of cognitive or sociological definitions of emotion, it is not useful to regard emotions as such, but always in relation to their foundation, context and bodily experiences. Qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff 2004: 22–23) is therefore chosen as the method for this present study, in order to analyse connections between the emotion and the context and meaning.

3. Wellbeing of Laestadians as a factor in internet discussions

The results of studies concerning wellbeing in Laestadianism differ. In her study on Conservative Laestadian mothers, Pesälä (2004, p.168) states that mothers are coping well because of their faith, family, extended relatives and friends as a source of wellbeing. Snellman (2011) signifies that women have huge power and responsibility over the domestic life as transmitters of tradition in the Laestadian *Rauhan Sana* line.¹ In Laestadianism, family life is organised based on biblically understood models and values, and women's space in conducting the domestic life is expected to be satisfactory and rewarding. According to Pesälä's study, happiness is believed to derive from their own and their children's health. However, Pesälä asks whether this picture of uniform wellbeing is the whole picture of coping in CL. According to the literature, activity and wellbeing seems to be bound together in the CL context: active and engaged members cope well, but wellbeing is not necessarily the result of engagement. Coping can be the foundation of activity: if one copes well, one is active.

Divergent results including experiences of spiritual or sexual violence among Laestadians have been revealed through research (Hurtig 2013; Linjakumpu 2012) and in public news in Finland by the *Finnish League of Human Rights* due to problems with rejecting contraceptives (Ihmisoikeusliitto 2009). Spiritual violence means for instance the experiences of theologically oriented social control in CL. These issues complement the picture of wellbeing in CL. Persons with maladjustment and problems with health seem to fall into marginal positions in CL. However, they have been active discussants on internet forums, alongside active and wellbeing members of CL.

The internet is a potentially rich space to see beyond the picture of complete wellbeing or complete violence, because of the anonymity of discussions. Anonymity seems to enable the broader scope of emotional expressions, because the local social pressure of the movement does not reach the anonymous discussants. Since 2007, internet conversations concerning Laestadianism moved from closed peer groups, such as mothers' groups, to anonymous open discussion forums, social networks and blogs (Hintsala & Kinnunen 2013, p.100). This was the general transition during the development of social-media culture in 2009 (Östman 2013: 172). It meant an increasing number of discussions and increasing visibility on social media for CL (Suominen 2013, p.44).

4. Methodological choices

i. *The data*

One hypothesis underlying this analysis is that theological reinterpretation is grounded upon the adherents' reflections and negotiations about theology, gendered embodied situations and emotions in everyday life. The question is what methodological decisions will allow us to see this process. If data is collected based on participating in the activity of the movement, we

can get answers from active members with a healthy level of wellbeing. Consequently, attitudes toward the teaching will appear constant and traditional. Alternatively, if we ask about experiences of violence, the results will reflect this more negative side of the picture. Both angles are valuable and worth considering, and the combination of these views in the same analysis will provide complementary insights.

I gathered the data for this study during 2011 on several discussion forums. Here, discussion forum as a concept means an asynchronic www-based public discussion forum (see Arpo 2005, p.20). The particular forums were chosen based on the following selection criteria: relevance, activity, interactivity, heterogeneity and rich data computing (Kozinets 2015, p.168). They were Suomi24; Kotimaa24.fi; a discussion forum concerning family and baby issues in the public emagazine Vauva-lehti; an anonymous, public Laestadian community blog, Freepathways.com; Mopin palsta, an unofficial discussion forum for registered Laestadian members; and a privately moderated Gostaja-blog by a Laestadian man. The conversation about Laestadianism and by Laestadians crossed the boundaries of forums, and discussions were often interlinked, which is very typical for broad internet discussions on popular topics.

Within the forums, I found thousands of messages concerning Laestadianism. In order to limit data collection within the discussions about Laestadianism, I first used particular search terms in relation to gender in Finnish and in their inflexions: *mother, father, man, woman, wife, husband, gender* and *sexuality*. Second, my intention was to find messages based on the writers' own experiences as Laestadians, and to find messages which were intended to be part of an interactive dialogue (see, e.g., Hintsala 2012, p.32). As a result, the data collected is very focused, consisting of 380 autobiographical writings, each from four lines to four pages in length. In the data there are writings from at least 137 females and 51 males. Sometimes I was not able to identify the gender of an author. I will call the data "narratives", in reference to their quality as autobiographical stories. Contextually-selected qualitative data based on the relevance of the narratives is well adapted to content analysis, in which the content and meaning are crucial to the research question (Kozinets 2015, p.170; Krippendorff 2004, p.119). The decision to use internet discussions as a source of research data means that I decided to focus primarily on complexity rather than simplicity in terms of data content, theme and methodology. Additionally, I decided to focus on depth (autobiographically deep narratives) rather than breadth in the data collection, in order to achieve a qualitative analysis (Baym 2009: 175).

ii. *Epistemological and ethical considerations*

The origin and context of internet discussions determines how internet material is used in research work (Turtiainen & Östman 2013, p.54). The focus of this analysis is on written and socially shared emotional expressions, rather than emotions themselves and the way they affect an individual's mind. Thus, an ethical question is how to use these discussions as research data.

