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Prisms of perceiving femininity. Theoretical and empirical reflections

ABSTRACT. Within centuries femininity and its understanding have been the subject of numerous observations and analyses. Over the past decades its shape has been gradually becoming outdated and transformed. This article reflects on the prisms of perceiving femininity. It refers to two theories: essentialism and social constructivism. The aim of such considerations is to show the changes of the role and place of women in society (in the light of current norms, trends, opportunities and socio-cultural transformations).

KEYWORDS: Woman, Femininity, Socialization, Social Roles, Stereotypes, Essentialism, Social Constructivism

Throughout the centuries, women and their place in society were the object of many observations and analysis. Women's identity and issues related to their social roles is analyzed in an academical discourse in the field of female studies so called *women's studies* or *gender studies*. This article treats about femininity in the broad sense of the word, its evolution and—what's the most important—our current understanding of this term. I'll try to clarify what is hidden under the notion of femininity now, how we understand and perceive women, what influences this perception and how it evolved through the centuries.

It seems that women's issues and the broad conception of femininity are very elusive and difficult to analyze from regular social frameworks. The tendencies of femininity, as well as those of masculinity, are constantly evolving, becoming an inseparable and distinct part of a fluent modernity, as explained by Zygmunt Bauman (2006). The world is constantly changing (social-cultural changes (Sobecki, 2010, p. 87), at the necessary speed to be able to have a self-realising, successive or relatively comprehensive happiness, which is a good reason for a constant re-definition of already existing, traditional norms and values. This re-

definition makes multiple and often alternative attempts to conceive these norms and values from the current perspectives of XXI century life.

Thus, the conception of femininity becomes the object of a successful evolution and is vulnerable to the changes of time. We can admit that the contemporary femininity is ambiguous, variable and sometimes controversial. Sherry H. Ortner argues that „the treatment of women in reality, their relative power and impact on the life of society, depends on the culture, historical times and regional tradition»” (Ortner, 1982, p. 112). E. Gontarczyk adds that „different types of changes visible in the schooling and education, medical care, political sciences, mass media, as well as law, professional career and family. The convictions about femininity and masculinity or the stereotypes about what is feminine and masculine or what is appropriate for women and for men are also vulnerable to changes (Gontarczyk, 1995, p. 101).

The basis of what's feminine and masculine comes from two theories of sex, which are the result of Robert Jesse Stoller sex—biological aspects from his 1968 work (biological essentialism) and cultural theory (social constructivism). The first category is totally focused on the aspects related to the physiology and reproduction aspects that describe the sexual and biological identity of a person. The second category relates to everything which is culturally associated with sex, like social roles, cultural demands and expectations (for which these roles are the answers). Fulfilling these specified obligations, in this context is nothing else than identification with a concrete sex (Urban, 2014, p. 142–143).

Due to the essentialist theory, every individual with a definite sex has a specified, characteristic set of features and dispositions. From this perspective, the socio-cultural sex depends on the biological sex, by which is completely determined. Zbyszko Melosik says that the differences between the sexes is nothing other than the “logical consequence of biological differences” (Melosik, 1999, p. 173). In this theoretical conception, our biology, which is based on physiological features, body anatomy, skeletal system, set of hormones and chromosomes, totally implies our sexuality. This leads to the and isolation of two groups: women and men, who (besides physiological and anatomical differences mentioned) possess also lots of vital, radically different psychological features (Bem, 2000, p. 9). It's related to the principle of the sex binarism, which underlines the different vocations of men and women, as well as their social functions, and situates them on two opposite (however asymmetrically situated) poles (Melosik, 1996, p. 28; Gromkowska-

-Melosik, 2012, p. 71). The supporters of this approach claim that women and men are the parts of two different, unparalleled worlds (due to the common statement, emphasizes by John Gray: „Men are from Mars, women are from Venus” (2008, s. 21) with unequivocal functions, duties and characteristics related to the commonly established ideal of femininity and masculinity (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2010, p. 185–186). In biological essentialism it is impossible to indicate the mutual features or obligations that would be feminine and masculine and the elements of reality, in which both sexes could be equal and, fulfilling the same criteria could compete, be satisfied or be partners.

They're as different as reverse and obverse. The most fundamental difference in this context seems to be the female ability of procreation, that throughout the centuries predisposed them to accomplish every kind of protective tasks in the domestic environment and men (by the lack of this feature) to fulfill the material and economical needs of the family, related to professional and social activities (Miluska, 1999, p. 44). In this perspective, the biological approach is the main dichotomous, evaluative and unambiguously determining aspect of what means to be a woman, man and what is an obvious negation of it. The supporters of this approach are named “naturalists” (Zaworska-Nikoniuk, 2008, p. 18).

