

Abstract Objections to pornography as the commercialization of the intimate, as sexist or as generally harmful are voiced internationally, yet their investments and dynamics cannot be reduced to those expressed in the US in the wake of the sex wars. Addressing Finnish traditions of porn regulation, consumption and research, as well as the Nordic discourses of 'good sex', this article argues for the centrality of local histories in making sense of pornography. It conceptualizes pornography in terms of a dynamic nexus of actors, discourses, media economies, technologies and consumers that can only be studied through and within its specific articulations.

Keywords feminism, Finland, normativity, pornography, porn studies

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Healthy Sex and Pop Porn: Pornography, Feminism and the Finnish Context

Teaching and studying pornography outside the Anglophone academy poses particular challenges. Local histories are under studied, as are the variations in public sexual discourses and regulatory practices concerning sexually explicit representation. Focusing on the Finnish context, this article investigates the changing cultural position of pornography in relation to normative notions of 'good' and 'healthy' sexuality within the Nordic countries. Furthermore, by addressing the histories of porn regulation and use and the rise of scholarly interest in pornography, the article considers the role of feminist critique in a landscape that has not been shaped by the 'sex wars' as the USA has been. Public and feminist debates on pornography may be similar across national and geographical boundaries, but this does not mean that they are the same. Analysing their similarities and differences makes evident the diversity of the values and associations attached to pornography. It may also help in sketching out

different places from which to conceptualize pornography beyond the familiar and dualistic divisions that have dominated debates to date.

Regulation and feminism

The Nordic countries have enjoyed a certain pop cultural reputation as a ‘sanctuary for sexuality and pornography’, especially in the USA (Schröder, 1997; Sabo, 2005: 37): in the 1980s, Linda Lovelace, star of *Deep Throat* (1972) turned anti-porn activist, felt nervous about lecturing in Sweden and Norway as she knew Scandinavia to be ‘the porn capital of the world’ (Lovelace and McGrady, 1986: 171). But this imaginary landscape of pornographic abundance has worked to flatten out differences between the different countries of the area and their respective practices of regulation and control. Unlike Denmark or Sweden, which decriminalized audiovisual pornography in 1969 and 1971 and became important producers and exporters of porn, Finland had fairly strict legislation concerning pornography until the late 1990s. Following its parliamentary debates on pornography in 1970–1 inspired by the developments in the neighbouring countries, a group of conservative MPs made an attempt to ban pornography in Finland. In contrast, a memorandum by a governmental committee on the freedom of the press in 1973 suggested that only the distribution and public visibility – not the content – of pornography should be regulated, and that porn should not be displayed in public nor given to children (Jyränki, 2007: 93). But any such transformations were slowly implemented: the memorandum formed the basis for the governmental motion on reforming laws concerning pornography in 1997 – some 24 years later.

The 1973 memorandum (no matter how ineffectual) coincided with critiques of outdated moral codes of sexual demeanour, as voiced by the student movement, leftist women’s and youth organizations, and grassroots organizations promoting social, sexual and gender equality (Helén and Yesilova, 2006: 264). These critiques had already contributed to several important transformations, including free abortion on social grounds (1970), the decriminalization of homosexuality (1971) and the introduction of public sex education (1972). The women’s magazine, *Hopeapeili*, writing on pornography in 1979, associated the censorship of sexually explicit materials with an older generation’s ‘attitude towards sexuality, marked by fears, prohibitions and ignorance’ (Häyrinen, 1979: 53). A large comparative study of Finnish attitudes towards sexuality found that porn consumption was more common in the early 1970s than in any later decade, and not only amongst a younger generation (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2001). Although porn may not have been as culturally visible in the period between the 1970s and its

mainstreaming in the 2000s, its popularity certainly does not appear to be a recent phenomenon.

