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What's on the Telly?



The article explores pornographisation and processes of normalisation of pornography in mainstream Finnish television. The focus is on the broadcasting policies and practices of television-internet companies in relation to pornography and pornographisation.

By Jeff Hearn and Marjut Jyrkinen

In the research project, “Television-Internet Media Companies“ Policies and Practices, Young People and Pornographisation“, conducted at the Swedish School of Economics, Helsinki, we have explored pornographisation and processes of normalisation of pornography in mainstream Finnish television. This has focused on the broadcasting policies and practices of television-internet companies in relation to pornography and pornographisation.

The research covered five companies and eight mainstream television-internet channels in 2005 and early 2006. It has involved review of companies“ public policy documents, a questionnaire on their policies, interviews with top and

programme managers, and viewing and analysis of television broadcasts, internet and related material.

Many of the programmes and related activities that can be seen as including examples of pornographisation are designed for and often popular among young people. Although adults and young people may view television and use its related options differently, all programmes remain relevant in this study, because of the difficulty of controlling young people's viewing and ICT behaviour, and because "general" broadcasts are also viewed by young people. Some channels, such as Music Television MTV, focus mainly on young people, while Yleisradio's television programmes attract broader audiences. There is a clear "pornography-genre" in many music videos, particularly in (gangsta) rap, but also in some hip-hop and R&B videos. In our final report (Hearn & Jyrkinen 2006) we discuss this in some detail, but space limitations prohibit further analysis here. Television is a powerful everyday medium; its products are much more than programmes for viewing. Entertainment programmes often build around them a whole "family of products" – webpages, weblinks, chats, fan clubs and products such as T-shirts and caps with logos and slogans.

Pornographisation

The relation of pornography, sexualisation and pornographisation is complex. Pornographisation on television can be identified in terms of the use and influence of specific broadcasting forms and elements that indicate a liking for (promotion or approval of) pornography or that are themselves like (or are similar to) pornography. Pornography is here defined no longer only in its literal meaning of depictions of prostitutes, but, in its modern forms, in relation to the sex trade more generally. Pornographisation is embedded in contemporary culture in various forms and elements (Hearn and Parkin 2001; Jeffreys 2002; Nikunen et al. 2005), including:

- contexts, background and scenery ("visual wallpaper"), such as lap dancing, pole dancing or strip clubs;
- positive celebration of pornographers, porn stars or ex-porn stars, as celebrities, hosts, mainstream stars and so on;
- pornography-related short flashes, as in pop videos;
- dress (or lack of dress), most obviously (very) scantily dressed young women;
- physical, sexualised and erotic movements of people, especially conventionally attractive young women;
- characters within fictional "non-porno-graphic" broadcasts, for example,

prostitutes, vice squad;

- pornographic vocabulary, metaphor and constructions of relations of prostitution, for example, "Pimp my ride [car]";
- eroticisation of non-heterosexual sexualities, as in linking lesbians and gays with pornographic interests;
- human voice and other sounds, as in sounds of sexual arousal or music lyrics;
- specific programme genres, especially some "documentaries", for example, those celebrating Hugh Hefner and "Playboy" lifestyle; reality television, for example, use of pornography within "The Osbornes", and; comedy programmes, for example, use of or reference to pornography as humour;
- less usually, portraying pornography negatively within the narrative, and indirectly normalising pornography, for example, using pornography as a "disapproved" theme or within an erotic plot along with a counter "humanitarian" theme of rescuing women from under age prostitution.

These forms and elements can be found on television in: programmes themselves; cross-advertising of channels; direct advertising for (sometimes ambiguous) services, such as chats, dating services, telephone sex, prostitution; other product advertising; links with websites, mobile phone services and other media.

Mainstream television and pornographisation

In a short celebrity interview of three or four minutes with Teri Hatcher (broadcast Nelonen, 14.00 9th January 2006), the star of the US series "Desperate Housewives" was asked how she explained its success. She answered that because everything seemed so respectable on the surface and yet there were secrets underneath "I could be talking about a porn flick."

The quote gratuitously brings pornography into the conversation. It may indicate the analytical structure of pornography, both in the programme series and in the reflexive interview on the series. The remarks can be seen as part of processes of pornographisation on television.

Mainstream Finnish television includes relatively little pornography directly marketed as such; neither does it broadcast explicit pornography, at least not in full programmes or extended broadcasts. This is affirmed in mainstream channels' formal policies (http://www.yle.fi/yleista/pelis_k18.shtml). Since 2004 there has been a code of conduct on the mainstream channels in Finland marking programmes with "K" signs (K for "kielletty" – in Finnish "forbidden"). Programme

times are staggered, and programmes particularly inappropriate for children are broadcast later. This common code uses the following categories: K18 programmes (not suggested for under 18) not to be sent before 23.00; K15 (not for under 15) not before 21.00; and K11 (not for under 11) not during weekdays before 17.00. However, the system is often not being used for non-film broadcasts, such as series, music videos and documentaries; this is to be a surprising inconsistency. It is also much based on each channel's own evaluations. The companies and channels were quite satisfied with their own policies and practices on sex and violence. The code could be a solid policy framework for broadcasting; however, it is not totally "waterproof". While advertising of prostitution was criminalised in 2004, advertising of "other" sex services continues; text-television on many commercial channels opens up linkages to the sex trade through various new technologies, for example, banners of text-television often include links to advertising sites of "adult-sites" or sex telephone lines (Hearn & Jyrkinen 2000; Jyrkinen 2005). Digitalisation opens up many new challenges.