On the other hand, a constructivist approach exists, which treats man and woman categories as an effect of a social battle of a domination. Due to this theory, there is no universal femininity and masculinity, but only their socially accepted image, which is a (derivative) effect of socialization, based on socially established schemes and relations of authority—not based on a natural biological tendency (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2010, p. 187). A confirmation of this theory can be the words of Aleksander Kamiński from 1966: “Men (or women) structure of a personality is shaped by the social patterns of their cultural background, in other words—behaviour, attitudes and aspirations of men and women typical of their cultural area. Boys grow up to be men and girls grow up to be women assimilating the acquired habits due to male or female patterns of behaviour” (Kamiński, 1966, p. 134). It appears that not the biology, but the culture, history and the process of socialisation affects the sexuality of a person and has a crucial influence on shaping the femininity/masculinity of the individual (Dybel, 2012, p. 9). As Katarzyna Palus writes in her article “triad soma-psyche-polis determines our living not only as the individuals of a definite sex (biological dimension), but also a definite gender (social-cultural dimension)” (Palus, 2006, p. 188).

Now, It should be mentioned that gender sometimes becomes a confirmation and medium of the social contrasts (that confirms for ex. patriarchy) and constitutes its reproduction and a social illustration. It is associated with a theory of the symbolic violence of Pierre Bourdieu and with his “naturalisation of a dominating group cultural capital” (Gromkowska, 2002, p. 16). It is integrally related to the creation of two differently defined and prioritised habitus, that are susceptible of a social transfer and consolidation, as a historically formed, symbolic system of structures, which is internalised and indisputable. In this context, habitus is understood as a socially constituted range of activities, features, norms and attitudes based on experiences, effectively differentiating both sexes. As already mentioned, they are accepted by an individual as “normal” and natural, creating at the same time a kind of conceptual illusion of every mental context of the definition of masculinity and femininity. It constitutes a matrix that in a non ambiguous but “commonsense” way (Warczok, 2013, p. 34) defines what is in the range of these two categories. It is also important to say that, in such an approach, masculinity is frequently positively marked with its vast range of possibilities and activities in the masculine role of system of social roles. While femininity is mainly defined by its “non masculinity” and the lack and differences in comparison with men (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 216–218).

If we’d like to talk about the understanding of femininity nowadays and refer to mentioned theories, we’d have to try to explain the traditional meaning of social roles to which women are predisposed. Social roles are every kind of social norm which clearly define the female and masculine duties in the micro and macro dimension, i.e. in a vast social reality (Dankevych & Stakhnevich, 2011, p. 319). They constitute a kind of set of instructions that every sex has to follow to “keep the order”. Lucyna Kopciewicz claims, that “this social role is a cultural «recipe», expressing the expectation addressed to the people having a defined position in a social structure and identified as woman or man” (Kopciewicz, 2003, p. 63).

For centuries, because of biological essentialism, women were treated as the „Worse Other”, which was associated with the recognition of them as biological less developed and predisposed to executing every kind of domestic tasks as well as biological obligations—birth giving and taking care of the children (Gromkowska, 2002, p. 42). Traditionally, throughout the centuries there was a clear division and “association of

men with intellect and women with everything that is irrational, sensual or physical” (Bator, 2001, p. 36). The differences between femininity and masculinity determined also a different temperament characteristic to both sexes, that can be confirmed the theory of the reproduction and sex significance (biologically determined by the cell’s metabolism) by Patrick Geddes (which was commonly treated as “romantic idea of masculine rationalism and feminine intuition” (Vicinus, 1972, p. 143–144). Claire M. Renzetti and Daniel J. Curran, relating to the theory of Talcott Parson, noticed that maternity constitutes the basis of roles attached to women and men. It determines social convictions and reduces the woman to the role of mother. Men however, because of the lack of capacity of birth giving, are almost in a natural way, in the common beliefs, predisposed to fulfilling the roles beyond the domestic environment (Renzetti & Curran, 2005, p. 11).

In the beginning of the XX century there were still popular convictions related to this men and women dichotomy (*nature-culture* [Ortner, p. 116–129]), associating public sphere with Man and domestic sphere with woman (*domestic-public* [Rosaldo, 1980, p. 389–417]) and attributing the sphere of production to man and the sphere of reproduction to women (production-reproduction [Edholm, Harris & Young, 1977, p. 101–130]).

