

CHAPTER TWO

SUSANNA PAASONEN: ONLINE PORNOGRAPHY, NORMATIVITY AND THE NORDIC CONTEXT

Scandinavia has been envisioned as an area of liberal sexuality and accessible pornography both in Europe and in North America (Schröder 1997). Since the Nordic countries also have high Internet penetration, one might envision a realm of abundant online pornography and active public discussion on commercial sex. Be this as it may, pornography is virtually invisible in Nordic Internet research and information society discourses outside the parameters of child protection. Neither is pornography a topic of much feminist debate.

This chapter unravels different layers of Nordic—and more specifically, Finnish—contexts for feminist research on Internet pornography. This contextualization has four directions. It proceeds by first investigating local histories and practices of porn publication and distribution, taking *Seksi.net* (“Sex.net”), the largest Finnish site for adult entertainment, as a case study. *Seksi.net* is addressed in terms of business model, site concept and design, as well as in its ways of thematizing locality. This is followed by a discussion of local regulatory practices and normative public discourses on sexuality, and their ways of framing commercial sex. The question of normativity is developed further in the context of Nordic studies and analyses of Internet usage and their general aversion to pornography. The fourth layer of contextualization considers media discourses and public opinion related to pornography.

Like popular culture generally, pornography defies simple categorizations based on national borders or publics. Images, texts and films travel from one country to another; they become translated, modified and re-framed in local contexts of distribution and consumption. My research starts from the premise that online pornographies need to be studied in historical context, and in relation to local discourses on sexuality. This is especially pertinent since feminist studies of pornography are heavily dominated by North American perspectives and debates that cannot be directly applied for understanding and analyzing developments elsewhere. Don Kulick’s (2005) research on Swedish discourses on sexuality shows that attempts to regulate commercial sex are embedded in local contexts and debates in ways that escape generalizing models. Following this argument, in this chapter I explore the analytical possibilities of situated, context-specific approaches to

mainstream online pornography, and the diverse meanings of the Nordic context for such an enterprise.

Considerations of Nordic context easily lead to generalisations that render invisible crucial differences among the countries in their ways of regulating commercial sex. “Nordic context” is hardly self-explanatory as such. The figure of permissive Scandinavian sexuality has been circulated for some decades and it owes its reputation largely to cinema. In the 1950s and 60s, Swedish films were marketed as “sex movies” in North America. The term “Swedish films” was launched to describe a specific combination of “sexuality with cleanliness”—or, in George Sadoul’s terms, “naked swimming with social criticism” (in Schröder 1997, 124). The nude scenes in films such as *Hon dansade en sommar* (*One Summer of Happiness*, Arne Mattson, 1951), Ingmar Bergman’s *Sommaren med Monika* (*Summer with Monika*, 1952, also shown in the US with the more raunchy title *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl*) or *Jag är nyfiken: gul* (*I am Curious—yellow*, Vilgot Sjöman, 1967) qualified them as sex films, even if their focus was somewhere else altogether. According to Don Kulick, Sjöman’s film, for example, was primarily concerned with tensions within Swedish social democratic politics. (Kulick 2005, 210; Schröder 1997, 123–124, 128.)

In the United States, tens of *Swedish Erotica* titles were published in the 1980s, some of them featuring the porn superstar John Holmes. These had far less to do with Sweden than with the fantasy figure of uninhibited Scandinavian sexuality. Nordic countries may have a sexualised pop cultural reputation but this has only a random connection to the experiences of living in them (Sabo 2005). This reputation also draws from decades of public sex education in schools—although this is often “too little too late” and focuses on reproductive hetero-sex and sexually transmitted diseases (predictably, various pleasures and tastes are seldom part of the curriculum). Sex education films such as Torgny Wickman’s *Kärlekens språk* (*Language of Love*, Sweden 1969), were distributed internationally in the 1970s while Danish porn films were marketed as educational.

Denmark was the first country to legalise audiovisual pornography in 1969, followed by Sweden in 1971 (Kutschinsky 1993, 43–44; Schröder 1997, 128). Both countries were known as porn hubs in the 1970s whereas nothing of this sort occurred in Finland or Norway. Hardcore pornography remains illegal in Norway (Sabo 2005, 37). In Finland, the 1923 law on the distribution of text violating public decency and sexual moral still stands, although its applications have changed drastically over the decades. The history of porn production and distribution in Denmark is a case apart from Sweden, Norway or Finland, and debates on feminism and pornography vary

in all three countries. At the same time, Nordic production and distribution of pornography have been interconnected for decades. This trans-local nature of porn has been emphasized and accelerated by the centrality of the Internet as a publishing and distribution forum.

