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Hanna Varjakoski
University of Turku, Finland

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Older Women as Active Online Agents: Diversifying Cultural Conceptions of “Grannies” through Social Media

By Hanna Varjakoski

Abstract
With the advent of social media, the media environment has become more participatory for its users, making it possible for older adults to produce content for social media and be agential in online spaces. This article observes a group of older women known as Activist Grannies (Aktivistimummot in Finnish) and 60+ Finnish women bloggers who identify as “grannies” to discover what kind of agency social media potentially enables for older women. In addition, this article explores the cultural knowledge produced by older women’s self-representations as activist grannies and “granny bloggers.” I demonstrate that social media offers a space to make visible older women’s lives and societal contributions. This visibility challenges ageist conceptions and conveys affirmative understandings of aging, such as viewing higher age as a source of strength. Social media also makes it more achievable for older adults to participate in current societal debates and to exercise political agency. This study expands the existing research on older adults and social media by adding to the scant knowledge about older women as content-creators and identifies the ways older femininities are constructed and negotiated online.

Keywords: Older women, Social media, Agency, Online activism, Cultural conceptions, Ageing, Finnish women

Introduction
A 60+ year old woman announced on her blog post, “Once I receive my pension card, granny’s shenanigans will truly begin!” On another online platform, a group of older women proclaim that we need “granny attitude in the climate debate!” (Aktivistimummot, n.d.). These examples illustrate that not only have some contemporary older women adopted social media technologies as new instruments to exercise agency and self-representation, but the meanings related to the word “granny” are clearly on the move. This study explores a group of older women, namely Finnish grannies, who blog and participate in online environmental activism to gain a better understanding of the opportunities social media potentially grants older women.

On a global scale, social media has become a significant part of our sense-making and how we “do” everyday life (Lövheim et al., 2013). While the majority of research on social media activity has focused on younger age groups, older adults are also “moving towards more digitally connected lives” (Anderson & Perrin, 2017, p. 2). In many highly developed countries, older adults are the fastest growing user group of social media and the Internet (Eurostat, 2020a; Anderson & Perrin, 2017). In Finland, 91% of older adults in the age group 55-64 and 71% of the 65-74 age group used the Internet daily or almost daily in 2020 (OSF, 2020). Recent studies also indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled even more older adults to adopt new digital technologies to stay connected (Sin et al., 2021), resulting in a notable increase of social media use among adults 60 years and older (Emerson, 2020).

Engagement with online platforms for different purposes has become an important part of many older adults’ everyday lives (Szabo et al., 2019; Rasi & Kilpeläinen, 2016). Apart

1 Hanna Varjakoski is a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Turku, Faculty of Humanities, Finland and is a project researcher at the Department of Social Sciences, University of Eastern Finland. Her doctoral thesis investigates media portrayals of aging, older people, and later life and is situated at the intersection of cultural gerontology, humanistic media studies, and gender studies. Her other research interests focus on older people’s relationships with neighbors and questions related to aging, health inequalities, and digitalization.
from the usual online activities, such as banking, information seeking, and connecting with others, older adults have also entered the world of online dating (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014), online gaming (Carrasco et al., 2018), and blogging (Celdrán et al., 2019; Brewer & Piper, 2016). As the population ages, the social media community will consist of a larger segment of “silver surfers” (Fietkiewicz, 2017, p. 5) who have grown older along with social media.

Scholarly work regarding older adults’ social media use is typically conducted through the prism of digital divides (Yu et al., 2016; Friemel, 2016), health and wellbeing (Leist, 2013; Quinn, 2018) and discussion on the role of media technologies in compensating for physical, mental, and social challenges in later life (Givskov & Deuze, 2016, p. 2), such as decreased mobility and loneliness. While these topics are important, especially for developing a more inclusive and accessible society for older people, from a media studies perspective, the focus on health and wellbeing in social media research on older adults is somewhat limited.

