

Sari Näre

Doctor of Political Sciences  
Academy of Finland, University of Helsinki  
[sari@alli.fi](mailto:sari@alli.fi)

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## VISUALITY, VULNERABILITY AND VISUAL HARASSMENT

How can we interpret the discoveries on children's, especially girls' dissatisfaction with their body? Unlike in Norway and Sweden, in Finland among 10-11 -year old children three quarter of girls and half of boys are unsatisfied with their body, and already 80% among 13 years old Finnish girls are dissatisfied with their appearance (Oksanen, forthcoming). While boys' satisfaction with their appearance increases during adolescence, during the same period girls feel decreasing satisfaction with appearance (Hoare & Cosgrove 1998; Rosenblum & Lewis 1999). Compared with my research on school children's hero idols and gender ideals based on data collected in the end of 1980's (Näre 1992), Oksanen's results give an impression that in 2000's children recognize the expectations directed on their gender two years earlier than 15 years ago.

In Finland, since 1980's the issues before typical mainly for women's and men's magazines have become the content of dominant media: issues dealing with emotions and sexuality belong to the common discourse in news papers, especially in afternoon papers, tv, radio and internet. Advertisement has to follow the development as well. I have called this process "intimisation of publicity" (Näre 1999a). This intimisation concerns the culture and has applied to sexual policy as well. It has strengthened the commercialisation of sexuality and sexualisation of culture in Finland. Also the libertarianism in sexual politics encourages people to look for different kinds of sexual pleasures. According to this view, maximizing freedom is the condition of maximizing satisfaction. In this condition, "visual freedom" is also maximized.

### Visual harassment as an imaginary violence

Our culture is intimidated at the level of speech as well as at the level of presentation (Näre 1999a). This intimisation has caused visualisation of culture and vice versa. The development reaches its highest point in the pornografisation of culture (Jeffreys 2002). This kind of cultural atmosphere is seductive rising up intimate images, visions and mental pictures. Visual seduction forces us to practice self-control and it has strengthened the process of modernisation. (Näre 1995; 2002b.) But the seduction may turn us to practice a kind of "risk analysis" in order to protect ourselves, especially our minds. This kind of need for protection and defence means that we feel harassed by visual materials.

In the culture of visual seduction and even visual harassment especially the children become vulnerable: mental innocence of children gets broken earlier and earlier. This kind of visual harassment means harassment of integrity, and it has been legitimized by the constitution principle of "freedom of speech". "Freedom of speech" seems to mean "freedom of pictures", and "freedom of pictures" follows the freedom of markets, the freedom of advertisements. It is relevant to raise

the question, what is the difference between freedom of markets and freedom of speech. Are the markets abusing freedom of speech?

Visual harassment means disturbing the peace to grow up and creates a risk atmosphere of sexual or cultural violence. According to Galtung (1999, 39) "cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong". That's why probably we do not even recognize risky contents we allow for the visual culture. If we have to live in the continuum of trust and risks trying to balance between confidence and reflection of our own vulnerability (Näre 2000), we may not notice children's need for confidence in order to build mental strength to avoid vulnerability.

Visual culture produces ego ideals, object relations and virtual objects which may be uncatchable to realize (see Levä & Näre & Oksanen 2002). When the visual ideals become too demanding we can speak about imaginary violence, even visual violence. Concrete visual pictures create imaginary pictures in the mind, and violence means the disturbance of identity building by visual harassment we meet in our everyday life. Continuous cultural message according to which our body is never enough is a kind of state of abuse and violence. (Näre & Oksanen, forthcoming.) Visual harassment creates objectified body consciousness: body shame is connected with this kind of dissatisfaction, as body shame theorists have pointed out (McKinley 1998; 1999; Gilbert 2001; 2002).

#### Visual coercion in the memory

According to the theory of memory, everything we see remains in our memory of body and emotions. Memory prints, especially traumatic prints, may work unconsciously. (Schacter 2001.) Because visual materials, e.g. "hard core advertisements", may work as memory hints, visual culture when turning into visual harassment can be a risk factor especially for vulnerable persons. Visual harassment may arouse shame, and shame and rejection may impact brain and body (see Schore 2001).