The first key issue concerns how knowledge is produced on the internet, and to whom the discussions have been written. Internet discussions about CL originated as a reaction and

counter-discussion to public news stories about Laestadianism in recent times. These internet discussions concern an individual's private experiences about the burden of family life, when discussion face-to-face is not obvious or easy in local CL communities. Due to this, internet discussions play a crucial role in facilitating anonymous contact between peers. The discussions are addressed to peers although they are discussed in public spaces. Expressions are believed to be understood as such.

Second, a writer's right to know about being studied must be considered (Paccagnella 2006). In the case of Mopin palsta, which was the only platform requiring users to register, I registered and wrote a message on the forum, saying that I would be observing discussions and collecting some messages for my research data. I received many responses that signalled acceptance, including from the moderator of the forum. I was not an unknown researcher to them, because my own background is in CL. I am a kind of a 'native speaker' of the Laestadian religious language and culture in spite of my current more distant and disengaged relation to it. I have also published previous work about Laestadianism, which made my studies and position known to them and facilitated my access to the internet community.

Third, the question of publicity and privacy of the discussions must be addressed. All other selected forums were public and open for everyone. However, this publicness is not self-evident to some writers and the question of publicity must always be considered in the research context (Markham et al. 2012, p.10; Sumiala & Tikka 2013, p.179; Turtiainen & Östman 2013, p.51). Some bloggers or writers used their real names, or recognizable pseudonyms. In order to assure privacy protection, I ended up anonymising all the narratives. According to Lange (2008, p.372), content is privately public when there is no knowledge available concerning discussants, but they share very private experiences on the internet in the public domain. This setting correlates with my data.

The original quotations are in Finnish. Translations of them into English make these quotations difficult to find in the original context via search engines, which effectively cloaks the pseudonyms and names.

5. Content analysis of the data

I started the analysis by coding and categorizing the hundreds of expressed emotions in the autobiographical narratives, using ATLAS.ti software. I found 49 different emotional expressions and identified these as narrators expressed them. The five most often expressed emotions – weariness, fear, anxiety, guilt and gratefulness – seemed to form the core of this set of emotional reactions. I categorised all emotions into clusters and titled the clusters according to one of the core emotions.

Another angle on the data was the connection between the emotions and the teaching of contraception. I continued the analysis by classifying the emotions by types, focusing on their relation in the data to the theological teaching of contraception. For instance, gratefulness was expressed when a narrator was either tightly engaged with the teaching or clearly detached from it. This ambiguity revealed two different positions based on attitudes towards the teaching on contraception, which I labelled as "believers" (in an engaged position toward

the teaching) and “surrenderers” (in a detached position). Anxiety was felt and shared when the relation to the teaching was confused or unclear. Narrators in this third position of confusion were entitled “doubters”.

The narrators could be classified into these three positions as follows: “believers” (134 narrators), “doubters” (104) and “surrenderers” (147). Emotions and their expressions overlap and are related to each other. None of them work independently but, rather, each works as an element in a wider construction of meaning-making and practices. An emotional expression can be shared in many positions, but with a different meaning.

Table 1 below illustrates the frame of the analysis. The three classified positions cover all expressed emotions. In the table, the emotional clusters are located under each positions according to their content. Next, I will open the analysis according to the positions and the expressed emotions in each of them.

BELIEVERS (134 narrators)	DOUBTERS (104)	SURRENDERERS (147)
Gratefulness 46 mentions grateful 10, satisfied 4, joyful 4, emancipated 3, peaceful 3, relieved 3, empathic 3, happy 3, honest 3, optimistic 2, fearless 2, fed up 1, frustrated 4, amused 1	Anxiety 34 afflicted 9, distressed 8, angry 2, lonely 3, victimized 3, annoyed 1, sarcastic 2, nervous 1, amused 1, desperate 2, hurt 1, sad 1	Gratefulness 48 happy 6, joyful 6, pity 5, grateful 5, horrified 5, relieved 5, honest 4, satisfied 2, hurt 2, respectful 2, confident 2, emancipated 2, peaceful 2, untruthful for herself 1, hopeful 1
Weariness 26 weary 9, anxious 5, afflicted 3, victimized 2, confused 2, neglected 2, dejected 1, hopeless 1, sarcastic 1	Weariness 33 weary 14, frustrated 7, horrified 4, confused 3, untruthful for herself 2, disappointed 1, neglected 1, suspicious 1	Fear 29 frightened 8, guilt for children 5, angry 3, weary 3, anxious 2, frustrated 2, confused 1, empty 1, disappointed 1, constrained 1, paralysed 1, inadequate 1
Guilt of sin 18 frightened 6, guilt 4, untruthful for herself 3, panicky 2, horrified 2, ashamed 1	Guilt of inadequacy 16 guilt 8, fearful 2, ashamed 2, inadequacy 1, nervous 1, empathetic 1, honest 1	Bystanders 10 ashamed 2, distrustful 2, empathetic 2, bored 1, eager 1, sad 1, amused 1

Table 1. Emotional expressions categorised into clusters under each positions.