Neves, Waycott, and Malta (2018) have also noticed that older adults aged 65 and above are often portrayed both in public discourse and in academic literature as digitally illiterate and technophobic. In addition, it is common to see older adults perceived as relatively passive consumers of digital content and social media, not as active content-creators whose activities in online environments entail creativity, pleasure, self-expression, identity construction, or political influence. As Richardson and associates note, most studies tend to see older people as just old, not as creative and resourceful (Richardson et al., 2011, p. 144).

Older adults who proactively create online content or disseminate their ideas through writing or videos have received little scholarly attention (Celdrán et al., 2019, p. 170). The emergence of older women Instagrammers, YouTubers, TikTokers, and bloggers, however, indicate that not all seniors are merely lurkers on social media. Despite older women’s increasing engagement with different online platforms, research on older women as content-creators and the online environment as an arena for doing age has been scarce. This is somewhat surprising, considering that girls and women have been a major focus of study on digital media and gender, resulting in an abundance of research exploring “the possibilities of girls and women gaining access to new technologies, being able to represent themselves rather than being represented, and resisting and disrupting norms of femininity” (Kanai & Dobson, 2016, p. 4). The existing research has mainly overlooked older women, the various affordances digital media potentially offer them, and the ways older femininities are constructed online.

This article investigates older women who identify themselves as “grannies” and create content in social media. Seeing older women as active subjects in online spaces emphasizes agency, which opens a space to challenge discourses and identities commonly offered to older adults through research (Jyrkämä, 2008, p. 193). The article also demonstrates that social media can provide an important arena where cultural conceptions and understandings of contemporary older women are negotiated and potentially diversified via self-representation.

The empirical data consists of online blogs written by Finnish “grannies” and online content created by a group of older women known as Activist Grannies (Aktivistimummot in Finnish). The latter started as a Facebook group and has since expanded their online presence to Twitter, YouTube, and their own website. With regards to social media, Facebook is the most widely used social media platform among the older age groups in Finland. Reading blogs is an equally common online activity for Finnish women across their life course: 61% of women aged 25–34, 45% of women aged 55–64, and 25% in the age group of 65–74 read blogs (OSF, 2020). Based on the popularity of Facebook and blogs among older Internet users, I chose to focus on these platforms, excluding Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, which are still marginally used by older age groups.

The word granny (mummo in Finnish) generally refers to a grandmother or to an old(er) woman. It is very common to see the words granny and grandmother used interchangeably and synonymously. The traditional conception of the word granny has strong associations with
backwardness, yesteryears, and technical incompetence (Vakimo, 2001, p. 198), which “grannies as active agents in social media” runs counter to. Moreover, in the existing research on digital technologies, “granny” or “grandma” is often rendered as the prime example of an older person struggling with digitalization and related issues. A granny is depicted as someone who needs encouragement and support in taking the leap to the right side of the digital divide (Luijkx et al., 2015), who uses social media mainly to keep in touch with family and friends (Ivan & Hebblethwaite, 2016), who finds it challenging to mediate any grandchildren’s digital media use (Nimrod, Lemish & Elias, 2020), and whose health and well-being benefits from the usage of the Internet (Yost et al., 2016). While the “granny” depicted in the studies above enacts agency by choosing to be digitally connected and by proactively searching for health-related information, current research still offers a rather limited comprehension of older women’s digital competencies and relationship with social media. In search of a more nuanced understanding of older women’s agential roles in social media, this article asks the following research questions: What kind of agency does social media potentially enable for older women? What kind of cultural knowledge about older femininities do granny blogs and activist grannies produce?

The article draws from and builds upon earlier research on media, older women, and aging (Dolan & Tincknell, 2012; Ylänne, 2012; Harrington et al., 2014), and theoretical discussions in cultural gerontology (Twigg & Martin, 2015). Regarding ethical consideration of using social media data, I followed the guidelines of AoIR’s Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0 (franzke et al., 2020) and Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics by Townsend and Wallace (2016). The data used in this study is openly available to the public and is unlikely to cause harm to the individuals generating the online content examined. The content published on Activist Grannies’ Facebook site, website, and other platforms is informative and intended to reach a wide public audience. The research focus on granny blogs is not aimed at analyzing the bloggers’ personal lives but looks at blogging as an arena of agency and self-representation. However, to preserve the anonymity of the bloggers, I only refer to the writers by their usernames.