Until the deregulation of porn in the 1990s, the production, import, export, advertising and distribution of pornography were illegal, but it was not illegal to possess, import or export such materials for private use. In practice, porn was available. Domestic porn production consisted mainly of porn magazines with an impressive circulation – over 100,000 per issue in a country with a population of less than 5 million. These were widely and not too inconspicuously sold in shops and kiosks (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2001: 258). As sex magazines became more hard-core in the early 1980s, the Ministry of Justice and Rautakirja, the main distributor of sex magazines in the country, introduced more specific regulations (Kontula and Kosonen, 1994: 265–6). In 1988, Rautakirja banned displays of child porn, bestiality and violent sex in magazines sold in Finland, along with images featuring sex toys or other aids, semen, anal and oral sex. Intercourse could only be depicted if the partners' bodies were not cropped. (Kontula and Kosonen, 1994: 270; Korppi, 2002: 172–3.) Films faced more systematic censorship and became available only in select theatres, while films and videos imported illegally from Sweden, Denmark and West Germany were sold under the counter in tobacco shops and sex shops. The first domestically produced porn films date from the mid-1980s. Shot abroad on modest budgets, they attracted little attention. (Korppi, 2002: 147, 150–1.)

Good Nordic sex

As Wencke Mühleisen notes, the Nordic countries 'have a closer affiliation between feminism, state, institutionalized politics, and research' than many other European countries (Mühleisen, 2007: 176; see also Husu, 1998: 45 on the Finnish context). In spite of their differences, they share strong traditions of social democracy, welfare state projects and gender equality politics. These have been coordinated on a Nordic level since 1974 by the Nordic Council of Ministers (Peltonen, 2003: 50). So although it may be an obvious point, it is important to note that the Nordic contexts for public discussions of pornography differ from those in the USA or the UK where the 'sex wars' of the 1970s and 1980s have an enduring legacy. The sex wars did not catch fire in Finland. Throughout the 1970s the Finnish women's movement was more concerned with equality in the workplace and the development of public childcare; a radical feminism, which challenged the androcentricism of notions of gender equality, remained rather marginal. A shift from equality discourse to feminism took place in the early 1980s (Holli, 1995: 17, 23–4.)

While both Finnish feminists and social equality activists have certainly objected to pornography from the 1970s onwards, it has failed to become as iconic a feminist issue as it has been in North America. However, as Don Kulick (2005: 211–13) argues, in the Swedish context North American anti-porn feminism has become a form of hegemonic state feminism. International anti-porn scholars are invited to seminars organized by the government in Nordic countries, and pornography – along with other forms of commercial sex – tends to be seen as a social problem. Yet objections to pornography and attempts to regulate it are primarily underpinned, not by Christianity but by concerns about gender equality and, in Finland, sexual health. In Nordic countries, pornography has been associated with the oppression of women, the commercialization of intimacy and potential harm to children. Critiques of porn draw on definitions of ‘good’ (non-commercial, vanilla, committed, couple sex, straight) and ‘less good’ (commercial, kink, promiscuous, group sex and other) forms of sexuality (Kulick, 2005; Warner, 2000). According to Kulick (2005: 208), the Swedish model of good, healthy and natural sex involves ‘socially approved, mutually satisfying sexual relations between two (and only two) consenting adults or young adults who are more or less sociological equals. It must not involve money or overt domination, even as role-playing. It should occur only in the context of an established social relationship’.

This normative model of ‘good sex’ obscures a plethora of practices and preferences, enabling one particular sex positive public discourse while marking others as unacceptable and even pathological. But this does not mean that such normative notions go unchallenged, or that individuals are confined by them. In Finland, the gay S/M club, Motorsport Club of Finland (MSC), started in the mid-1970s. While various kinks were effaced from print pornography and the video law regulated access to sexually explicit materials in the 1980s, the radical lesbian collective, *Ekstaasi* (‘Ecstasy’), organized its own events and published the anthology, *Julmia naisia* (*Cruel Women*), in 1989. Since 1991, parties by Kinky Club, largely organized by women, have continued this tradition; BDSM and fetish subcultures have become more organized with the SMFR (‘S/M fetish group’) association and parties and events are held in cities across the country. The late Tom of Finland (aka Touko Laaksonen), whose drawings have had considerable impact on the iconography of gay leather cultures since the mid-1950s, remains one of the internationally best-known Finnish artists. Kink practices have evolved as urban subcultures and are considerably resistant (and in opposition) to articulations of ‘good sex’.