Patchy History

Historically, Finnish porn production has focused on printed magazines. With the exception of some experimental films not meant for distribution, the first domestic porn films date from the mid-1980s (Korppi 2002, 137). Applications of the public decency law have ranged from limitations in distribution to virtually no regulation on printed material in the 1970s and specific initiatives such as the ban on close-ups of exposed genitalia in the 1980s. This regulation also dictated that models performing sexual acts must be visible from head to toe—no cropping was allowed. Mainly set to regulate children's access to violent films, the much-debated video law of 1987 (abolished in 2000) banned the distribution of all X-rated films. At the same time, close-ups of sexual acts deemed “normal” (and taking place within a stable, in all likelihood heterosexual, relationship) were allowed. (Samola 1989, 197–198; Korppi 2002, 147, 192–173.)

The history of Finnish pornography remains largely unwritten and therefore patchy. Especially in earlier decades it has been marked by the strong presence of a gray economy and quasi-legal activities. Nevertheless, this patchy history makes evident the necessity to discuss context as simultaneously national, Nordic and international. For decades, porn films (8mm films and later VHS tapes) were smuggled from Sweden and Denmark and distributed in Finnish sex shops. Although this was illegal, profits were easy to make. After the 1987 legislation, Swedish mail order companies made large profits on the Finnish market since Finnish companies could not legally sell X-rated videos. Porn magazines have operated on national licenses of both Nordic and American brands and Finnish porn films have been shot in Germany, Sweden and the US. (Korppi 2002.) In other words, Finnish pornography was networked well before the era of online distribution.

This patchy history also reveals the multi- or inter-media nature of pornography. In his memoirs of three decades in the Finnish porn business, editor Timo Korppi (2002, 186–188, 225–138) discusses porn magazines, his more or less cursory involvement in film production, experiments in adult C-tapes, videos and DVDs tied in with printed materials, as well as sex

business branching out into phone entertainment and Web presence in the 1990s. Attempts to capitalize on technical formats are hardly surprising: after all, the pioneering role of pornographic media content is often noted (Lane 2001). Pornography was the “killer application” in VHS tapes and later the first and largely only profitable arena of online content production. Porn is inter-medial by definition: pornographic texts and products transgress the boundaries of individual media and content is recycled from one platform to another (cf. Lehtonen 2001). There has been convergence for decades in the production and distribution of printed magazines, telephone sex lines and adult videos. Portals, mobile services, image galleries, chat services and DVDs merely represent newer stages of development.

The cross-platform nature of porn is also evident in the business concept of the Seksi.net portal. Finnish porn business experienced a boom in the late 1990s in the number of Finnish productions and in the visibility of pornography on cable TV and online forums (Hänninen 2002, 6; Nikunen, et al., 2005, 7–14). Launched in 1999, Seksi.net was part of this boom and designed as a clear-structured portal for Finnish users looking for both Finnish pornography and pornography in Finnish. The two main figures behind the portal were Timo Korppi (who had launched a Web site for *Haloo!* magazine already in 1994) and Jukka Siitonen who had made his career in phone sex lines in the 1990s.

Seksi.net—“center for erotic entertainment”—is currently the largest Finnish adult entertainment portal and one of the largest also in Scandinavia. It is part of a broader brand operated by Fiamax company that also includes a printed version of Seksi.net, a digital TV channel (SexTV), streaming broadband movie service Seksikino and mobile Internet applications (wap.seksi.net). According to executive producer Jukka Siitonen, Fiamax has approximately 600,000 monthly users. These split down into 110,000 households accessing the TV channel and 490,000 individual users visiting the portal, although the majority of these do not make any transactions.¹ The figures vary drastically from those provided by Siitonen four years previously: in 2002, the site had only a thousand monthly users, and the annual turnover was between €340,000 and €600,000. Even the most popular films had a mere fifty monthly downloads. (Hänninen 2002, 16–17.)

Like other porn sites, Seksi.net is excluded from public listings of the most popular Web sites. User statistics provided by the site are difficult to confirm and they are possibly inflated. With 490,000 users, Seksi.net would

¹ Telephone interview with Jukka Siitonen, February 1, 2006.

be 10th in popularity among the Finnish Web sites, alongside large portals and sites for TV programming info. Such user statistics are impressive in a country with a population of 5.2 million—and given both the linguistic challenges involved with international users accessing contents in Finnish, and the abundant availability of online pornography in English.² According to estimates, approximately one fifth of European Internet users visit porn sites on a regular basis, although national statistics are difficult to come by (Phillips 2005). If approximately 3.25 million Finns use the Internet, this would mean that the majority of the 650,000 or so Finnish users accessing pornography also frequent Seksi.net. Alexa ratings, however, do not list Seksi.net among the top 100 most visited Finnish sites

A word on terminology may be in order in here. I prefer to use the term pornography rather than the euphemism adult entertainment employed by journalists and the porn industry alike. Adult entertainment truncates the notion of adulthood into sex (and, for the most part, to certain depictions of hetero-sex and the female body) while obscuring the generic specificity of pornography. From producers' point of view, the term adult entertainment reinforces the general, and legal, definition of pornography as entertainment for adults. Age verification systems are widely used and efforts are being made in Seksi.net to verify the identity of each paying customer with mobile technology. Teenagers are an undesired target audience because it is illegal to distribute porn to minors (soft core to children under 15 and hardcore to under 18 year-olds). The task of regulating access is left largely to the sites themselves. According to Jukka Siitonen, teenagers are undesirable visitors also because they only browse free contents and hence generate no profit. Seksi.net has been classified in the ICRA filtering system that makes it possible to block access to the site. The portal also features banners against child pornography.