About Grannies

According to Caldas-Coulthard and Moon (2016), the majority of public references to grandmothers (and old women in general) tend to carry negative associations, which resonates with Coupland’s observations that “granny performances” in media mainly recycle and draw on portrayals of older women as docile, dull, and unattractive (2013, p. 98). A recent study on Instagram, however, suggests that the ways in which grandmothers are portrayed in a family context is slightly more diverse, yet still limited to two opposing tropes: the cool, “badass” grandma and the frail, sick grandmother being cared for by family members (Barnwell et al., 2021, p. 15). In colloquial language and outside of the family context, the word granny is often used in a derogatory manner. For some women, being called a granny can be insulting, sexist, and demeaning (Rouse, 2019). However, being a granny obviously carries positive meanings too, since some women choose to identify as one despite the unfavorable connotations. Granny is also a flexible category since, in order to be a granny, one need not be either a grandmother or even old. Being a granny can be one way of doing age and presenting oneself to the world. For instance, a younger woman who enjoys handicrafts, baking, and staying home instead of going out might be considered a granny.2 Here, “doing granny” (or mummoilu in Finnish) relates to wider lifestyle trends in affluent Western societies, such as homing, which is characterized by younger women who revert to the home and domestic and familial contexts as their domain (Jäntti et al., 2018). Although exploring the homing phenomenon is beyond

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2 See for example, the website http://www.grannygirls.com.
the scope of this article, it is interesting to note that when younger women go granny, they return to the private sphere and to the home. The women in this article, on the contrary, turn outwards: they get involved in civic activities, seek change, travel the world, and occupy new roles outside the domestic arena.

In addition, prior qualitative research on older women has claimed that women over 50 can feel invisible and irrelevant, and that they are not “allowed” to have meaningful roles in life as they age (Hofmeier et al., 2017, pp. 8–9). However, being a granny can be a meaningful and empowering role for older women, both on a personal and societal level. Slogans like “granny power” convey that older women can be agentic, capable, and in control, thus inviting us to rethink the ways we have traditionally viewed older women. As a self-identification category, granny can be seen as celebrating aging and femininity and taking pride in being an older woman. This is at least the case for the grannies in this article; they are technologically savvy, environmentally aware, and have all kinds of expertise and resources accumulated from their life experiences. They may be mothers, grandparents, and wives but they also have interests and lives beyond the domestic space.

**Older Women in the Social Media Landscape**

There is a considerable amount of research evidence proving that traditional media is generally not inclusive of older women. Scholars have noted, for example, that women over sixty remain relatively invisible in the “media buzz” (Edström, 2018) and that most mainstream media tend to see older women as not particularly newsworthy or interesting (Edström, 2018; Halonen, 2002). However, with the advent of social media, the media landscape has become more participatory for its users, making it possible for older women to potentially move into the “arena of visibility” (Lazar et al., 2017, p. 663) and have more control over their image production. As Abidin notes, “users are now able to broadcast, control, and negotiate how they would like their identities and cultures to be perceived” (2018, p. 10).

For older women who identify as grannies, Instagram has offered opportunities for “glamorous grandmas” to become fashion influencers and “sassy grandmas” to trend on TikTok. According to Farinosi and Fortunati (2020) women social media influencers over 70 “are smashing myths and stereotypes around ageing, beauty, and society’s expectations” while offering “diverse, personal, and innovative perspectives on age and ageing” (2020, p. 46, 53). YouTube also provides a platform to overhaul ossified conceptions of older women and to imagine alternative ways to “do age” (see e.g., Kim, 2020 on a YouTuber called Korea Grandma). However, not all older women content creators on social media are or need to be subversive to be interesting. A good example of this is “Pasta Grannies” who cook traditional homemade pasta dishes on YouTube and have nearly 900k subscribers to their channel.