However, this model of ‘good sex’ has been central to public sex education. Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce compulsory sex education to schools in 1955 and attracted considerable

international attention doing so. In Carl Gustaf Boëthius' (1985: 276) view, this development gave rise to a myth, in the USA in particular, of Sweden as 'peopled by healthy, sexually athletic blondes' educated in the clinical details of sex since the kindergarten. In Finland, public sex education was only included in the school syllabus in 1972 (Helén and Yesilova, 2006: 264; Liinamo, 2005: 14) and Finnish sex policy has revolved around the notion of sexual health, both in the sense of overall well-being and the avoidance of STDs. As Ilpo Helén and Katja Yesilova (2006: 258) point out, this sexual ethos is liberal, heavily influenced by psychotherapy and emphasizes 'personal autonomy, socially responsible sexual conduct and equality'. According to an ideal of 'healthy sex', individuals should not abstain from sex or deny their sexuality, but exercise sex as a form of self-expression and in order to maintain physical and mental wellbeing.¹ Sexual health also requires that individuals are not led astray by 'false interpretations', 'myths' or 'slanted attitudes' towards sex (Helén and Yesilova, 2006: 267).

Pornography's commercial underpinnings, hyperbolic displays of gender difference and relations of control, demonstrations of casual sex and indifference to health issues such as STDs ensure that it is easily identified with 'false interpretations', 'myths' and 'slanted attitudes' towards sexuality. Public reports and memoranda by the Finnish Board of Film Classification, the Council for Gender Equality, the Development Centre for Welfare and Health and the Ministry of Justice position pornography as an atypical preference, potentially harmful at an individual and social level (Karjalainen, 2004: 35–6), as a possible threat to health, as offensive (Anttila, 2004), and as facilitating prostitution and the objectification of women (Hänninen, 2002: 23).

But this framing of public concern is difficult to align with the enduring popular appeal of pornography. Haavio-Mannila and Kontula's 2001 study found Finnish attitudes towards pornography becoming considerably more positive during the 1990s (even if more porn was consumed in the 1970s).² Attitudes were more positive than in Sweden and there were also smaller differences in the attitudes among women and men: 63 per cent of young women and 87 per cent of young men found pornography 'very arousing', while 40 per cent of women and 80 per cent of men under the age of 33 had watched porn films during the past year (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2001: 258–61). According to Kontula's (2008: 87) more recent study, attitudes towards porn have not changed much since the new legislation took place. Meanwhile, practices of porn consumption have been changing: in the newer survey, 70 per cent of young men had watched porn films and 80 per cent had used online porn during the past year. Young women, again, preferred watching porn films – 43 per cent – over online porn – 20 per cent – (Kontula, 2008: 248–9).³

Contemporary Finnish debates on pornography have tended to focus on child pornography, and on the role and effect of pornography and its mainstreamed soft-core variants in the lives of children and teenagers (Anttila, 2004; Näre, 2002; critically analysed in Sorainen, 2007). The increased accessibility and mainstreaming of pornography have been also investigated in a Nordic research project, 'Young People, Gender and Pornography' (2004–6).⁴ Interestingly, this found no differences in the accessibility of porn across the different countries, even though porn legislation is considerably stricter in Iceland, Faroe Islands and Norway than Sweden, Denmark or Finland. In this sense, the internet appears to be a great equalizer, overriding local regulatory practices. The project found no significant differences in young people's opinions on pornography, and pornography appeared to be a mundane element of young people's lives, albeit one that is used and discussed with a considerable degree of critical reflection.

Porn goes pop

Finland faced something of a porn renaissance around the millennium. In 1999, the existing 1927 law regulating offences against 'sexual discipline and decency' and the distribution of obscene materials was replaced with a law banning the production and distribution of violent and animal pornography, and the production, distribution and possession of child pornography (see Jyränki, 2007). It became illegal to sell soft-core pornography to under 15-year-olds and hard-core pornography to under 18-year-olds. In 2001, an earlier (1987) law banning the distribution of all films with a 'K-18' rating (that is, violent or sexually explicit films not suitable for under 18-year-olds – Samola, 1989: 197–8) was abolished.

There were several reasons for this liberalization. Perhaps most obviously, the old law, while often interpreted creatively, was both vague and outdated. Secondly, as porn distribution had increasingly shifted online, the accessibility of a virtually endless range of niches, tastes and kinks rendered conventional forms of regulation ineffective and impossible to maintain. The third set of reasons drew on broader debates about commercial sex. In the early 1990s, as Finland faced deep recession, sex clubs and topless karaoke bars mushroomed in both urban and rural centres. With an influx of sex workers from the former USSR, the sex trade gained unprecedented visibility while also becoming more organized (Hearn and Jyrkinen, 2007: 31–6). International efforts to fight child pornography and the sexual trafficking of women were increasingly discussed (e.g. Saarnivaara and Sava, 1996; Vartti, 1996). All this made it necessary to distinguish between

illegal activities (such as child porn and sex trafficking) and acceptable ones ('regular' porn, unobtrusive soliciting).