In some late night programmes there is direct and overt broadcasting of "erotic movies" and short clips of pornography – of different kinds, sometimes within other programmes, such as documentaries on the sex industry. Such broadcasts and different forms of pornographisation are distributed unevenly across channels. Within pornographisation, processes of construction of texts, images and practices positively value or make positive reference to pornography and the sex trade, for example, prostitution, often through complex intertextualities.

A general pattern in our viewing was that Yleisradio (YLE) television channels differed from other channels' broadcasts. We viewed approximately 250 hours television. The non-existence of commercial advertisements and the company's financing based mainly on television fees paid by viewers makes a difference. Yleisradio as a public service company seems to have a reputation that "safeguards" it from many offers of pornographic television programmes in sales and marketing. In one sense, Yleisradio has currently more freedom from pressures of pornographisation processes often present in other media. However, Yleisradio's television programmes are by not immune from the impact of pornographisation. Examples of this include: an interview of the most famous Finnish pornographer Tom Sjögren in "Mato, Pirjo, Pirjo" programme (YLE TV1 14th October 2005 19.30); programme advertisement of World Athletics Championships (YLE TV1 6th August 2005) where there was a summary of short eroticised "highlights" from World Athletic Championships in Helsinki, accompanied by the song "I am too sexy for my shirt"; and "Girl Traffickers"

detec-tive series (YLE TV2 30th June 2005 23.05), with a K15 sign, but included rape, striptease and sex club environment.

An example of links between pornography and mainstream television is "A Night with Rakel" (In Finnish "Yö Rakelin kanssa"). This was broadcast from Autumn 2005 as a Subtv talkshow hosted by Rakel Liekki, who is presented in the programme advertising as an ex-porn star. The talk guests were men (including sportsmen, musicians, writers, celebrity businessmen); the programme was filmed in bars, as if on a "night out". While the programme was not pornography, on Subtv's webpage there is a weblink to Liekki's "adult entertainment" webpages with, for instance, "services" and "gallery" (<http://www.subtv.fi/yorakelinkanssa/> link to <http://www.rakelliekki.com/suomi/base.html>).

A more composite example of pornographisation was an episode of "Muodon vuoksi" ["nip/tuck"], a US series about a cosmetic surgery clinic. The plot involved (i) a young boy as a voyeur to his therapist; he is then arrested for masturbating in public; (ii) background to action in a gym focused on woman's (silicon) breasts; (iii) during a surgical operation on a woman's vagina, the main character comments: "Now I feel horny". The surgeon replies: "This is your ideal woman, she must be extremely tiny" (no K signs added) (<http://www.mtv3.fi/muodonvuoksi/>).

In some US series, such as "The L Word" (in Finnish "L-Koodi") or "Sex and the City" (in Finnish "Sinkkuelämä"), marketed as offering new, liberating ways to talk about sexuality, particularly women's sexuality, a sexist "gaze" continues in many scenes. Some lesbian and other sex scenes are represented in similar ways to pornography. The "liberating" element(s) can be interpreted as much reduced, and instead presented as a "civilised" pack-age of woman-woman sex scenes that might interest some heterosexual (male) viewers. The "L Word" programme on MTV 9th August 2005 MTV3 started with the "filming" of a lesbian porn movie, with two women half-naked in public toilet, prior to a man in the movie coming in. Various sex scenes and action were also shown in a sex club (including Snoop Dogg playing a character "Daddy"). One of the women in the first scene is a missing person sought by a missing children agency, adding a contrary "humanitarian" aspect. The role of some rappers, as pop icons, impacts on many popular culture forms; their involvement in making music videos, (misogynist) music and the pornography industry needs further research.

There seems to be a gap between formal policies and practices on sexualisation, pornography and pornographisation. Apparent divergences between the

questionnaires and interviews, on one hand, and viewings, on the other, might be accounted for in several ways. These include variations in extent that pornography and pornographisation as constructed as separate; variations in understanding of what counts as pornography/pornographisation; spokespersons' lack of familiarity with detailed programme content.

Finally, as we were writing ...

... in the very final stages of writing the final report, the following broadcast appeared on YLE TV2 10.55 Sunday 26th March 2006. The programme continued until 00.45. "YLE Live: Mailman suosikit Hollywoodissa" [ABC and World Music Awards 2005] began with Beyoncé Knowles and Destiny's Child singing and dancing in very short "dresses", similar to "Baby Doll" nightdresses. The awards were introduced by James Denton, star of "Desperate Housewives", in formal evening suit, and a woman with porn star presentation in bra and panties and short jacket, who immediately striped off her jacket and invited three more women, similarly clothed, of different ethnicities, to writhe around and squirm over the man. He introduced Pamela Anderson (Playboy model, referencing pornography by her presence), followed by Snoop Dogg (rap artist and pornographer), and Destiny's Child. Philip Kirkorov, the best selling Russian pop artist, following, performing backed by men and women erotic dancers – the women in bras and panties and very short white "fur" jackets. That was the first 25 minutes.

YLE's policy is not to broadcast pornography; however, this example shows that some programmes broadcast messages that do indeed strongly suggest that they "like" (promote, celebrate or approve of) pornography or that they themselves are like (similar to) pornography.

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