Overall, besides glamorous grandmas who underpin the idea that aging well or successfully requires consumption-based agency (see more in Katz, 2009), it is important that any older woman can participate in content-production by sharing their images, experiences, and outlooks on life. In this way, it is possible to obtain a better understanding of the individuality of aging and the diversity of older femininities, instead of just seeing older people as a homogeneous group, which as Givskov and Deuze (2016) rightly point out, is at odds with the knowledge presented by aging studies.

At a broader level, age representations in the media also shape the ways in which people see themselves as “old” and relate to others (Loos & Ivan, 2018, p. 164). Studies have found that younger people’s knowledge about aging can be poor, which in turn, can feed aging anxiety and ageist attitudes (Allan & Johnson 2009). Considering the scarce opportunities for individuals of differing age groups to meet and interact in many contemporary Western societies (see Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005), it is conceivable that for many young people today, social media representations are a significant source of cultural information about aging.
and older individuals. Therefore, the kind of content produced and circulated in the media landscape is significant. More favorable and diverse content about and created by older women has the potential not only to expand the cultural imagination of what later life and aging can be like, but also to alleviate possible ageist attitudes towards older people.

**Social Media Savvy Activist Grannies**

Activist Grannies started as a Facebook group in 2019, launched by twelve older Finnish women, to discuss and deliver science-based knowledge about climate change and offer guidance for living more environmentally friendly. Although any person may join the group regardless of age or gender, their environmental activism and concerns about the future of the planet are framed within the idea of “grandmotherhood” and concepts of caring, taking responsibility, and leaving the world better for future generations. This kind of granny activism can be viewed as a form of societal grandparenthood, which is tied neither to chronological age nor biological identities. The role of a caring granny figure is thus extended outside of the domestic notion in ways that serve global ends; that is, activist grannies are “caretakers of our planet” (Narushima, 2004, p. 31) and enablers of a more sustainable future.\(^3\)

The contradicting associations that “granny” and “activist” evoke undoubtedly have helped Activist Grannies to attract wider media attention since they came into existence online. Several Finnish newspapers and magazines have written stories about the group and published interview articles on the founding members. Even the online version of Euronews took notice of the group (Jansson, 2021), and Oatly, one of the largest companies in the global alternative milk market, featured a story about Activist Grannies on their website, granting the group media visibility outside of Finland.

The broader media visibility combined with the group’s active presence on different social media platforms helped Activist Grannies to reach nearly 6,000 members on Facebook within the first few months of the group’s activity. While the members consist of people of all ages, framing the environmental activism with a grandmotherly caring has possibly encouraged older women in particular to join the group and become more engaged with climate change debates, even if merely through liking, sharing, and commenting, which Picone and associates (2019) see as “small acts of engagement” and as an expression of everyday agency (p. 2010). As one of the founding members of Activist Grannies pointed out, older people do not have many opportunities to discuss environmental issues (Jansson, 2021), possibly due to a perceived lack of knowledge about environmental issues or a lack of easily accessible engagement opportunities (see Pillemer, 2021). However, for older citizens with the necessary digital skills and devices, the online environment has opened up new arenas and ways to participate, and to seek and receive information.

The Activist Grannies movement can be defined as social media activism (Velasquez & La Rose, 2015) since social media is essential for advocating the group’s cause, sharing information, expressing political views, and coordinating actions. In addition to participating in social media, Activist Grannies also organize seminars, participate in political influencing by meeting decision-makers and politicians, and collaborate with non-profit organizations, such as 4H Finland, in order to plant trees to increase the carbon sinks of Finnish forests. To recognize the group’s pro-environmental work, Activist Grannies received “The Grandparent of the Year 2021” award by the Union of Senior Services (VALLI ry in Finnish). According to the head of the union, Activist Grannies are giving a new meaning to the word granny with their concrete actions to mitigate climate change (Valli ry, 2021).