It is worthwhile seeing that even though through the years women accepted this dependent role, there was a time when feminist conceptions and huge waves of the feminist movement appeared. In this context, we can understand feminism as a social movement which struggled for equal rights, equality of women and their total emancipation. It was to defend the social order, the same social status of the both sexes, as well as to oppose the discrimination and oppression regarding women. (Gontarczyk, p. 83). In the most general sense it is a voice of women’s freedom, not allowing for sex discrimination and oppression (Anthias, 2002, p. 275). In the beginning it had to be a tool to struggle for women’s right to vote (the first wave of feminism, known as “women’s suffrage movement”), but gradually the postulates of women were developed and modified. However they still oscillated around the patriarchal system problems and social equality (contrary to the second and third wave of this movement) (Malinowska, 2009, p. 46–55). Today, the still intense feminists are becoming a kind of confirmation of the need to popularize a new image of the woman, which often involves strongly overcoming stereotypes, redefining her own identity and constitutes a negation of

essentially understood femininity. This is evidenced by the increased level of independence, growing ambitions (Holmes, 2007, p. 6), birth control (Badinter, 2013, p. 153), development of the contraceptive market, as well as examples of taking over typically male roles by women—for example in the area of maintaining the family's financial condition, successively climbing up to the next levels of promotion, or carrying out their professional aspirations in typically masculine fields (Kosakowska, 2006, p. 92). Modern women are gaining new dimensions and possibilities in the field of manifestation their femininity

Another context of analyzes within the framework of the mentioned topic determines the process of socialization and the issues of assimilation of stereotypes concerning femininity and masculinity recorded over the years. Maria Tyszkowa pays attention to the fact that “socialization in the psychological sense means shaping the individual—based on the generalization of experience in the social environment and the transmission of social communication processes—pecific, socially and culturally determined internal regulators of activities and behaviors along with action schemes, as well as the formulas and rules of cognitive recognition, elaboration and interpretation of an individual experience and its emotional experience and valuation” (Tyszkowa, 1985, p. 13). Two types of socialization are commonly distinguished: primary and secondary socialization. A child observing his closest surroundings, based on primary socialization, and then through secondary socialization, gains knowledge about the world around him, and about its norms, rules and order (Doradz-Sawa, 2008, p. 40). As Jolanta Miluska writes: “as a result of activities undertaken by the social environment (parents, peers, other important adults, mass media), children learn to act in a manner appropriate to their sex, develop the appropriate features that are the premise of such action and only then get the full gender identity that includes the ability to identify themselves within the sexual dimension” (Miluska, 1999, p. 55). Sexual socialization in this context refers, above all, to socially accepted behaviors, which include somatic, characterological, temperamental and behavioral features which are appropriate for a given sex (Dankevych, 2011, p. 318).

Philip G. Zimbardo and Floyd L. Ruch drew attention to the importance and role of educational methods used in order to correct, socially acceptable identification with a given sex, its functions and place in society (Zimbardo & Ruch, 1996, p. 340). For centuries, the above-mentioned essentialist discourse prevailed in these educational meth-

ods. Within its assumptions, the aim was that “girls and boys at the beginning of adulthood reflected their natural features (both physical and mental) at maximum”, thus striving for the “ideal” of a woman and a man. In this way, through, for example, the use of rewards and punishments by caregivers (Bardwick & Douvan, 1982, p. 165–166) (in accordance with the assumptions of the concept of behaviorism (Renzetti & Curran, 2005, p. 110) adequately to the manifested behavior (which was or could not be in the “norm” of femininity and masculinity) and own observations and modeling, the child learned to identify with his own gender (Strykowska, 1992, p. 17).

It turns out that from an early age, through socialization, both girls and boys are taught, for example, “correct” understanding of professions: as masculine or as feminine (Cameron, 2007, p. 5–6), so that they can shape and then develop their aspirations in an appropriate way. This is, as already mentioned, what mainly directs our interests, influences how we understand and argue our role, goals and life aspirations (Freeman, 1996, p. 4). Socialization, therefore, by reproducing common patterns, tendency based on traditional norms and cultural practices, in a sense leaves no choice, and in an unequivocal way determines who we are together with our attached luggage of assigned traits and instruction containing a series of recommendations, how to behave and what is in accordance with our biological predispositions and social vocation (Kaschack, 2001, p. 187).