The intimisation and visualisation of culture have meant more and more objectified body consciousness shaping the implicit memory. Daniel Schacter (2001) has developed the theory of implicit memory by combining clinical studies with neurological and cognitive researches. In the implicit memory experiences have automatical, unconscious effect without the knowledge of the origin. The memory is activated by memory hint, and visual materials are these kinds of hints as well.

The function of implicit memory can be interpreted to be important in mediating culture, especially in mediating visual culture. Cultural coercions, visual compulsions and bodily demands are mediated through implicit memory. When the importance of self control has increased in the cost of external control (Elias 1976; see Näre 2002a) the demands become implicit and explicitly unclear. In this situation the function of unconsciousness and implicit memory may strengthen: memory hints printed in our body may motivate our choices and behaviour - ultimately, our body makes choices.

The younger we receive these memory hints mediated by visual culture, the stronger the print that may be left in our implicit memory. In this respect, we are living in the visual culture abusing children's integrity. The cognitive mechanisms of perceptions and images are similar: it is difficult to make distinction between images and memories, because images are essential part of memories.

Visual perceptions effect through our images to our thinking, since our thinking is partly based on pictures. So, visual surroundings impact our inner life caused by the fact that memories and images come involuntarily into our consciousness.

According to vulnerability theorists Ingram and Price (2001) vulnerability can play a causal role at risky, stressful environment. Environmental vulnerability factors include socialisation processes, trauma or injury. One vulnerable group is children with learning disabilities (e.g. ADHD, MBD). They use to learn and sense different from normal ways, and they may be very sensitive for visual surroundings. In wrong conditions, this sensitivity may turn to pathology instead of creativity.

Intimisation of visual culture (Näre 1999a) raises a question how to prevent vulnerability in front of the visual imaginary produced by commercial interests. What is the relation between freedom of speech and protection of privacy? We can speak about harassment when freedom of speech - or more specifically, freedom of pictures - turns into disturbance of privacy, mental privacy. There seems to be a risk of insulting privacy in applying freedom of speech to the spreading of visual materials: the "freedom of visual materials" insults the integrity of vulnerable people, especially children.

#### Visual harassment as an insult to the transitional state of mind

Children's vulnerability in front of the visual materials becomes obvious when considering their mental integrity. Mental integrity presupposes the protection of privacy which is not guaranteed to the children in our culture. The insult of integrity and privacy is potential according to the theory of object relation. The most private space is our mind: in our transitional state of mind we create our relation with others and with ourselves. This transitional state is a kind of liminal space between fantasy and reality where one can orientate towards future by playing and imagination. It is the space of imagination needed in building integrity and identity. (Winnicott 1971.)

Words still give space for creating images and pictures in mind, unlike pictures when given too early to take the place from imagination. So, when insulting integrity "freedom of visual materials" may turn into visual harassment. (See Näre 2002a.) The younger the children become victims of visual harassment, the narrower their mental space for imagination may remain - especially if their personal relations are poor (see Näre 1992). If the imaginary space decreases, the potentiality of mental processing by acting out behaviour increases. In some cases, acting out behavior may lead into criminal acts.

Visual harassment with sexualized and/or violent "hard core" contents may have similar impact with traumatic events. According to the trauma theory, the memories of trauma record in the non-verbal memory which makes them difficult to handle by therapeutic methods. Trauma changes the processing of stimuli. Body reacts to the memory of trauma, e.g. touching, independently if there is any hazard or not, and the body itself becomes a source of fear. This overactivation may lead to underactivation and loss of sensing. Situations similar with the traumatic memories may activate the trauma. Trauma memory can be like a burning print in the brain without forgetting like many other memories. Similarly, traumas can activate unconscious visual images, but they can cause difficulties to remember as well. (van der Kolk 1996; Rothschild 2000; Schacter 2001.)

So, because visual surroundings work as memory hints, visual seduction and harassment may have similar elements to traumatic experiences disturbing the transitional space in mind. When the public

is unselected, as typically in the case of advertising in public places, there is the risk of insulting the transitional space. In practice, this can insult especially children's integrity and privacy.

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