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\(^3\) The Finnish Activist Grannies have many points of contact with the North American groups “100 Grannies” and “Raging Grannies.” The Raging Grannies address environmental concerns, racism, sexism, and other forms of social and economic injustice. The movement also entails feminist objectives that aim to expose and dismantle the social and cultural devaluation of older women (see Hill, 2000; Narushima, 2004).
In the context of climate change debates, women and older people are usually positioned as being among the most vulnerable subjects (Arora-Jonsson, 2011, p. 744). Activist grannies fighting against climate change also form an important counter-narrative to younger people’s perceptions of the older generation as “out-of-touch with modern realities,” outdated and conservative, and therefore potentially delaying progress on important societal issues (Meisner, 2021, p. 57). In some ways, the concept of an activist granny suggests a rather radical departure from how grandmothers are culturally perceived; instead of being domestically oriented and keepers of traditions, activist grannies are clearly “agents of change” (McHugh, 2012, p. 282). Of course, women have in all periods been socially and politically active in their own groups and organizations, and Finnish women in particular have had a strong participation in public life. However, with advancing age, many older women encounter pressure to retreat from public and active roles (see also McHugh, 2012, p. 284) partly due to sociocultural norms that render activism, vocal stand-taking, and political influencing somehow inappropriate for older women.

Older women can be a valuable resource to society, yet this potential often goes unrecognized, and their contributions tend to remain invisible in public discourse. However, Activist Grannies’ media presence and social media activism have offered new ways to make visible the means by which older women can contribute to the common good. This is no minor issue considering that some scholars have claimed that there is a tendency to write off, undervalue, and render invisible older women’s social and political action (McHugh, 2012). Interestingly too, grannies as climate activists seem to attract far less online trolling and negative commenting in the media in comparison to their younger counterparts, such as Greta Thunberg. To some extent, a higher age and the granny framing (Chazan & Baldwin, 2019) work as an advantage by adding novelty and newsworthy value to the Activist Grannies’ endeavors. In addition, it renders the often emotionally charged debate on climate activism as less threatening through the positive association of grannies with gentleness and caring.

In terms of representational tropes, activist grannies are “cool” (cf. Barnwell et al., 2021) for tackling such a topical cause, namely climate change. Above all, the founding members of Activist Grannies are all highly educated women with resources, expertise, and a wide range of networks, and therefore have the possibility to make a difference. On their website, they state that the grannies represent a large group of voters, that is, older women and/or grandmothers, which further suggests that these women as a group possess notable political power. In general, activist grannies challenge the view of older women as being outdated and out-of-touch, vulnerable, and in need of help and protection. Participating in social media activism and self-representational practices also introduces new arenas and ways to engage in grannyhood. When the concerns about the future of our planet and younger generations are framed within ideas of grandmotherly caring and mentoring, the meaningful role of a granny is extended beyond the bounds of the domestic sphere and presents grannyhood as a source of strength and societal importance.

**Blogging Grannies**

Another arena where older women’s online presence as content producers and readers has steadily grown is the blogosphere. One indication of this growth is the emergence of blog portals especially intended for older bloggers. In Finland, “40+ blogs” is one such portal with over 30 blogs aimed at more mature bloggers. In addition, many lifestyle and women’s magazines aimed at older readers have a blog section on their web version for seasoned paid bloggers and for readers’ blogs.

Blogging is generally viewed as providing a space to share interests and ideas with the public, to build communities, to communicate with others, and to negotiate identities (Lövheim, 2011). Writing blogs has also been seen as a practice of agency which enables
bloggers to act as cultural contributors and offers opportunities to talk back (Keller, 2012). However, there is not a lot of research regarding older women bloggers and blogs as spaces of agency and self-representation for older women. To rectify the lack of attention given to older women bloggers, this section discusses blogs written by older Finnish women, who, according to their usernames, embrace the granny identity. The word granny in the context of these blogs seems to act, above all, as a marker of older age and gender since the bloggers only make occasional if any references to being grandmothers. The blogs can be categorized as personal blogs, but they are not commercial lifestyle blogs and do not contain sponsored posts or product advertising. The low interest in these bloggers among the mature market is curious, considering the growing power of the so-called gray economy and older adults’ increasing engagement with social media and consumer markets (Nunan & Di Domenico, 2019). Some older women fashion bloggers (Farinosi & Fortunati, 2020) obviously form an exception; however, these fashion bloggers are usually well-off women who represent the “golden ager” in terms of “glamorous and luxurious lifestyles” (Ylänne, 2015, p. 371). The Finnish granny blogs do not fit into this category and are more down-to-earth in style.