6. “Grateful Believers”: the position of balance

i. *Gratitude*

Believers trust the traditional Laestadian teaching. Believers accept pain as a part of the Christian life. This understanding follows the mystical Christian tradition, in which suffering cultivates faith (Orsi 2004, p.22; Asad 2003, p.84). A believer lives between the everyday context and transcendental reality, without complaining about the circumstances of life. Believers express negative emotions, but they try to get rid of temptations rather than pain or negative emotions as such. Balance between one's own thoughts, the teaching of the community, and outward behaviour creates a peaceful position. This correlates with the earlier studies among active Laestadian mothers (Pesälä 2004, p.168; Snellman 2011, p.312). To believers, internet discussions are a kind of apologetic arena in which to argue for the traditional Laestadian tradition. Believers repeated the phrase “to live as they believe” as an expression of satisfaction and gratefulness, as seen in the next quotation:

If a believer's conscience says that children are gifts from God, that God is the lord of life and death, and the believer wishes to submit to God's will (thy will be done), why would you pressure them to act against their conscience? It is the basic right of believers to live as they believe. It would violate their basic rights if the Church began to put pressure on them to use contraception. (19, no gender)

Although believers are sometimes both weary and anxious, compliance with expectations create balance and thus positive emotions and satisfaction. The social emotional regime works as expected: emotions support the theological and social order in the community (Riis & Woodhead 2010, p.121).

In the accounts of believers, gratefulness is the emotion that is most often mentioned. It seems to relate to the balance between one's thoughts and the reality of the community. Gratefulness is a sign of learned and internalized emotions, because Laestadian individuals feel gratefulness often in ambivalent situations. Children, diseases, problems and joy are all gifts of God and worth receiving:

I have children of my own. Some were born close together. We had some tough times when they were little. But now when I look at and think about our children, I thank God for giving me the strength to accept all of them. With today's general selfish thinking, we would probably not have had children so close together, if at all. (Female, 21)

Children and a big family constitute a great gift and the source of gratefulness. This woman explained that a baby gives energy at home, and a big family later means having a large number of loved ones, listeners, and supporters. A rich domestic life helps these women to cope and be happy, even in spite of their housework and responsibilities. Having children is a source of “some tough times” but also of gratefulness for both parents: the agents in the text above are “we”, meaning both a wife and her husband. Pesälä (2004, p.153) notes that parents in Laestadian families share the responsibilities and the relationship is often constructed in support of the mother. Snellman (2011, p.315) argues that Laestadian family structure is constructed toward a Christian ideology in which “man and woman are created differently but with the same worth”. Focus on the domestic life and children is seen as the pre-eminent vocation given by God, even though parents may work outside the home and have other responsibilities in the public realm:

I also have experiences of babies and children and anxiety. I have doubted how we can cope. However, always a baby has been the best therapist ever. A neonate leads us back to basic life values. Anxiety disappears after a workday when I get to lay down on the sofa, a baby on my chest. (Male, 307)

There is no distinction between the experiences of men and women concerning gratefulness. Gratefulness is an emotion that appears solely in the context of children. As an exception, two men mentioned gratefulness about marital sexuality:

Sex itself is more important than having children. Though, we are grateful for every child and how perfect they are, but it doesn't attribute to us. (Male, 300)

Expressions of gratefulness were relatively homogenous. Positive expressions are widely shared and repeated, and they enjoy large social acceptance on the emotional scale.

ii. *Weariness as a part of ordinary life*

Among women in the group of believers, there were several explanations for weariness. First, weariness was seen as an unwanted feeling coming from outside the religion. Second, however, it was seen as a normal feeling related to domesticity and usually accompanied by an intention to lessen its significance and strength, for example saying that not only mothers of ten are tired but also mother of one could be tired. The dismissive conclusion is that weariness should be seen as a relatively common feeling and an inherent part of life that people do not have to do anything about:

Clearly, we have been weary as well, sleepless nights as in many families with kids. No more than in families in general, though. We have received them together. A large family is so gratifying that memories grow sweeter with time. (Male, 61)

“Receiving children” is an expression illustrating the theological foundation of the everyday religion in Laestadianism. God gives children and parents receive them as a gift. The following examples show how theological understanding remarkably influences the ways Laestadians perceive their life through language. In the Laestadian context, the God’s creation is sacred, and therefore people should not complain about receiving children. Family life seems to be a vocation. Thus, weariness is the foundation of complaining. That is the reason why it is not appreciated and socially downplayed as a feeling to be dismissed. Acknowledgement of weariness would challenge the religious emotional regime and then threatens the traditional theological interpretation and teaching.