Seksi.net as Finnish Pornotopia

Like other commercial portals, Seksi.net produces its assumed audience through design, news, links and advertising (Campbell 2005, 670). Ways of organizing and presenting content are telling of the ways in which audiences are targeted and how their interests are imagined. If one subscribes to the view of consumer culture as producing the desires that it aims to satisfy

² Seksi.net's services in English include only a version of Seksikino, Sexykino, which enables watching porn films online.

through its endless stream of new products (Campbell 1987, 37–38), then the principles of organizing site content also reveal how consumer interests and desires are shaped and crafted. Seksi.net promotes Fiamax's own services, sells advertising space, hosting and linking possibilities, and offers free chat and news items related to sex and porn. In other words, popular chat and dating functions are embedded in commercial services and links in order to attract paying customers.³

Seksi.net has recently undergone a transformation in interface design. This provides possibilities for considering different associations and forms of address created by visual styles, especially since the basic structure of the site remains intact.



Fig. 2:1 Seksi.net interface, autumn 2005

In 2003–2005, the interface of Seksi.net depicted a drawing of an urban space after sunset (Fig. 1). More specifically, the location depicted was the statue and square of the Three Smiths (*Kolmen sepän patsas*) in central Helsinki. Sociologist Pasi Mäenpää (2005, 88–89) reads the square as a

³ The news items also tie in with the interests of Timo Korppi who emphasizes his journalistic background and professionalism throughout his memoirs. Korppi and Siitonen envisioned and produced nude TV newscasts in 2001, acquiring brief international fame. The newscasts were shown on local cable television and could also be purchased for one's mobile phone. (Korppi 2002, 318.)

condensed, characteristically Finnish miniature city that accommodates trade, labor, traffic, history, culture and national symbols. Situated on the corner of Mannerheimintie—occasionally referred to as the main street of Helsinki—and Aleksanterinkatu—the traditional street for commerce and banking, the square is an undeniable urban center (Mäenpää 2005, 186–187). The Seksi.net interface transformed this symbolical urban space into a red light district. The interface featured a perspective drawing of the square by night: the moon was large and full and the sky was covered with stars. The user could gaze down Aleksanterinkatu turned into an adult entertainment theme park. On the left, the old student union building had become the headquarters of Seksi.net and the location of membership-only S-Klubi, accessible via a red carpet. On the right, the massive Stockmann department store had been transformed into Seksikino cinema and its white-yellow neon lights had been turned red. Leaning on the walls and loitering on the streets were several women clad in mini-skirts, suspenders and tight tops, freed from the grim realities of Nordic climate and apparently waiting for customers.

In his study of Victorian literary pornography, Steven Marcus (1964, 268) introduces the concept of *pornotopia*. Pornotopia refers to the imaginary spaces envisioned in pornography, a non-place that could be geographically located anywhere but which exists ultimately only in the reader's mind: a fantasyland of flowing desire, multiplicity of sexual acts and abundant bodily displays. Separated from the confines of physical location, pornotopia promises the freedom of fantasy without the burden of excessive detail (Marcus 1964, 269). The interface of Seksi.net constructed a pornotopia of its own. Explicitly linked to a specific physical location, this pornotopia turned its point of reference into a fantasy space of accessible commercial sex. The pornotopia was depicted as a drawing rather than a manipulated photograph. This, along with the portal's non-physical electronic format, enhanced the design's fantastic qualities.

Addressing national intimacy and heteronormativity in the United States, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (2000) identify zoning policies and the effacement of sex work, shops, clubs and other forms of commercial sex from the public eye as examples of silencing and even demonizing public displays of sexuality. According to Berlant and Warner, sexuality is actively confined to private spaces and relationships acknowledged by the state. Queer sexualities in particular are rendered invisible or (semi-)private by “purifying” urban space. (Berlant and Warner 2000, 314–316, 326.) Similar cleansing operations have surfaced in Finland in discussions concerning prostitution. Prostitution as such is not penalized whereas disturbing public

order while offering sexual services and soliciting in all its forms are illegal. In 2006, the Finnish parliament discussed banning the purchase of sex as Sweden had done (but decided to criminalize it only when trafficking is involved). In the pornotopia of Seksi.net, cleansing operations were turned inside out as one of the commercial urban centers was symbolically appropriated into a venue for commercial sex.