As already mentioned, the process of socialization is sometimes closely related to the assimilation of stereotypes functioning in the social area. Stereotypes are defined as “a generalization referring to a group in which identical characteristics are assigned to all its members without exception, regardless of the actual differences between them” (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 1997, p. 543). Sexual stereotypes, on the other hand, are nothing more than “beliefs about the features characterizing women or men and the activities that are appropriate for them” (Brannon, 2002, p. 240). Gender stereotypes, according to Kay Deaux and Laurie L. Lewis, have a multifactorial structure (Deaux & Lewis, 1984, p. 1003). They relate, *inter alia*, to specific behaviors characterizing both groups, value systems, personality aspects, tasks performed by them in society, the physical appearance of their representatives, the implementation of professional duties and areas in which they specialize (Budrowska, 2013, p. 263). It can be concluded that the main tasks of gender stereotypes as “products of the social structure” include the constant confirma-

tion of society in the conviction about the importance and necessity of falling within the "typical" images of femininity and masculinity (Budrowska, 2013, p. 264–265).

Ellyn Kaschack paid attention to the way in which specific features unequivocally determine male and female personality in an artificial way. And in this manner, we can say that a woman should be characterized by, among others, delicacy, protectiveness, sensitivity and willingness to help, while men by: activity, courage, self-confidence, individuality, competition, aggressiveness (Kaschack, 2001, p. 44). It is a division, highly seated in the social consciousness, where, as we can see, women are identified with the caring roles associated with help and work for others, full of dedication, devotion to others, characterized by inner warmth and delicacy and often religiosity (Mandal, 2000, p. 17–18).

The general characteristic of masculinity and femininity, as Maria Strykowska writes, is the conviction that "masculinity is associated with risk taking, assertiveness, action, cognitive focus on the performed work, problem solving, implementation of distant goals and dealing with external relations between family and other social institutions. Women, on the other hand, are oriented towards protectiveness and affiliation. In interaction, they look for a foundation for building emotional ties, empathy, common experiences and mutual opportunities and responsibilities. (...) In general, femininity is combined with expressive orientation, i.e. emotional concentration on other people and maintaining harmony in the group, and masculinity with instrumental orientation related to action and achievements" (Strykowska, 2006, p. 126). This is perfectly confirmed by the *Deutsche Encyclopädie* from 1785, invoked by Ute Frevert: "a man who in nature has more brawn is fit for hard work and farming, as well as a woman for quiet activities, especially for nursing children. A man has more energy and enthusiasm than a woman. He is bold, strong and suitable for a carer, while a woman who is gentle and shy, on the contrary—needs care. A man aware of his strength, by nature is pushed towards government, while a woman who knows her weakness, rather to obedience, is willing" (Frevert, 1997, p. 36, 79).

As already mentioned in the assimilation and internalization of gender stereotypes, the family environment and the already mentioned socialization process play an important role, providing standardized information on what features, interests or duties a woman should have and which ones belong to men. In this context, we can recall the words of N. W. Gonczarenko, who gives the following female and male character-

istics: "psychological stereotypes about masculine and feminine personality traits often come from childhood and according to them, typical of men's features are: independence, persistence, competitive spirit, tendency for reflection, striving for novelty, emotional endurance (...), for women in turn: passivity, lack of obstinacy, avoiding competition, emotiveness, intuition, sensitivity" (Gonczarenko, 1991, p. 109). The above examples become a perfect confirmation of the assumption that "certain character traits are" naturally "feminine, while others" naturally "masculine" (Mead, 1982, p. 26). Thanks to them, a given person could easily "enter" into a specific matrix of behaviors, being in harmony with his / her own gender, which allowed him/her safe and full adaptation to society.

In this context, it is worth recalling one of the characteristic stereotypes of sex functioning in the years 1820–1860—The Cult of True Femininity (Welter, 1978, p. 313–333). It referred to the traits that a woman should have and which constituted a measurable criteria for her assessment. It included four virtues: piety, chastity, submission and domesticity. They constituted a "set" of unambiguously valued female traits. It was widely socially approved, as evidenced by the common persuasion of women to strive for achieving these values in their lives. There is no doubt that we experience its repercussions to this day, as evidenced by the archetype, still deeply rooted in the social consciousness: the Polish Mother (referring to the issue of performing tasks related to motherhood – often a determinant of the social status of women and the only field under her power and domination – it assumes the versatility and perfection of women in fulfilling all their duties and obligations within the network of various roles they perform in society (Titkow, 2012, p. 28–32) and Marian Cult (closely related to the role of the Catholic church in Poland)—women were required to display such features as warmth, goodness, beauty, gentleness, submission and care (Kowalczyk, 2003, p. 17; Kościańska, 2012, p. 147), which are the basis of the socio-cultural condition of our country.