iii. *The guilt of sin*

Guilt appeared among believers when they experienced having a bad conscience because of the felt experience of committing sin. Feeling guilty occurred only in women’s narratives. Men did not mention conscience at all in the data. Taking a closer look at references to conscience, the concept is always related to discussion about contraception. One writer explains that when she started using contraception, she felt a strong sense of guilt in her conscience. Although she knew that this was the only option available in her situation, she could not avoid feeling guilty:

Personally the whole thing makes me really anxious. I strongly feel that I’m doing something wrong now that I’m using contraception. I’m no longer part of the community. (Female, 206)

Experience of committing sin is tightly related to the experience of being a part of the community. The community reflects the acts of individuals, and religious emotions depend on communal reactions. When their conscience caused women to feel guilty, due to bad thoughts or the temptation to use contraception, the successful process of the emotional regime led to repentance as a religious, but social process.

Repentance is seen as the right action to eliminate guilt. It returns the balance in the shattered theological order, when the emotion of guilt creates a desire for repentance. After repentance, forgiveness of sins by other believers is the religious confirmation of having acted correctly. Laestadians emphasise the total forgiveness of sins by other believers, which purges the conscience and gives peace:

Sinners must repent. The repentance means conversion, to turn away from one’s past bad life. So, one’s own ‘good’ and ‘easy’ life would not be the most important thing, but rather joy about the gifts given by God (faith, family, friends etc.). (23, no gender)

Guilt resembles the construction of the religious emotional regime (Riis and Woodhead 2010, p.76–77), because it supports action towards conformance with the traditionally “right” theological interpretation.

To sum up, positive and negative emotions are relatively balanced in the group of believers. Faith creates gratefulness and helps with coping. Negative emotions such as weariness are seen as part of the believers' life and problems are seen as being solved in the frame of faith. The online display of believers is coherent with previous studies concerning wellbeing among Laestadians (Pesälä 2004, p.168). The position of believers, including a variety of emotions as a part of the religious emotional regime, illustrates well the balanced and corrected type of religious emotional regime as formulated by Riis & Woodhead (2010, p.121).

7. “Weary Doubters”: the position of inner conflict

Doubters have widened the space of belief by combining modern values such as individualism and the Laestadian religious tradition. This shows that the religious emotional regime is always an open regime, taking impulses from the surroundings (Riis & Woodhead 2010, p.122). The emotions labelled here are weariness, anxiety and guilt, but with a different meaning than among believers. Doubters seek to renew their life and get rid of pain and suffering without seceding from the community. A feature of this category is the strategic silence between private life and the social community. In this category, internet discussions play a crucial role in modifying personal modes of belief. Tension between inner thoughts and outward behaviour places the individual in a position of oblique incidence, and critical or opposing action mirrors the found position:

My own experience shows that people with large families are exhausted and can't get help because everyone else also has a large family, and municipalities lack resources. We gradually became more exhausted until I eventually noticed that today was not the only desperate day, but that our life had been one desperate day after another for many years. Our life has become a struggle for survival, and my prayers have become so desperate that I only have the strength to ask: God, have mercy on me! (153, no gender)

Action is limited here due to weariness and having reached the limit of being able to cope. In some cases, contraception has changed the situation; when these people get their life under control, the problem is relieved. As stated in the quotation above, the influence of the secular society is remarkable and might drive people to religious doubting: when municipalities lack resources, religion must be flexible.

i. *The burden of weariness*

Weariness among doubters appears most frequently among women in internet conversations. Weariness makes women passive and dependent. Internet discussions are a place to unload the burden of weariness, and the internet often seems to be the first place to do that. Thus unloading burdens and theological reinterpretation become possible.

The source of weariness varied among women, but also sometimes differed between men and women. The ordinary life-questions are often common and shared among men and women. They share similar challenges and burdens, but also gratefulness and joy. Men defend the Laestadian faith on the internet, but they also talk about weariness. The most common reason for weariness in both women and men was the frequency of pregnancies and the huge number of responsibilities in their domestic life:

We got weary little by little. Sometime, we acknowledged that many things had disappeared from our hobbies and chores because we didn't have energy to do anything extra. Suddenly, our life was only the survival in the middle of routines. Nothing succeeded without help, which was substantial, though. (Female, 155)

Also, other emotions such as fear and uncertainty seem to increase the feeling of weariness. Fathers with children were tired because of their many responsibilities and their fear for the future as breadwinners. However, the fluidity of emotional expressions is worth noting here. Emotions are shared over gender boundaries in cases where wives talk about their husbands, or reverse. Empathy labels those narratives where a husband or a wife enter into his or her spouse's emotions or situation.

ii. *Hidden anxiety*

Anxiety appears as an emotion in uncertain situations among doubters. It emerges due to contradictions between inner emotions and outward expectations, especially when there is no way to discuss the contradictions:

So, it is easy to go to Sunday services, behave and seem like everybody else. Greet, smile and nod at appropriate points, act and react when it is "right". --- It is easy because I've grown into it since my childhood when you don't consider it so seriously. --- It feels so empty, though, meaningless, false. If you encourage yourself to watch it, it is plain formless emptiness without content. This situation causes fatigue step by step. Inner conflict in my mind and falsehood breaks close relationships. (Female, 45)

The internalisation of religious habits has led this narrator to act a role in social situations. People who chose strategic silence in social situations often felt anxiety. Strategic silence here means a position where the person encountered a contradiction between his or her life and the teaching of CL, but did not want to speak about it in the community. There were many reasons for silence, but one of the most general was the fear of social sanctions, such as a reprimand or social rejection. Strategic silence can be seen a sign of the predominance of the community in a member's life, where unexpected emotions are suppressed and hidden. It reveals the religious emotional regime, which is unbalanced in a member's life (Riis & Woodhead 2010, p.145).

Examples of contradictions could include experiences of weariness (and shame because of it) or the decision to use birth control against the social expectations of the group. Some people do not speak about emotions in a real community, only in internet discussions. Strategic silence and experiences of anxiety were relatively more common among men than among women. A significant distinction lies in the embodied area, that of pregnancies. A woman's decision to stop "receiving children" is immediately obvious in the local community, since she does not give birth to any more children. On the other hand, when men struggle with contraception, this is an inner struggle, not embodied as in the case of women. When women decide to break the silence – to speak, to leave the community, or to limit their family size – they do not internalize the anxiety.

iii. *The guilt of inadequacy*

In the group of doubters, women expressed the emotion of guilt due to neglecting their children, on account of both their weariness and a continuous inadequacy:

In addition to discussion on the domestic duties of CL-parents, guilt keeps a painful and heavy company with other problems. It is so especially when you fail with children or when you are weary. (Female, 138)

This context of guilt, pertaining to children, led women to seek better well-being through active decision-making in health issues. This is because women expected to better survive their domestic duties and caring for their children after the decision to use contraceptives. Love toward their children and spouse could support them in coping, and at the same time, could be a reason to change their life and consider their faith issues. One woman considered a decision to use contraceptives and correlated it to another thing that creates guilt:

Just like if I dye my hair, like many people do, I'm doing something wrong. I feel it in my conscience. Even though neither of these things depends on my faith or changes my faith. (Female, 206)

The narrator considers that faith and being righteous are up to God, not up to her. She also assumes that contraception is not an issue related to faith, but still she cannot avoid guilt. This may lead to the differentiation of the social, internalised order from personal faith. The effort to achieve greater well-being is then a counterforce to the symbolic process of the right theological interpretation of the movement, and women in particular have struggled to negotiate between their emotions, situations and the theological teaching.

To sum up, the position of doubters is labelled with the emotions of desperate weariness, anxiety and guilt. Gratefulness does not occur, which reveals the confusing situation toward the teaching of contraception.

8. “Hopeful Surrenderers” – the position of one’s own decisions

Surrenderers are consciously separated from the teaching of contraception, and they expressed gratitude for it. Obvious behaviour against the teaching of the community and vehement critiques towards the tradition make them visible. For example, a mother of two disabled children first struggled between the expectations of the community and the circumstances of her own life, but ended up leaving the community:

But I’ve also known that I’ve been acting like a robot with a program coded into me. I’ve continuously reflected on my behaviour so that it would meet the minimum requirements for what is acceptable. Sometimes when I was still part of the movement, I felt (I occasionally dared to feel!) that God’s will is not like this, that I’m casting myself into a prison by following the code of customs and that I’m adopting views that are not God’s advice to his children, but the advice of human children to each other, like the blind leading the blind. (Female, 60)

When one acknowledges oneself as active and capable of making decisions concerning one’s own well-being and spiritual life, it is possible to step away from passively receiving action. Seeking to eliminate pain that originates following the teaching, in this context, is to seek a solution for well-being that necessitates leaving the structure that creates the pain. On the one hand, it may mean completely seceding from the community, which creates a group of empathetic bystanders in these internet discussions. On the other hand, the distance from the teaching of contraception may mean just rejecting the teaching of contraception, but still maintaining a close connection with some of the community members and sharing some particular and chosen aspects of the community life.

i. *Fear leads to action*

In the case of contraception, fear was experienced almost solely by women in all of the three positions. When fear continues to appear, it leads toward conscious action and to locating oneself into the position of a surrenderer. Fear was shown to occur only in social situations. Fear leads to using contraception as a religious decision: it was said to be the best way to save faith. Fear is usually the emotion linked to labelling in society or coping with domesticity. However, fear has links to Laestadian theology about repentance and the forgiveness of sins:

I’ve so often found myself in situations where I’ve doubted my own experiences and emotions. I’m talking about the demands from other believers. And about how I haven’t understood myself or where certain unwanted thoughts and emotions have come from, that there is a real, understandable reason: exhaustion and fear. I’ve felt a tremendous burden and an inability to cope with the child thing and with the practice of customs that don’t come from the heart and from religious

understanding, even though I have strived to “receive forgiveness through faith” (i.e. for wrong thoughts and emotions – really deadly seriously). (Female, 60)

This woman reports that she had had unwanted emotions such as fear, but she had tried to believe that wrong thoughts and emotions are all forgiven. She explains that traditional customs do not come from her heart. She believes that God sees into her heart and realises what the situation is. Broadly speaking, in the data, while women trust the rightful justice of God in their situation, they encourage each other to pray and trust.