The design was suggestive in a number of ways but it also summarized the site concept. Using the analogy of physical space (whose referent is likely to be familiar to most Finnish users, and heavily symbolic), Seksi.net constructed itself as a marketplace that rents out commercial space to private entrepreneurs. Similar emphasis was also present in the two previous designs (launched in 1999 and 2003, respectively) depicting anonymous urban spaces with recognizable adult performers pasted on the foreground.

Produced with 3D graphics, the portal was from the start like a Jumbo or Itäkeskus [both are large suburban shopping centers in the Helsinki area] of sex business. The customer could surf from one place to another and engage, according to his or her desires, in peeping or window shopping. (Korppi 2002, 305.)

The initial 3D graphic of 1999 was since replaced by the remodeled urban landscape, yet the general concept prevailed. The design was a means to brand the site as professional and “stylish” since, contrary to many porn sites, the user did not encounter plentiful displays of naked bodies or exposed genitalia on the front page. Only two topless women appeared in the background images toned to match the burgundy tones of the overall design. Similar aims at stylishness were evident in the site’s slogan (“center for erotic entertainment”) and Seksikino’s slogan “content for the best of tastes”. Finnish service providers have used similar design tactics in marking their adult chats apart from porn sites. Jippii’s chat rooms “Peepshow” and “Erotic Bar”, for example, are illustrated with humorous drawings that render the forums “safe”, casual and fun.

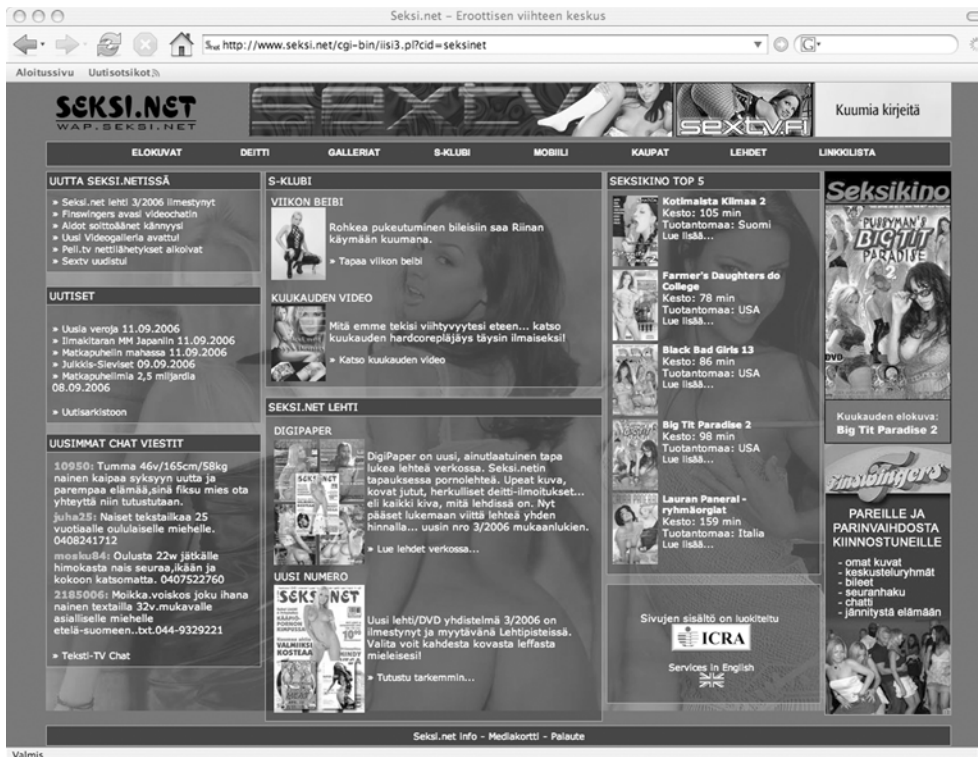


Fig 2:2 Seksi.net portal in 2006

The 2006 interface design of Seksi.net took a different direction (Fig. 2). More a traditional portal interface, the new version is abundant in links, listings and small images. According to Jukka Siitonen, the new interface is basic and pragmatic. The users know what they are looking for and, rather than enjoying the portal's interface graphics, they appreciate fast and easy access to the material in question—the interface is an instrumental tool rather than an end in itself. The color scheme remains similar (burgundy), as do the female pin-up background images that have merely increased in size. The interface is divided into four columns dominated by white text and small images. The left-hand column includes links to novelties, news and newest chat messages. The next one to the right is dedicated to S-Klubi membership service featuring a digital magazine and a free monthly video; the third lists the five most popular films of Seksikino; and the column on the right consists of various banner ads. This interface is far more fragmented and dominated by text. Unlike the previous year, the banner ads feature both penetrative sex and genitalia. All in all, Seksi.net presents itself more explicitly as a porn site—which, given the brand in question, is probably exactly what both users and producers prefer.