There were also transformations in the media environment. Soft-core films had become available on commercial television in 1987, and by the mid-1990s the Finnish media were being diagnosed as 'eroticized' and 'overflowing with sex' (Hietala, 1996: 18–19; Kontula and Kosonen, 1994: 17). In the early 2000s, hard-core films were available on Pay-TV and for free as part of the nightly diet of the Helsinki-based cable channel, ATV, alongside nude newscasts. Another cable channel, MoonTV, showed *Pornostara* (*Porn Star*, 2000–3), a programme consisting of porn film reviews, interviews and reports on 'adult events'. *Pornostara* also featured two sections starring Rakel Liekki, the visual artist, columnist and porn performer: in *Välinetesti* (*Tool Test*), she tested sex toys and in *Rakelin ja Lassin Panokoulu* (*Rakel and Lassi's Shag School*), guided heterosexual couples in sex techniques (see Nikunen and Paasonen, 2007: 31–3).

Female porn performers such as Liekki, Mariah or Emilia, Laura Lee and Sabina of ELS productions were central to the redefinition of pornography in Finland. These women, making their own films and even owning their own companies, ran up to two thirds of Finnish film porn production in the early 2000s⁵ (Korppi, 2002: 294). Their work had the effect of framing porn as an arena of female agency and sexual experimentation – and also as something exciting and risqué. The popular media largely embraced this development and Liekki in particular became something of a national celebrity (Nikunen, 2005; Nikunen and Paasonen, 2007). In contrast to 1990s' sensationalist depictions of porn performers, these female porn professionals were celebrated as savvy, intelligent and independent (Nikunen, 2005).

The strong presence of young and articulate female entrepreneurs and TV personalities such as Liekki – then in her early 20s, or Sami Hernesaho, the enthusiastic, boyish and smiling host of *Pornostara* – helped to frame pornography as fun and trendy (Nikunen and Paasonen, 2007: 31). It also worked to distance porn from well-known figures like Tom Sjöberg, one of the grand old men of Finnish porn, also known as a boxing promoter and owner of an erotic club with connections to the criminal underground. *Pornostara* featured camp references to this older generation of porn producers: the show's logo used a silhouette of a man against flowery yellow 1970s wallpaper, sporting sunglasses, moustache and a beard, and bearing some resemblance to Lasse Braun, the self-titled 'King of Porn' and undoubtedly the best-known Scandinavian porn producer of the 1960s and 1970s. *Pornostara* exemplifies how porn was taken up as urban youth culture and cut off from connotations of sexism and of vintage sleaziness. This was certainly only a partial reframing of

porn (no radical change in terms of gender or age occurred in the ownership of print publications, web enterprises and video distribution), yet one with some impact on local public discourses on pornography.

All in all, transformations in legislation, media policy and the availability of porn online facilitated the mainstreaming of pornography in Finland, as well as in other Nordic countries. In addition, scholars have noted the increasing tendency of mainstream media culture to flirt with soft-core elements in advertising, cinema, TV, games and music videos (McNair, 2002; Nikunen and et al., 2005; Sørensen and Knudsen, 2006). In recent years, street advertising for women's underwear has provoked debate about the sexualization of public space and the ubiquity of soft-core (Rossi, 2005, 2007). It should be noted that nudity is not exactly taboo in Finland: sauna culture, for example, involves social nudity on a daily basis and complaints from television viewers are twice as likely to concern violence as displays of nudity or sex (Hearn and Jyrkinen, 2007: 70, 105). Debates about street advertising have focused on sexism rather than sex and it is striking that flirtation with soft-core codes in commercial cultures has evoked more dismay than the increased accessibility of hard-core pornography.

Finnish porn studies

The increased public visibility of pornography has recently inspired a range of studies internationally, ranging from the local uses of pornography (McKee and et al., 2008) to its international histories (Sigel, 2005), online variants (Jacobs and et al., 2007; Waskul, 2004) and media cultural forms (Gibson, 2004; Lehman, 2006; Williams, 2004). Following this trend of renewed interest in pornography, two projects were launched in Finland in 2003. An anthology, *Jokapäiväinen pornomme* (*Our Daily Porn*), published in 2005, addressed the mainstreaming of pornography in media culture and in 2004, a research project titled 'Pornoakatemia' ('Porn Academy') received funding from the Academy of Finland. The Porn Academy project involved a series of seminars and an international conference and an anthology was published in 2007. Classes on pornography were taught in at least four universities as part of women's studies and media culture curricula during the same period.