An often repeated sentence in the data declares the incompatibility of fear with the Laestadian emotional regime. One does not need to be scared of anything, because “God gives you the strength to take care of the children he gives as his gifts”.ⁱⁱ When the woman quoted above felt fear, she wondered about her emotions, their origin and the reason for their existence. Fear is a sign of unbalanced engagement between her life and the expectations of the community. She had tried to bring herself into alignment with the “right” theological interpretation by means of repentance, but this did not help. She experienced that this act did not “come from the heart” in the sense of taking it seriously.

In the data, fear is often found to be coupled with depression and other mental or physical health problems. Women have sought and used healthcare services to solve their problems. Additionally, some women chose to pray and trust for a better future. Both praying and making one’s own decisions increased hope for the better future:

My postpartum psychosis lengthened from one child to the next. My husband barely had energy to take care of them. He tried to get assistance. We prayed together, night after night. We prayed to God for help and solutions to our distress, the distress of our children. Finally, we agreed about the facts and decided that I would seek sterilization after the ninth childbirth. We are so young that I would’ve been pregnant even ten more times. (Female, 88)

Weariness and fear often appear together among women, but weariness is a present feeling, as compared to fear. Weariness functions as an alarm in challenging domestic situations, but only fear encourages women to do something about the problematic situation. Among women in the study, fear led to changing their conditions of life. Other emotions such as satisfaction, peacefulness and gratefulness have replaced it. Women attempted to find ways of avoiding fear in order to make decisions concerning their lives.

9. Conclusion: weary, yet grateful

In this article, I asked how the Laestadian teaching of rejecting contraception is emotionally expressed and shared on internet discussions. According to the content analysis, three different emotional positions emerged in terms of the Laestadian teaching on contraception: believers, doubters and surrenderers. Positions are constructed through a variety of emotional clusters including single expressions of emotions. These positions are not static but rather

fluid and subject to change. One person might be at two positions simultaneously, for example deliberating between doubting and surrendering. Additionally, a position may change during the life course: for instance, the emotion of fear leads a woman from the position of believers to that of surrenderers.

I based my analysis on the definition of emotional experiences as having both a bodily and a social foundation. Thus emotional expressions on the internet have both embodied and contextual manifestations. In the analysis, I adapted the social theory of religious emotional regimes created by Riis and Woodhead (2010). In this context, emotions appear in relation to both the theological tradition of the movement and the health issues of the narrators.

The constructed emotional positions illustrate different forms of socially constructed emotional regimes. All positions are located within the same regime, but they represent different modes of emotional reactions. This is a novel contribution to the field of Laestadian studies because reactions such as doubting and surrendering have been in the shadows beyond wellbeing (Pesälä 2004, p.168). Even the critical members, the doubters, can engage with the movement – although their personal approach may include many secularly-understood choices through negotiations in internet debates.

The religious emotional regime is both balanced and unbalanced in this analysis. A core emotion in the positions of believers and surrenderers was gratefulness, which implicates balanced and reinterpreted positions of religious life. Doubters, in the middle position, expressed a confused and contested religious attitude, in which a core emotion was anxiety. Weariness was a core emotion in general throughout the data. This corresponds with the results of other studies regarding mothers in Finland. Mothers are often tired (Jokinen 1996, p.26, 30). The relation between emotions and their theological construction makes weariness interesting in this analysis. The emotional nuance of the discussions is a methodological and ethical question here as long as it influences the results: admitting that the expressed emotions seem to be mainly negative, the intention is to seek increased wellbeing and more suitable forms of faith. This result favours the significance of qualitative analysis when studying emotions on the internet: the content and the context regulates the final meaning of the emotional expression. For instance, gratefulness has a very different meaning and role in a religious emotional regime, depending on its context.

Often in sentiment analysis (e.g. Chmiel & Sienkiewicz et al. 2011; Chmiel & Sobkiewicz et al. 2011, p.3; Garas et al 2012; Serrano-Puche 2015; Strandberg 2008), emotions are studied quantitatively on the internet, not in relation to their content and meaning. As a result of my qualitative content analysis, I say that emotions expressed on forums are not only based on other discussions but also on the narrator's life. Religion is a vital process of social and individual life and emotions spill from the offline group onto the discussion forums, which reveals the embeddedness of online and offline contexts (Campbell 2013, p.3; Hine 2015, p.53). Without qualitative considerations, the significance of emotions in internet discussions eludes observation. Thus, in the larger scope, qualitative analysis is an essential contribution to the field of sentiment analysis.