(Trans)national packaging

Adverts for phone sex and adult personals were removed from Finnish television and newspapers in the early 2000s after their high visibility and even dominance (in late night TV programming) provoked some public debate. After all, advertising sexual services is illegal; consequently, sex ads shifted online, especially to the sex entertainment portal *Sihteeriopisto* (*Secretarial Academy*). *Sihteeriopisto* was eventually bought up by a Dutch company and the site operates in Finnish, Estonian, Swedish, Russian and English under the Dutch law. It provides links to private chats and adult entertainment services, as well as articles and news items related to and opposing the suggested new legislation banning the purchase of sex. As a country with a history of radical sexual politics—as in the inter-connecting claims for decriminalizing homosexuality, pornography, prostitution and abortion, and feminist deconstructions of the gender system in the 1960s (Hekma 2005, 276)—Dutch discourses on sexuality both resemble their Nordic counterparts and differ drastically from them.

Differences in legislation within EU countries have obvious benefits for porn distribution. International networking and centralization of ownership has increased with both digitization and the spread of the European Union. Venture capital investments and different levels of convergence have facilitated the operation of large international corporations. An international venture capital company owns 40% of Fiamax, the company operating *Seksi.net*. According to Siitonen, porn distribution is becoming increasingly centralized and internationally networked. This is evident in Fiamax's distribution of Italian and French films as a means to counter the dominance of American pornography. The programming of *SexTV* is entirely European and European productions are also marketed in *Seksikino*.

Obviously, *Seksi.net* promotes domestic productions, including pay-per sites by Finnish models and actors. Its galleries feature Mariah and Rakel Liekki who are among the female porn performers and producers gaining mainstream media publicity since the late 1990s and holding two-thirds of domestic porn video markets (Nikunen 2005). Although the boom of female porn stars and their productions seems to have passed, their products are featured on *Seksi.net*. Users can access biographical information on Mariah and Liekki who also answer questions and explain their principles of operation.

With the exception of Henry “The Great” Saari (Kyrölä 2005), the new Finnish porn celebrities of the late 1990s and early 2000s were women who claim to make new kinds of porn on their own terms, according to their own

rules, preferences and standards. Female filmmakers may have aimed to bend porn conventions and broaden their range of representations, but this was not automatically evident in the products themselves. Targeting as large audiences as possible, the films did not take large risks in terms of plot lines, aesthetics or gendered positions. The products were also marketed in highly conventional terms. To use one example, Rakel Liekki's *Mun leffa* (*My Film*, 2002) has been promoted as her own vision of porn that deviates from generic conventions and aesthetics (Nikunen 2005, 220–221; Nikunen and Paasonen, forthcoming). Quite independent of the actual scenes and acts involved, the DVD cover enthuses over Liekki “swallowing liters of cum”. Seksikino frames the film through Liekki's star image and familiar porn conventions:

High class pornstar from Finland, Rachel Flame wrote her first movie. She shows us what she and her friends like to do the most. That is to have sex... fucking, licking and sucking. Lots of cocks and loads of sperm.

With the fairly recent increase of domestic productions, *Suomityttö*, Finnish girl, has become a recognized category in domestic productions. Films promise “fresh” local girls engaging in hardcore acts while the identity of the male performers is less of an issue. *Suomitytöt 1 (Finnish Girls #1)*, the most popular Seksikino video in December 2005 and ranked third in March 2006, advertised girls performing in front of the camera for the first time:

Jaana, Elene and friends, young, hundred percent Finnish girls with big tits hang out in public places, squirt yellow streams in the downtown buzz and satisfy their lust for men with big dicks. (...) Naughty Finnish teens love to perform and their games get ever dirtier!

Suomiteinit nussii (Fucking Finn Teens), fifth in popularity both in December 2005 and four months later, has a similar advert line: “real cats in heat with a Finnish flag”. At the time of writing, Seksikino selection also featured titles *Teen Pussies from Finland*, *True Finnish Porn* and *Fucked in Finland* that made use of similar national branding. The new Finnish release *Fucking Young Maids* was the most popular video in March 2006. This emphasis on nationality has to do with the relatively scarce supply of domestic porn films. Due to the very small-scale production, performers are not necessarily seasoned and claims of performers being amateur may be valid. Small budgets result in a certain “home made” feel that associates

with amateurism and its codes of directness. (Hänninen 2002, 11; Paasonen, forthcoming.) Interviews with domestic porn professionals have also tended to highlight the “fair trade” nature of their products: good working conditions, sufficient pay and centrality of female filmmakers. Porn created by women does not necessarily differ from mainstream conventions. Nevertheless, female authors help to frame pornography in novel ways and to attract women as its audiences.