In the USA, classes on pornography have regularly gained negative media attention aided by bodies such as 'Accuracy in Academia', a conservative organization which condemns leftist, feminist, queer and post-colonial courses as biased and dangerous to the moral fibre of the nation (Jablonski, 2001; see also Jenkins, 2004). This kind of criticism has been notably absent in Finland, where pornography is more likely to be seen as a challenging subject. In the student feedback to the two *Pornopedagogia*

(‘Porn Pedagogy’) classes that I taught in 2005 and 2006, pornography was considered a difficult, heavy, important, interesting and thought-provoking topic. While not all students felt equally comfortable watching and discussing porn in the classroom, such spaces for collectively making sense of pornography were felt to be important in terms of media culture and women’s studies curricula. The exclamation in one of the feedback papers – ‘A course like this (should be) compulsory in every university’ – while understandably pleasing to the teacher, is hardly representative, yet it is notable that none of the feedback objected to the courses or the clips shown (although some students did wish that these had been fewer and shorter). On the contrary, students wanted more classes on pornography – and, to my surprise, some wished these to be longer. Enthusiastic classroom encounters have been my key personal motivation for continuing to study pornography: student essays have in many instances conveyed a rare level of engagement, and critical classroom discussions have definitely fed into my own investigations.

The initial treatment of the Porn Academy project, however, is an important exception to the serious attention generally paid to porn studies in Finland. *Ilta-Sanomat*, the largest evening newspaper, published a double page article titled, ‘The state gives 256,000 Euros to porn research’, illustrated with photographs of S/M gear (18 November, 2004). Harri Kalha, the director of the project, was quoted as commenting that ‘we will not travel around the world and watch porn movies with the money, as fun as that would be’ – probably not realizing that his statement would end up in the next day’s paper in large print. Soon after, a populist politician raised an inquiry in the Finnish parliament on the appropriateness of funding porn research with ‘tax payers’ money’, but given the Minister of Culture’s defence of the project the inquiry had little effect.

In his analysis of the short-lived debate, Kalha (2007: 29–31) sees it as exemplary of the intertwining of desire and rejection at the heart of pornography’s economy of desire. In order to function as a ‘forbidden fruit’, porn necessitates moral outrage and attempts at censorship (cf. Kuhn, 1994: 21) which help to maintain some of the guilty pleasure related to porn in spite of its ubiquitous presence. The debate fuelled by *Ilta-Sanomat* concerned the appropriateness of pornography as an object of study and appropriate ways of studying it. In contrast to the Nordic project on youth and pornography, equally funded with ‘tax-payers’ money’ yet following the publicly sanctioned discourse of social concern, the Porn Academy research was implicitly associated with the leisurely and pleasurable uses of porn.

This treatment was nevertheless exceptional and specific to the populist evening newspapers. Like *Our Daily Porn*, the Porn Academy conference

and anthology received positive coverage in the cultural pages of *Helsingin Sanomat*, the largest Finnish daily newspaper. All in all, Finnish scholars studying porn do not have a shortage of opportunities to perform as discussants in the media and it is not uncommon for journalists to have read some of their work. Rather than being dismissed as frivolous, academic porn studies have been received in the Finnish media with notable enthusiasm.

Yet although the sex wars were not fought in Finland, they do have a certain legacy as a ‘tired binary’ logic (Juffer 1998: 2) in which porn becomes a symbol of either sexual violence or sexual liberation. Journalists routinely frame their questions accordingly (as in the perennially favourite question, ‘but is porn good or bad?’). Before the 2000s, the Finnish media tended to rely on four authorities when it came to pornography: feminist sociologist, Sari Näre, who has published widely on commercial sex (Näre, 1986, 1994, 1998, 2002), film scholar, Veijo Hietala, who has conceptualized pornography in the context of the ‘sexual revolution’ (Hietala, 1996, 2001), journalist, Walter de Camp (aka Kari Lempinen), known for his enthusiastic probing of pornography and fetish cultures (Camp, 1990, 1997; Lempinen, 1988) and sexologist, Osmo Kontula, who has carried out extensive studies of Finnish sexual cultures (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2001; Kontula, 2008; Kontula and Kosonen, 1994). Since the late 1980s, ‘the feminist’ stance on porn has been largely identified with Näre, who defines pornography as a form of public harassment and violence against women with a negative impact particularly on the sexual autonomy of girls. Hietala, de Camp and Kontula have – in differing ways – seen porn in a more positive light. Although the recent Finnish porn studies have been diverse, feminist analyses are still strongly identified with anti-porn views, and particularly so in the popular media.

