



– Tarja Savolainen

Abstract zum Vortrag:

Women and the Commercialization of Television in Finland

I would like to talk about the changes in women's possibilities to get a voice in Finnish television during the last decade.

In 1995, I was involved in a Nordic television research project TV-presenters, Commercialization and Gender in Scandinavia: A Comparative Study Focusing on Public Service vs. Commercial Channels. In that study, we wanted to know what kind of positions Nordic television channels offered to women and whether commercial channels gave more possibilities to female presenters than public service channels. The hypothesis was that commercial channels would offer more positions to women but place women in stereotypical roles, like for example young assistants in programmes.

The study was based on the idea that public service channels have traditionally been part of the public sphere and concentrated on male interests such as politics, sports and high culture. Although public service television has been obliged to allow for democratic access and equal opportunity, it has more or less neglected the female audience. Commercial television, instead, has been more dependent on female consumers and female audiences. It has addressed women more likely, but in the process it has conformed to a traditional concept of femininity. To put it simply, women have been marginalized in public service television but trivialized in commercial television.

The other central idea behind the study was that women as hostesses might get important positions in commercialized television. Women as images provide visual pleasure as sexual objects and emotive images and also personify extravagance and visualize abstract ideas. Deregulated television which is based on form and style and the ability to catch the eye might use women to get audience not only by providing visual pleasure but also by symbolising ideas. Thus, the images of women are profitable in creating profiles for the channels and the programmes.

As far as Finland is concerned, the study did not support the hypothesis of the research. Instead, it showed that both public service and commercial television companies allowed an equal number of positions to women, i.e., 40% of the presenters. The situation was approximately similar in Sweden. However, commercial channels gave more opportunities to women in Denmark and in Norway. In addition, women were found in stereotypical positions on every Nordic television channel, i.e. they were often younger and acted as assistants to male presenters. The analysis, done channel by channel, showed that it was the Finnish public service TV2 that offered most positions to women in the Nordic countries: 45% of its presenters were women. This was because the channel combined factual public service journalism with a female - male couple presenter system absorbed from commercial television. During years 2003-2004, I repeated the study on Finnish television. The research showed that the proportion of female presenters had clearly increased.

Although it seems that women have received more chances to speak on television in Finland in recent years, there are studies on television and newspapers which show that women still form a minority, for example, as news subjects. In addition, there are results of newspaper studies which indicate that women's proportions as news subjects have even decreased. Unfortunately, there is no television research which would give more precise information about women's possibilities in other genres than the news. On the basis of the projects I have been involved with, my view is that the best positions for women to speak on Finnish television are offered in factual programmes.