

Violence, Victims and Emotionality in Finnish Crime-Appeal Programming

There appears to be a growing interest in emotion in the news media as more and more space is devoted to the representations of mourning in the coverage of major disasters or extraordinary deaths. This development has taken place simultaneously with the growing amount of crime related material in the media. As in several other Western countries, also in Finland the reporting on violence has increased drastically during the last decades.

Contemporary media narratives not only invite, but seem to actively encourage consumers to identify and empathise with victims of crime. This is done by making the viewers see what the victims are seeing and feel what the victims are feeling. The audience is also seduced to become emotionally involved with the narrative and to join in the punishment of the offender. Thus, it appears that the rise of the mediated victim image in crime reporting is heavily connected to the general trend of growing emotionality in news media.

In this paper I examine the portrayals of violent crime and their victims in the Finnish crime-appeal program Poliisi-TV. I am interested especially in analysing what makes a crime victim ideal in/for the program, and on the other hand, what kind of victims are non-ideal and thus completely missing from the footage. My objective is also to track down both narrative and visual techniques and victim specific attributes that are utilised in portraying violence and victims in the program. Altogether I have analysed 21 violence narratives with an identifiable/personalised victim.

The program's violence narratives are moral tales embodying a very simple lesson: terrible things can happen to good people for no specific reason at all. The role of the nuclear family is highlighted so strongly in the program that it is hard to imagine a Poliisi-TV violence victim outside the parameters of family, since not being a family member equals to not being a proper crime victim altogether. Victimhood is presented in the program through various visual and verbal techniques that aim at aligning the viewer emotionally with the experiences and feelings of the presented victim. Thus, Poliisi-TV enables the viewers to both consume crime, but to also distance themselves from the actual events at the same time.

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