Studying pornography in Finland poses some challenges due to the limited number of previous studies; communication scholars do not include sexually explicit materials in overviews of Finnish media; case studies of domestic porn remain scarce (Kangasvuo, 2007; Kontula and Kosonen, 1994; Kyrölä, 2005; Lind, 2000; Nikunen, 1996, 2005; Näre, 1986); porn histories have been mainly narrated in the memoirs of porn professionals (Korppi, 2002); and the uses of pornography have largely been studied as part of broader surveys on sexuality (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2001; Kontula, 2008), using quantitative methods which do not allow the investigation of content or context (cf. Attwood, 2005). This situation is hardly exceptional; studies of media history have generally paid little attention to pornography, and where they exist, porn histories have focused largely on developments in the USA. European histories have – with the exception of literary pornography – been rarely touched upon. Consequently, scholars studying and teaching pornography draw on

Anglo-American case studies and there is a risk that Anglo-American developments come to stand for developments ‘in general’. Teaching and studying porn necessitates acts of translation that are not merely linguistic in nature (although they are also that) but also contextual and tied to local differences in regulation, public discussions and discourses of sexuality.

Pornography, the evasive denominator

At the heart of Finnish discussions about pornography lies the paradoxical fact that the concept and phenomenon under discussion is elusive indeed. Current legislation mentions pornography only in terms of its forbidden varieties. The Finnish broadcast company refrains from showing ‘pornography’ without defining what it understands by this (Hearn and Jyrkinen, 2007: 68, 71). Debates on the pornification of culture include soft-core and hard-core aesthetics and their circulation in mainstream popular culture, along with sexual depictions more generally, which can result in a certain imprecision (Hearn and Jyrkinen, 2007; see also Kalha, 2007; Mühlleisen, 2007: 174–5). In the two Finnish ‘porn studies’ anthologies to date, the case studies include porn films, street advertising, fashion photography and moral panics about pro-anorexia web sites.

What one person defines as pornographic is nothing of the sort for another. Thesauruses define pornography as sexually explicit texts intended for sexual arousal; notions of obscenity frame pornography in moral terms, casting it as immoral and damaging; juridical definitions in the USA have seen porn as lacking in ‘redeeming’ or ‘serious’ social or cultural values of the kind that can be found in art (Ross, 1989: 181). Anti-porn critiques see porn as a form of male violence against women, while ‘erotica’ is used to mark acceptable sexually explicit depictions as opposed to unacceptable ones. The euphemisms preferred by porn distributors, such as ‘adult films’ or ‘erotic entertainment’, further complicate the picture. In my own background of cinema studies, pornography is a marker of genre, rather than a pejorative denominator connoting judgements of quality or appropriateness.

This elusiveness has been a central theme in, and motivation for my own classes on pornography. In this last section, I discuss the first course of its kind, a 2005 women’s studies seminar titled ‘Pornopedagogia’ (‘Porn Pedagogy’) in terms of the analytical possibilities that surfaced from it. Attended by 14 graduate-level students minoring in women’s studies, the course provided an introduction to academic porn debates and the development of the genre in the historical context of media technology, regulation, aesthetics and politics. While the students’ individual ideas on pornography and its meaning ranged considerably (from pronounced lack of interest to objection and considerable engagement), they shared an

interest in studies of sexuality. Rather than acting as transparent starting points of any kind, definitions and meanings of pornography were introduced as questions to be investigated in student essays and discussed in the classroom. With active student participation, the class became a shared effort of making sense of pornography, yet one without the aim of arriving at any consensus concerning it.