Contexts of production—small budgets and modest histories—and distribution constitute an important context for considerations of online pornography in Finland. People working in the porn business, such as Korppi and Siitonen, emphasize their professionalism and the quality of their products: pornography is marketed as adult entertainment, through notions of quality, and seldom by using aggressive publicity stunts. All in all, nationality has come to be a marker of specificity or even of quality. On yet another level, nationality has become a kind of fetish: the Finnish girl has become a commodified category associated with fantasies of the “girl next door”. In doing this, the productions negotiate understandings of sexuality, commerce and normalcy in the Finnish context, which I examine below.

Normative framings

Pornography is a product of categorization. Definitions of pornography tie into practices of regulation and acts of censorship that vary from one local context to another. Annette Kuhn (1994, 23) argues that “in order to maintain its attraction, porn demands strictness, controls, censorship” since without acts of policing there would be no taste of forbidden fruit. Pornography goes hand in hand with forms of policing that are telling of the tensions between technologies of production, forms of distribution, consumption practices and conflicting moral standpoints.

Pornography is not mentioned in the Finnish criminal law as such except for the illegal status of animal pornography, child pornography and violent pornography (Uusitalo 2005). The category of violent pornography is used to regulate S/M productions and it is open to film classification officials to define an audiovisual product as legal or illegal. Denmark and The Netherlands are currently the only EU countries that do not regulate S/M pornography (Kutschinsky 1992, 44; Kulick 2005, 209).

In a 2004 report on the accessibility of audiovisual pornography, the Finnish Board of Film Classification differentiates between violent pornography and depictions of “regular” (heterosexual, bisexual and gay and

lesbian) acts. The report admits that the borderline between special preferences within the parameters of normal or regular sexual practices and “pathological behavioral disorders” is difficult to tell. Nevertheless, these categorizations are used as basis to classify and define the products’ legal status. (Karjalainen 2004, 35–36.) The report is also highly vague in its definitions of sexual pathology. Practices ranging from fetishism to S/M, use of sex toys, phone sex and Internet sex, enjoying porn films or golden showers are defined as special preferences, whereas sexual paraphilias in general are identified as disorders. This conceptualization is difficult to balance with the fact that paraphilia is the umbrella term for “atypical” sexual preferences encompassing fetishism, S/M and golden showers alike. The term “sexual perversion” is used without specification and sexual disorders are identified with a general sense of “ill being”. Consequently, the report suggests the regulation of texts depicting paraphilia as a means to decrease ill being and to help the people in question. (Karjalainen 2004, 35, 41, 45.) In brief, definitions of “normal” are considerably blurry, plastic and confused, yet widely employed as self-explanatory.

The report makes visible some key characteristics of Finnish discourses on sexuality and pornography. Firstly, a line is drawn between regular and irregular sex—normal and deviant desires—without dwelling on the semantic intricacies involved. Secondly, regulation is posed as a means of helping the individuals with irregular sexual preferences by barring access to representations that may increase their ill being. While pornography is not directly marked as a problem, it becomes framed as one from the perspectives of sexology and child protection. In their own publications, other Finnish public institutions (Council for Gender Equality and National Research and Development Center for Welfare and Health) define pornography as facilitating prostitution and objectification of women (Hänninen 2002, 23), and as offensive and indecent representations that offend general norms (Anttila 2004a, 12).

These definitions of regular and irregular preferences have a strong family resemblance to the definition of “good sex”, as analyzed by Don Kulick in the neighboring country of Sweden. According to Kulick, the Swedish understanding of good sex concerns

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. (Kulick 2005, 208.)

Since this notion of good sex is something of a consensus, it can be used to categorize and mark out “less good” sexual practices and preferences (kinky, commercial, casual or acted out in a group). Such workings of normative imagination are a separate issue from legislation aiming at child protection, yet easily conflated, as in the report by the Finnish Board of Film Classification.

In *Trouble with Normal*, Michael Warner (2000, 1–5) discusses the division of sex into acceptable “good” practices (benign, pleasant and wholesome) and “bad” ones evoking possible shame (centrally gay and lesbian sexualities, sadomasochism and fetishism). Divisions of good and shameful sex tie in with a mistaken conflation of moralizing and morality: other people’s acts and desires are labeled as shameful and disgraceful under the guise of morality, whereas such moralizing actually has little to do with morality and more with self-righteous control and “complacent satisfaction in others’ shame” (Warner 2000, 7). Warner's analytical critique of sexual normalcy results in a similar conceptual division of good sex (“good, normal, natural”) and its counterpart (“bad, abnormal, unnatural”) as Kulick's. If good sex is monogamous, non-commercial, vanilla, and acted out in pairs, bad sex is promiscuous, commercial, S/M, acted out alone or in groups, and it may involve pornography and manufactured objects. (Warner 2000, 25–26.)