The emotions of men and women, as well as their causes, are overlapping and diverse. The negative nuance of women's discussions here refers to the question of the context of CL. Pesälä (2004, p.160) argues that "a mother was forced to cope with everyday life, and by

doing so she enabled the rest of the family to cope". A mother's loss of wellbeing might have a serious impact over the whole family, and this explains hidden negative emotions and the necessity to resolve them. If women cannot share negative emotions in family life or in the movement – especially when the negative emotions are related to doubting the religious teaching – the anonymous emotional space might be significant especially for women. The case of religious men discussing on the internet is still worthy of further analysis.

Notes

ⁱ While the lines of the Laestadianism are separated and the results of studies concerning different Laestadian line are not completely applicable, the basis for religious teaching, customs, the motivations of the practice and ordinary religious life are nevertheless comparable.

ⁱⁱ This kind of sentence appeared at least twelve times in the data (37, 60, 71, 114, 115, 121, 155, 162, 208, 266, 281, 296).

References

- Andreassen, B., 2012. From monthly bulletins to eLaestadianism? Exploring attitudes and use of internet within the Laestadian movement. *Temenos* 48(2), pp. 179–202.
- Arpo, R., 2005. Internetin keskustelukulttuurit. Tutkimus internet-keskusteluryhmien viesteissä rakentuvista puhetavoista, tulkinnosta ja tulkinnan kehysistä kommunikaatioyhteiskunnassa. Joensuu: Joensuun yliopisto.
- Asad, T., 2003. *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Baumel-Schwartz, J., 2009. Frum surfing: Orthodox Jewish women's internet forums as a historical and cultural phenomenon. *Journal of Jewish Identities* 2(1), pp. 1–30.
- Baym, N., 2009. What constitutes quality in qualitative internet research? In: Markham, A. & Baym, N. (ed.), *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method*. London: SAGE, pp. 173–189.
- Burke, K., 2014. What makes a man: Gender and sexual boundaries on evangelical Christian sexuality websites. *Sexualities* 17(1/2), pp. 3–22.
- Campbell, H., 2010. *Exploring religious community online: We are one in the network*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Campbell, H., 2013. *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds*. New York: Routledge.
- Chmiel, A. & Sienkiewicz, J. & Thelwall, M. & Paltoglou, G. & Buckley, K. & Kappas, A. & Holyst, J., 2011. Collective emotions online and their influence on community life. *PLoS ONE* 6(7): e22207. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0022207

- Chmiel, A. & Sobkowicz P. & Sienkiewicz, J. & Paltoglou, G. & Buckley, K. & Thelwall, M. & Holyst, J., 2011. Negative emotions boost users' activity at BBC forum. *ArXiv* 6 May 2011 DOI: <http://arxiv.org/abs/1011.5459>.
- Evans, D., 2000. *Emotion: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Finnäs, F., 1991. Fertility in Larsmo: The effect of Laestadianism. *Population Studies: A Journal of Demography* 45(2), pp. 339–351.
- Garas, A. & Garcia, D. & Skowron, M. & Schweitzer, F., 2012. Emotional persistence in online chatting communities. *Scientific Reports* 2, 402. DOI: 10.1038/srep00402
- Hine, C., 2015. *Ethnography for the Internet*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Hintsala, M-A., 2010. Muuttuva äitiys haastaa herätysliikkeen: Vanhoillislestadiolainen äiti väsyä javoimaantuu. Pessi, A & Grönlund, H. (eds.). *Perhe, parisuhe ja kirkko – Lähikuvia leikkauspintoihin*. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 229–246.
- Hintsala, M-A., 2012. Vanhoillislestadiolaisuus ja sukupuoli verkossa auto-netnografisesti tarkasteltuna. *Naistutkimus – Kvinnoforskning* 4/2012. 29–38.
- Hintsala, M-A. & Kinnunen, M., 2013. *Tuoreet oksat viinipuussa – Vanhoillislestadiolaisuus peilissä*. Helsinki: Kirjapaja.
- Hintsala, M-A., 2017. Elämää uskonrukouksessa – Vanhoillislestadiolainen ehkäisykeskustelu verkossa. *Teologinen aikakauskirja*. Forthcoming.
- Hurtig, J., 2013. *Taivaan taimet. Uskonnollinen yhteisöllisyys ja väkivalta*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Ihmisoikeusliitto 2009. Ehkäisykielto loukkaa ihmisoikeuksia. Ihmisoikeusliitto.fi, [online] 4 March. Available at: http://ihmisoikeusliitto.fi/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/IOL_Taustamuistio_vanhalestadiolaisten_ehkaisykiellosta_2009.pdf [Accessed 11 January 2017]
- Jokinen, E., 1996. *Väsynyt äiti. Äitiyden omaelämäkerrallisia esityksiä*. Tampere: Gaudeamus.
- Kerr, P., & Moy, P., 2002. Newspaper coverage of fundamentalist Christians, 1980–2000. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 79(1), pp. 54–72.
- Kozinets, R., 2015. *Netnography: Redefined*. London: SAGE.
- Krippendorff, K., 2004. *Content Analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. 2ND Edition. London: Sage.
- Lange, P., 2008. Publicly private and privately public: Social networking on YouTube. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13(1), pp. 361–380.
- Lieber, A., 2010. A virtual *veibershul*: Blogging and the blurring of public and private among Orthodox Jewish Women. *College English* 72(6), pp. 621–637.
- Linjakumpu, A., 2012. *Haavoittunut yhteisö: Hoitokokoukset vanhoillislestadiolaisuudessa*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Maiese, M., 2011. *Embodiment, emotion and cognition*. New York: Palgrave.
- Markham, A. & Buchanan, E., 2012. Ethical decision-making and internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee. [online] Available at: <http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf> [Accessed 12 January 2017]