In the spring of 2005, neither of the Finnish anthologies on pornography had come out and the reading consisted of articles by Anglo-American authors, ranging from Andrea Dworkin to Lynne Segal, Laura Kipnis, Anne McClintock, Richard Dyer and Linda Williams. As a teacher, my aim was to provide background for the readings (their theoretical premises, methods and possible aims) and to outline the different paradigms of academic porn studies in order to support students' case studies. Addressing the dividing lines of the sex wars – a theme difficult to escape in feminist and queer studies of porn – I was struck by a feeling of detachment. There may be a shared genealogy in terms of feminist studies, but less so when it comes to local porn histories and sexual discourses. Contextualizing such readings involves teaching US porn histories, and US traditions of feminist activism and research, equality politics and public sexual discourses. These may strike a familiar chord, yet they come with different dynamics and investments.

Rather than endlessly returning to the dualistic logic of anti-porn and anti-anti-porn, censorship and freedom of speech, either as an anchor of argumentation or a dynamic to depart from – and by necessity narrated through US histories – I think that we could use a different place from which to start. We might be better off considering the ways in which certain texts become understood or categorized as pornographic in terms of taste, genre and context of distribution, and how they circulate in media culture (see also Kalha, 2007: 19). The role, form and meaning of pornography in contemporary culture result from a network of different factors including (but not limited to) porn performers, producers and distributors, legislation, media, economy, research and various forms of expertise, politics, popular culture and hierarchies of taste.

In other words, what is at stake is a complex and dynamic nexus that makes it impossible to fix the meanings of pornography, for this would assume unity of intention, form, content, effect and meaning within the pornographic. In spite of its frequent use as a cultural symbol, pornography is not, and never has been, a monolithic entity. Consequently, one cannot study 'pornography' but certain *articulations* of the pornographic and its co-articulation together with politics, values and cultural phenomena (for example, understandings of porn as 'violence', 'offensive', 'subversive', 'camp' or 'fun'). Taking seriously the diversity of pornography grows ever more important with its increased accessibility

and diversification online. Context-sensitive investigations enable critiques of porn production and representational conventions without presenting them as categorical condemnations of the entire genre. Categorical judgments about the genre – be these celebratory or condemnatory – have increasingly little critical leverage and pose serious limitations to an analytical agenda.

Conclusions: feminist options

There is more to considerations of local context than the obvious observation that ‘things are different elsewhere’. What I am suggesting is that with pornography, analyses of local contexts work to diversify not only understandings of the genre, its development and regulation, but also possible feminist engagements with it. *Not* entering porn studies from the dynamics of the sex wars allows us to refuse its dualistic legacy in and for feminist investigation and start from a different place – for example, one that does not assume the analysis of one set of materials to metonymically speak of all pornography. Understanding US feminist debate as *the* feminist debate – as has happened in Finland (Kontula and Kosonen, 1994: 304–5) – obscures the simple fact that the terms of the US debate are not internationally applicable. Discussions on pornography may also be flattened into debates for and against in a Nordic context, yet this does not mean that the political investments are the same. In Finland, feminist porn debates have been less passionate, conservative Christian perspectives remain rather subdued and institutional sex discourses advocate active sexuality over sexual abstinence. The nexus of the pornographic, as sketched earlier in this article in the Finnish context, involves legislation, agents and practices of production, distribution, regulation and consumption, media representations, discourses on sexuality, gender politics and research agendas. While mapping these dynamics makes evident the impossibility of identifying a singular ‘Finnish discourse’ concerning pornography, it is possible to identify some of its recurring characteristics, such as the popular media’s simultaneous embrace and condemnation of pornography (as daring and titillating, yet improper and risqué), the public discourses of good and healthy sex, and the firm popularity of porn among media consumers, women included.

In her discussion of Nordic new feminism, Wencke Mühliesen (2007) points out that in the UK and USA, the sexualization of culture, including the production of sexually explicit representations by women, tends to be associated with a form of de-politicized postfeminism that has emerged from an anti-feminist backlash – as individualism with neo-liberal overtones. But in Nordic media culture feminist issues have actually become revitalized; in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, a wave of

publications and debates have addressed the shortcomings of gender equality projects and made claims to sexual freedom, pleasure and experimentation (Mühleisen, 2007: 177). Although these claims are in line with the Nordic discourse of 'sexual health' and good sex, they also involve the embrace of kinky, casual and commercial sex, which have traditionally been labelled as less healthy.