These analyses of Swedish and US contexts point out a persistent need to mark some preferences as shameful and problematic. This is not a question of legislation but far subtler workings of regulatory imagination and normalization. The diversity of desires and evasiveness of fantasies cannot be accommodated in the framework of good sex that flattens out the complexity of sexuality it aims to schematize. The ideal of good sex is non-reflexive, normative, and plays an active role in Finnish discussions on pornography. In regulative practices, liberal principles are interwoven with implicitly normative discourses on sexuality. While pornography is not censored, it is positioned as an “atypical” preference, a “less good” and potentially harmful form of sexual expression on a both individual and social level. As atypical, less good and potentially harmful, pornography is something best to avoid.

White Spots in Nordic Internet Research

Nordic Internet researchers have not addressed pornography at any length. Perhaps given the large public investments in information society programs and agendas, research has tended to focus on questions of access, democracy, citizenship and the public sphere. The absence of pornography from the body of Nordic Internet research may also have to do with the fact that pornography and its possible masturbatory uses fit badly with the figure of the “information intense” citizen postulated by information society discourses, rationally searching for and exchanging information with the aid of information and communication technologies.

Since the mid 1990s, Finland has competed for the title of the most wired nation in Europe—more or less successfully - with Sweden and Denmark. Statistics on Internet use have focused on the percentages of households with Internet connections and the percentages of regular Internet users. Internet penetration in Finland is 62.5% of the population (70% of adults) in comparison to the 49.8% of the European Union in general (*Internet World Stats* 2005). The content of usage is considerably more difficult to monitor. The most popular uses include email (88%), Web searches for products or services (84%), online banking (71%) and browsing governmental sites (62%). Leisurely entertainment uses such as listening to or downloading music (30%), chatting (25%) or gaming (23%) are featured in the 2004 statistics, but—rather predictably—pornography is nowhere to be seen. (*Statistics Finland* 2004.) The uses of pornography are understood as highly personal, potentially shameful and hardly disclosed to others. Users are therefore unlikely to report such activities when interviewed or surveyed any more than elaborate on their practices of illegal file sharing—provided, of course, that such questions are posed in the first place.

Listings of popular search terms tend to be similarly selective. Depending on the source, searches for pornographic content vary between 10 and 33% of all search requests although their popularity is not reflected in the published listings (Jansen and Spink 2006, 258–259; *Internet Filter Review* 2006; Bonik and Schaale 2005). Statistics on porn sites and their uses, again, often do little to differentiate between legal and illegal pornographies. Since these statistics are used in promoting filtering software, they are very likely inflated in order to exaggerate the popularity and abundance of online pornography. No available estimates on porn usage differentiate between various kinds of pornography or user demographics.

The marginalization of pornography on the level of filtering and public discourse is a result of systematic aversion. The centrality of pornography for online business and traffic is widely acknowledged but seldom mentioned, let alone analyzed. A large percent of Internet users consume

pornography, but porn tends to surface only as a problem and example of bad or somehow improper content. The strategy of aversion adds to general silence around online pornography as one of the “less good” areas of sexuality.

Pedophile networks—especially in Usenet—have gained regular publicity in the Finnish media and there has been some discussion on children’s access to pornography and the possibilities of regulating it. Yet pornography and its online distribution have not been seen as a similar issue, or problem, as in North America. This is partly due to the relatively marginal position of conservative Christian perspectives in the media, as well as a different tradition of political and public debate. To generalize, political parties identifiable as conservative balance moral views with an insistence on consumer autonomy and freedom of choice. Parties on the left, again, use the argument of sexual autonomy both for and against pornography. In mainstream media such as tabloid newspapers, pornography is framed as something daring and titillating in its naughtiness, as something fun or potentially dangerous, depending on the type of article in question. People’s attitudes towards commercial sex are generally permissive (Autio 2004; Anttila 2004b).

While the US government has waged a battle against online pornography in its court case against Google and the company’s refusal to hand over information on individual searches, the topic fails to evoke similar passions or efforts in Finland. Uses of pornography are considered a private matter and regulations concern minors and illegal forms of pornography. At the same time, female porn celebrities have been participating in the mainstreaming of pornography. Magazine interviews and other media coverage on female porn professionals have been positive in tone. Rakel Liekki and Mariah have appeared regularly in mainstream media as commentators and experts on commercial sex and they have been characterized as creative, strong and independent. (Nikunen 2005, 229–231.)

Assumptions concerning “good” and “less good” sex are in active operation in Finnish discourses on sexuality, but lines are divided on the matter in terms of party politics as well as in terms of gender politics: Rakel Liekki, for example, is a self-proclaimed feminist in the porn business whereas some other feminists are firmly opposed to commercial sex. Importantly, this debate is not primarily or even secondarily concerned with censorship—a theme that has dominated North American feminist porn debates for the past three decades.