In the light of the aforesaid arguments emerges the question how the image of woman has been shaped and what is the widely perceived femininity in the contemporary world. With an objective to know opinions how the femininity is understood in XXI century, I decided to ask that questions the students of pedagogy as the representatives of the current young generation as well as active observers and participants of the present social reality. Therefore, I took advantage from the classes classes that I conducted within the academic years of 2016/2017 and

2017/2018—during which we have been considering the issues contemporary changes in socio-cultural reality, taking into consideration the current perception of the masculinity and femininity. 134 persons, among whom 121 women and 13 men took part in this initial recognition (which had a character of a survey). Each person was given a task to write down maximum 2 connotations with the term “femininity”. The responses were of anonymous character. Overall I managed to gather 257 responses. I decided to group the obtained responses for a few categories, such as: appearance, character (personality) traits, performed functions and other connotations. The vast majority (over 160 connotations) referred to the features characterizing women which can be encompassed by the definition of femininity. As it arises from the survey, in most cases students associate contemporary woman with „independence” (autonomy)—35 responses which can constitute certain kind of after-effect of emancipation and equality movements as well as response for the successive augmenting—over the years—of the women rights which as a result has led to the situation—that currently in the vast majority of States (especially these developed) women constitute a social group with equal rights and possibilities comparing to men. On the next positions, taking into account the number of responses, have been ex aequo „delicateness” and „potency” (including „the mental strength” and „the power to step up”—both 1 response) which can both indicate and confirm the aspirations of the current women. Such conclusion can be also drawn from the next responses given by students within the analyzed category, such as „assiduity” (12 responses). Within this trait, the students were referring to the images of “overworked woman” (1 response) and „working woman: (2 responses). The further traits were ex aequo: „self-confidence” (9 responses) and „sensitivity” (9 responses). Among other popular responses can be indicated: „care” (6 responses), wisdom and educational background (6 responses, among which were responses such as: „a well-educated woman” or „a woman who aims at good educational background”), „multitasking” (6 responses) and „resourcefulness” (also 6 responses). Taking into consideration the traits characteristic for the femininity, also: „subtlety” and „independence” (each 4 responses) as well as „family-dedication”, „solicitation” and „perseverance/pursuance to achieve one’s objectives” were mentioned (each 3 responses). The students also identified such features as: „emotionality”, „communicativeness”, „intelligence”, „success”, „feistiness”, „good organization”, „self-sufficiency”, „sentimentality” (2 responses each). Only single

votes has been noted for such features as: „goodness”, „affectionateness”, „attentiveness”, „attentive”, „charmness”, „self-centred”, „kindness”, „indecision”, „argumentative”, „openness”, „responsibility”, she “has a traits of the stereotypical man”, „free”, „aware of her own value”, „crazy”, „creative”, „courageous”, „ambitious”, „well-read”, „stubborn”. Taking into account the whole scope of the presented traits, their discrepancy and multicontextual character is visible. It is apparent that, according to the obtained responses, contemporary woman is full of contradictions and ambiguity. Such observation has been fully coherent with the remark of Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik: “sometimes one may have the impression that a woman shall be like radio—to set oneself for certain airwave in the specific moment and be «appropriate» for a situation: to have unlimited potential when it comes to attune oneself. She should simultaneously be that and that and that else and someone different as well. She should be every kind” (Gromkowska, 2002, p. 100).

The next category which has been grouped upon the basis of the gathered responses, referred to the (external) appearance of the current women. Within the framework of this category, the largest amount of the students' responses regarding the features of femininity are associated with: beauty (9 responses), elegance (8 responses), paying attention to one's appearance (6 responses). The same number of responses were for: pulchritude, sexappeal and sensuality (3 responses each). Less amount of respondents (two responses each) indicated the “attractiveness”, “trendy look” or “vulgar appearance”. The single opinions were connected to: “estetics”, “female shapes”, “make up”, “nakedness”, “focused on one's appearance”, “dresses”, “slim”, “waist/figure”, “appearance”, “athletic (fit)”. Such responses may suggest the perception of the women is mainly based on their visibility, the possessed body and may indicated for combining femininity with widely understood—physical attractiveness, which may confirm further existing in society beliefs and tendencies referring to the theories of essentialism, but they can also constitute certain kind of response for changes regarding the current perception of identity (including female) and its creation, which in the contemporary culture has been transferred “on the surface” and “incarnated by visual representations” (Melosik, 1996, p. 72). In this case one may observe the *sui generis* “orientation for visibility” (Gromkowska, 2002, p. 95–97).