The granny blogs make the lives of older women culturally visible (cf. Jäntti et al., 2018, p. 900). Through their blog posts, bloggers share their lives, personal histories, interests, aging experiences, and lifestyles to a wider public. A few of the blogs have been active for several years now, and some bloggers post rather frequently. One 70+ blogger has published over 900 blog posts over the past five years. The topics covered in these granny blogs are highly diverse, ranging from retirement, aging, traveling, writing, gardening, hula hooping, painting, surviving cancer, working as an au-pair, and even going to a sex shop, to name a few. On the whole, these blogs provide a fruitful way to better understand the retirement experiences and leisure of older women, as some scholars have already suggested about blogging in later life (Genoe et al., 2016).

Processing life changes upon retirement or late-life divorce is discussed in many blog posts. These changes are seen as bringing an opportunity to “stop and not plan anything,” but also to seize new challenges and to discover oneself. As one blogger states in a rather humorous manner, “Now that I have turned sixty, it’s time to think what I want to do when I grow up.” Through blogging, these women can (re)negotiate their later life identities as a retiree or as a granny, as their usernames suggest too (see also Brewer & Piper, 2016). One blogger aptly notes that when work has played a significant part in her life for 49 years, transforming into a pensioner is not easy. To soften the transition from work life to retirement, this particular blogger decided to continue as a supervisor in her previous field of profession and to do volunteer work.

Blogs can help to understand how individual women experience and negotiate the aging process in relation to a wider way of thinking about aging. Most Finnish granny bloggers, for instance, write about aging-related bodily changes and how aging has impacted the ways they see and think about themselves. One blogger confesses that she would be lying if she said that getting older does not bother her. However, nowadays she has come to accept the visible signs of aging and cares less about how other people expect her to look and dress.

Besides offering a space for negotiating later life identities and processing various aging related issues, blogging provides opportunities for older women to exercise political agency, which surfaced when the blogs in this study were used to critically comment on ageist stereotypes and old age-related societal faults, including the poor state of care for the elderly and the sociocultural devaluation of older people. One blogger, for instance, was indignant

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4 The majority of the participants in Brewer and Piper’s (2016) qualitative study on blogging were women. Nevertheless, the study does not have a gender-sensitive approach, thus reinforcing the popular tendency to see older people as a homogeneous group and as not having gender.
because she felt that television programs often represent women over sixty in a degrading manner and as “idiots.” Indeed, when women blog about ageist attitudes encountered in real life or noticed in the media, they raise awareness about ageism by making these narratives visible (Lazar et al., 2017, p. 662; see also Brewer & Piper, 2016). This practice can also be considered as “everyday activism” in a digital space, which takes place through sharing personal stories with the aim to reshape social norms and catalyze social change (Vivienne, 2016). Older age may work as an advantage here, for older women potentially have more confidence in sharing their stories, taking stances, and expressing dissenting views. One recently retired blogger also pointed out that nowadays she can write without restraints since she no longer has to think about what colleagues and the like think about her texts.

In my interpretation, the granny blogs’ self-representations offer counter-narratives to the often demeaning and dismissive rhetoric that targets aging women in many online forums, tabloid magazines, and television shows in particular. While blogs often cannot compete with mass media in terms of audiences, blogging can allow these women to speak in the “arena of visibility” (Lazar et al., 2017, p. 663) and share in public topics and stories they find meaningful and interesting. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, through blogging, older women’s views and voices are conveyed as they wish (Celdrán et al., 2019, p. 175) and not by others which is often the case with the news media (Morgan et al., 2021).