Critical Positions

Seksi.net is a portal catering primarily to male users with a diet of heterosexual, bisexual, transsexual and gay pornography, contact ads and image galleries. It is, in a word, generic. The pornography accessible on Seksi.net equals that of other mainstream sites internationally—it is no better or worse, more or less interesting than commercial pornography in general. Nordic or Finnish context does not imply exclusive specificity but sensitivity to different discursive spaces available for addressing pornography. Contextualization helps to discuss Seksi.net beyond the generic and typical: to understand its connections to and position in the history of Finnish porn production and distribution, its displays and representations of nationality, as well as its relationship to local discourses on sexuality and commercial sex. These tie in with contingent histories and practices of regulation and public discussion.

This chapter has considered the site concept of Seksi.net and the diverse meanings of local context for studies of online pornography. In my reading, context is firstly crucial in terms of publishing and distribution of pornography, their local histories, volumes and central agents. Secondly, context matters on the level of regulatory practices and their underlying understandings of sexuality, discussed above through the notion of “good sex”. Thirdly, context matters in terms of the field of Internet research and the general tendency to avoid online pornography as a subject for investigation. Political and media discourses constitute the fourth level of context. These contexts or frameworks are not uniform. They reveal the coexistence of permissive—and even positive—approaches to pornography in public discourse, regulation and production, and the more regulatory and normative discourses on acceptable or proper sexuality. These result in telling silences and illogical gaps in discussions concerning online pornography. The virtual exclusion of pornography from considerations of the Internet and its uses has little to do with the general permissiveness towards commercial sex, let alone the popularity of online pornography among different demographic groups.

Considering the framework of this volume as a whole, the question of feminist critique should perhaps be explicated. Firstly, the above discussion should have made evident that feminist considerations of pornography cannot be reduced to Anglo-American debates on censorship and freedom of speech, as shaped by the sex wars of the 1980s (Duggan and Hunter 1995). While these debates have evolved from specific histories and socio-political contexts, their specificity seems easily forgotten. Indeed, they have formed a

framework for scholarly discussions on pornography on an international level. Scholars from various parts of the world are surprisingly familiar with North American jurisdiction, court decisions and cases, as well as the history of porn production in the United States. This chapter has argued that local contexts and discussions—such as Nordic or Finnish ones—complicate understandings of feminist viewpoints and considerations. While debates over the legal status of prostitution and strategies of regulating pornography are in all likelihood discussed across national boundaries, the trajectories and histories through which scholars and activists arrive at these debates vary drastically. Consequently, these debates mean different things and have different implications.

Secondly, there are lessons to be learned from queer analyses of the notion of normalcy, as employed in discussions on commercial sex. Something should also be learned from the problematic comprehension of pornography as a homogeneous entity, which is sometimes found in anti-pornography feminist texts. Acknowledging differences between various pornographies, their contexts of production and consumption means that generalizations over the meaning or ideological function of porn can only be made at great risk, if at all. Feminist critiques need to be self-reflexive in terms of the ideals, models and assumptions concerning sexuality they base their argumentation on. Analyses by Michael Warner (2000) and Don Kulick (2005) show that different kinds of normative imaginations have been at play in feminist critiques of porn. These have both relied on and produced normative criteria of “normal” or “regular” sex (as variations of vanilla) that are marked by class-specific criteria of good taste and proper representation.

Research on sex work has made evident the conceptual gap between the feminist argument for women’s rights over their own bodies and the occasional inability to accept women’s choosing to work in pornography, prostitution or other forums of commercial sex (Chapkis 1997; Frank 2002). These are not necessarily acknowledged as choices at all. Paradoxically, then, some feminist writers have structured out the agency of women in the sex business. Without making arguments either for or against commercial sex, I would like to address this as a basic ethical question concerning the right to set norms for other people’s actions, and the necessity of considering one’s own values and grounding assumptions when doing so. As argued by Warner, moralizing over other people’s choices and preferences does not equal morality. The inability to accept the diversity of desire leads to normative assumptions based on regulatory categorizations.

Nordic welfare states have been shaped by feminist and socialist thinking that emphasizes the inter-connectedness of the individual and the social;

hence they consider sexuality as a realm of power, as opposed to a sphere of potential freedom and experimentation. In his brief discussion of Swedish discourses on sexuality, Jens Rydström (2005) sees these two positions, which he labels as classic feminist and queer, as mutually incompatible—even if he does consider dialogue between them both important and necessary. I would argue that numerous intermediate positions are both possible and desirable. Feminist argumentation can, and certainly has stretched beyond questions of gender oppression and inequality while queer critiques have hardly celebrated all expressions of sexuality. The rhetoric of equality feminism employed in the making of the welfare state is contingent and able to change. For changes to occur in discourses on sexuality more attention needs to be paid to normative discourses and aversions in play, both within and outside of the debate on commercial sex.

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