- Midden, E., & Ponzanesi, S., 2013. Digital faiths: An analysis of the online practices of Muslim women in the Netherlands. *Women's Studies International Forum* 41(3), pp. 197–203.
- Minde, H. 1998. Constructing 'Laestadianism': A case for Sami survival? *Acta Borealia: A Nordic Journal of Circumpolar Societies* 15(1), pp. 5–25.
- Nykänen, T., & Luoma-aho, M., 2013. *Poliittinen lestadiolaisuus*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura.
- Orsi, R., 2004. *Between Heaven and Earth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Paccagnella, L., 2006. Getting the seats of your pants dirty: Strategies for ethnographic research on virtual communities. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 3(1).
- Palola, T., 2015. *American or Scandinavian? American Apostolic Lutheranism 1884 – 1929*. Oulu: Suomen Rauhanyhdistysten Keskusyhdistys.
- Pesälä, L., 2004. When one does not want to be like others: The basis of the sense of control among Conservative Laestadian mothers with large families. *Yearbook of Population Research in Finland* 40, pp. 153–171.
- Riis, O., & Woodhead, L., 2010. *A sociology of religious emotions*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Snellman, G., 2011. *Sions döttrar: De laestadianska kvinnorna som traditionsförmedlare i norra svenska Österbotten åren 1927–2009*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press.
- Serrano-Puche, J., 2015. Emotions and digital technologies: Mapping the field of research in media studies. *Media@LSE Working Paper Series* 33. [online] Available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/mediaWorkingPapers/pdf/WP33-FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 12 January 2017]
- Strandberg, K., 2008. Public deliberation goes on-line? *Javnost – The Public* 15(1), pp. 71–89.
- Sumiala, J., & Tikka, M., 2013. Verkko mediaetnografin tutkimuskohteena: tapauksena uutisen etnografia YouTubessa. In: Laaksonen, S-M. & Matikainen, J. & Tikka, M. (eds.), *Otteita verkosta*. Tampere: Vastapaino, pp. 171–192.
- Suominen, J., 2013. 2003 – Tyyntä myrskyn edellä. In: Suominen, J. & Östman, S. & Saarikoski, P. & Turtiainen, R. (eds.), *Sosiaalisen median lyhyt historia*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, pp. 28–47.
- Talonen, J., 2016. Lestadiolaisuus muuttuvan ajan paineissa. *Perusta* 3. [online] Available at: <http://www.perustalehti.fi/2016/05/lestadiolaisuus-muuttuvan-ajan-paineissa/> [Accessed 12 January 2016]
- Talonen, J., 2001. Lestadiolaisuuden hajaannukset. In: Talonen, J. & Harjutsalo, I. (eds.), *Lestadiolaisuuden monet kasvot*. Helsinki: Suomen teologinen instituutti, pp. 11–30.
- TNS Gallup, 2012. Weekly statistics of the Finnish websites. [online] Available at: <http://tnsmetrix.tns-gallup.fi/public/> [Accessed 12 January 2017]
- Turner, J. & Stets, J., 2005. *The sociology of emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Turtiainen, R., & Östman, S., 2013. Verkkotutkimuksen eettiset haasteet: Armi ja anoreksia. In: Laaksonen, S-M. & Matikainen, J. & Tikka, M. (eds.), *Otteita verkosta: Verkon ja sosiaalisen median tutkimusmenetelmät*. Tampere: Vastapaino, pp. 49–67.
- Wallenius-Korkalo, S., 2011. Moving Laestadianism: Politics of continuity and change in religious community. Paper presented at ECPR General Conference, Reykjavik. [online] Available at: <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/c0f492e8-d6fe-4749-a6c4-bb362842ae90.pdf> [Accessed 12 January 2017]
- Whitehead, D., 2015. “The story God is weaving us into”: Narrativizing grief, faith, and infant loss in U.S. evangelical women's blog communities. *The New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 21(1-2), pp. 42 –56.
- Östman, S., 2013. 2009 – Hömppäharrastuksen haltuunotto. In: Suominen, J. & Östman, S. & Saarikoski, P. & Turtiainen, R. (eds.), *Sosiaalisen median lyhyt historia*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, pp. 171–201.