In the granny blogs, aging appears as a liberating factor rather than a constraint, although they explore the downside of aging as well. Their blogs offer affirmative depictions of women’s aging and nuanced understandings of present-day grannies and encourage viewing higher age as a source of strength instead of a burden. Granny blogs also offer glimpses of the ways older women continue to participate in society by participating in volunteer work and sharing the wisdom they gained in their work lives. For instance, a blog authored by a retired teacher—who calls herself Digigranny—is a good example of the latter. Although the blog is more of an instructional website on how to use tablets and different applications, it nevertheless proves that many contemporary grannies, besides being digitally savvy, have plenty of expertise and willingness to share this expertise with others both online and offline.

Conclusion

Meanings related to older women are contingent and perhaps more in flux than ever before due to population aging. Contemporary women of 60+ in developed countries are more educated than the preceding generations of women. Most of these women live long and healthy lives, have participated in the labor market throughout their adult life, and continue to have active lifestyles after retirement. In 2020, the estimated remaining life expectancy for a 65-year-old Finnish woman was 22.3 years, which is over five years more than the expectancy in 1980, and currently amongst the highest in Europe (Eurostat, 2020b). In relation to these societal and cultural changes in women’s lives, it makes sense that cultural conceptions of older women and grannies are also diversifying. Social media offers one notable cultural arena where these differing conceptions can be negotiated and made visible.

This article demonstrated that social media has provided new opportunities for older women to become more engaged and more visible in society, which is important in developing a society that is more inclusive and accessible for older people. The article focused on Finnish grannies in the online environment and investigated how social media has enabled these women to exercise agency and self-representation through the practice of blogging and engagement with activism in online spaces. By taking on agential roles as leading figures in social media activism and as content-creators, these women also produced cultural knowledge about age, which existing research on social media has scarcely investigated.

Representational tropes in traditional media often lag behind the realities of many contemporary older women (Whelehan & Gwynne, 2014). The premise that social media
grants more control over cultural knowledge production entails significant potential for older women in terms of providing opportunities to deconstruct some ossified conceptions of age currently circulating in the mass media and beyond. The figure of a granny provides a good example of a standard categorization: both in public discourse and academic literature, grannies are often rendered as somehow incompetent with modern technologies and out of touch with the current world. However, this article has demonstrated that older women who identify as grannies in online spaces offer important counter-narratives to this out-of-touch conception by making visible older women’s contributory roles in society and highlighting higher age as a source of strength.

The analysis of the Finnish group Activist Grannies demonstrated that the role of a caring granny can be harnessed to serve the global good, in this case, to mitigate climate change. Granny activism in online spaces is a form of societal grandparenthood that extends beyond the domestic sphere and introduces a new way to do grannyhood. Blogging, on the other hand, offers older women an arena to voice ideas and interests to the wider public, and, at the same time, make the lives of older women more visible in society. Some granny bloggers in this study also used the platform to address ageist views about older women and to raise awareness about age discrimination, thus expressing political agency which otherwise might not be possible.

Considering the ubiquity of ageism in our society (Aylon & Tesch-Römer, 2018), social media offers one arena where discriminatory cultural conceptions can be challenged, which may help alleviate unfavorable attitudes towards older people in real life (Oró-Piqueras & Sibila, 2017; Trentham et al., 2015). The granny representations explored in this article entail this transformative potential by inviting us to reassess the roles, activities, and meanings traditionally granted to “grannies” and acknowledge that older women are a highly heterogeneous group with different interests, capabilities, and life situations. Further, considering how we are socialized to view aging in negative terms, producing more affirmative media imagery and understandings about aging can benefit women of all ages. For further research, it would be interesting to take a more detailed look at the comment sections of granny blogs and survey their followers since some of the blogs studied in this article seem to have young women readers too. Future research is also needed to better understand the diverse ways older adults engage with social media, how they use the opportunities provided by the Internet to contribute to more nuanced understandings of aging, and how older individuals exercise digital agency in later life.

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