This Nordic development has been less apparent in Finland where, in spite of institutionalized gender equality discourses, popular media tend to frame feminism as the female equivalent of chauvinism or sexism; as man-hating and excessive radicalism. Recently, sociologist Anna Kontula (2009) has argued for a more sex-positive feminism and critiqued older generations' normative views on sexuality, forms of commercial sex included. It is also possible to see Rakel Liekki, a porn star and a self-identified feminist, as representative of a feminism that emphasizes active female sexual agency, pleasure and experimentation and is notably irreverent towards established norms of 'good sex'. Liekki claims that she has control over her work and emphasizes the fairness of her working conditions, framing her films as 'locally grown' and 'fair trade' pornography with strong female authorship (Nikunen and Paasonen, 2007: 36). This brand of feminism may not be recognized as such by everyone and – like the new Nordic feminist authors discussed by Mühleisen – it could be accused of an individualistic focus on personal pleasure. Yet Kontula and Liekki have contributed to a broadening of public sexual discourses in Finland when it comes to the meanings of commercial sex, challenging the conflation of pornography, prostitution and sexual trafficking into a single phenomenon characterized by the victimization of women (e.g. Hearn and Jyrkinen, 2007).

This diversification of public sexual discourses involves the possibility of moving from moralizing to ethics – that is, from mandating similar sexual tastes or practices for everyone (in the guise of good or healthy sex) to considering sexual tastes and practices as choices involving particular ethics, social agreements and arrangements (cf. Warner, 2000: 4). The Nordic model of 'good' and 'less good' sex is in crisis. The ideal of sex as detached from money has been challenged in critiques of the financial underpinnings of marital intimacy (for example, Kipnis, 2003; Zelizer, 2005), and it is increasingly difficult to mark everyday practices as separate from the exchanges and dynamics characterizing consumer culture at large. In Finland, kink subcultures, queer analyses of sexuality, the sex discourses of popular media and the framing of porn as trendy have all worked to erode the boundaries of 'good sex' (whereas in Sweden women's sex toys have recently been added to the product selection of state-owned pharmacies). Taking seriously the continuing popularity of pornography and its different forms and audiences necessitates a stepping

away from categorical definitions of the morally acceptable towards those which account for the specificities of sexual desires, imageries and practices, as well as their ethical implications. In Nordic countries with their state-mandated pro-sex discourses, shifting the public discussion of commercial sex, and, more specifically, pornography, from the field of morality to that of ethics should not be a radical move.

Studies of pornography, grounded in local histories and contexts, enable critical analysis of regional developments and debates, as well as theorizations of porn that do not make false claims concerning their own generality (be this in terms of geographical locations, subgenres, working practices or experiences of porn). Rather than theorizing broadly about a genre, the definitions of which are multiple, debatable and shifting, this means accounting for specific instances and articulations of the pornographic. Considering pornographies in the plural as they are produced, circulated and consumed across cultures is one means of arriving at the kind of critical and ethical leverage that is necessary for porn studies, if it is to break away from the dualistic legacy of the sex wars and to productively contribute to the broadening of public discourses on sexuality and commercial sex.

Notes

1. A similar understanding of a satisfactory sex life as equally important for women and men and as the basis of a happy relationship (or, more specifically, marriage) has been traced back to Finnish 19th-century agrarian culture (Stark-Arola, 2001: 13–14).
2. Whilst this may seem paradoxical, it should be noted that the definition of the pornographic has been subjective in all the surveys carried out since the 1970s: respondents have been simply asked ‘[Have you] read or browsed some book or magazine during the past year that you could define as pornographic?’ This is noteworthy since porn imageries (as distributed in porn magazines) in 1971 were a far cry from those of today. (Kontula, 2008: 246–7).
3. The 1999 survey did not include online pornography, so the effects of the new porn legislation would have been too early to document.
4. The findings of the project ‘Unge, køn og pornografi i Norden’ have been published as a final report (Sørensen and Knudsen, 2006) as well as three volumes edited by Anette Sørensen and Susanne Knudsen in 2007, subtitled *Kvalitative studier*, *Kvantitative studier* and *Mediestudier* (2007a, 2007b, 2007c).
5. In the mid-2000s, Rakel Liekki retired from porn at the age of 25, as did Mariah after a decade-long career. ELS Production is no longer in operation but Laura Productions (est. 2004) continues the tradition of women-run porn production with 12 DVDs and over 300 online videos to date.

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