Another divided category refers to role as well as location within the world. This category has been vividly less popular (comparing to

the previous two) taking into account the number (slightly over 20) of gathered responses. While considering the role and the place within the world, for the students of pedagogy the term “femininity” is first of all associated with “maternity” (7 responses). Among this kind of response, the more precised answers were: “working mother” (1), “good mother” (1), which still can indicate for the internalized in the individuals' awareness essential approach for femininity connected mainly with realization of the duties at home, but at the same time with occurring more and more often—simultaneous performing of family and professional roles by contemporary women. The next emerging responses were: “career/career-making”—4 responses (1 of the responses were: aiming at career) and *ex aequo*—4 responses for “businesswoman” (and among that, such statements as: “determined businesswoman”—1 response). The next, a little bit less popular answers were: “housewife” (2), “realizing her dreams” (2) and “self-development” (2). After that, students indicated: “house”, “homebody”, “professionally fulfilled”, “personal development”, “woman who has achieved professional success and professional career” (1 person each). The presented answer prove the bipolarity of the female role issues. On one hand, we can observe the traditional approach for femininity as well as roles attributed to the women, concentrated mainly on house, family and maternity which have been balanced with the perception of women actively participating in social reality, competing with the men, realizing their hobbies and passions and following their own dreams. The most seldom responses regarding the femininity which confirm an aforesaid remark as well as unveil certain evolution in the mode of perception of women and widely understood femininity, given by students were: “feminism” (2 responses), “emancipation” (1), “growing up” (1), “maturity” (1), “being judged” (1), “fight” (1), “power” (1) and “adaptation” (1).

The contemporary perception of femininity—according to the contemporary theories and the opinions of pedagogy students—indicate for the fact that it is highly fragmented and ambiguous. As the first perspective can be seen—according to the given responses, the issues regarding bigger independence and self-dependence of the woman as well as multidimensionality of the female life which in an appropriate manner shall combine both realities—essentially female—connected with house environment and the numerous traits traditionally attributed to women with this non-traditionally female (or stereotypically male) connected with bigger independence, focus on professional activities, bigger activity,

increasing ambitions, resourcefulness and realization of the new plans. At the same time, the external appearance and social attractiveness of woman is not deprived of significance. To recapitulate, sex as the analytical category encompasses two areas: biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender). According to Ewa Gontarczyk "in compatibility to such distinction, we must be aware that sex of certain person is formed by a biological factors, while his/her gender has been shaped in sociological and cultural manner" (Gontarczyk, 1995, p. 35). Moreover, the factor of gender currently often takes advantage over biological sex as gender has been constructed through our functioning in the culture and upon the basis of its norms and patterns" (Mizielińska, 2006, p. 185–187).

Accordingly with the recalled statements, arguments, theory and responses provided by the students—we may draw a conclusion—that we are living in the world consisting of many various, often contradictory with each other realities, that we create by ourselves. The fragmentation of the present culture and as a consequence, also our identities turns out to be not only theory, but also real part of the social reality (Gromkowska, 2002, p. 98). It is equally applicable to the issues regarding masculinity and femininity as well as socially approved images of those, which are subjected to constant changes, evolutions and downgrades (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2010, p. 167). It is worth paying attention—according to Zbyszko Melosik—that the ideal of hundred percent representative of the certain sex was and still is subjected to successive modifications depending on the epoque or even decade, taking into account and distinguishing different features of psychological and/or physical character (Melosik, 1999, p. 174). Michel Foucault in his analysis regarding post-modern reality, emphasizes that the diversity of interpretations, perceptions of co-existing realities leads to the necessity of "stepping out"—putting on the first plan one of them and achieving so called—primacy of metanarration in the context of relatively perceived rationalism. Such metanarration constitutes "the genuine knowledge" which unequivocally characterizes and precises many ambiguous issues of our existence, for example—how to perceive masculinity and femininity in contemporary world (Foucault, 1980). What is important, is that such knowledge cannot be discovered, but it is constantly produced (through naming and defining) in a process of the fight of a dominant status various, and often contradictory meanings and interpretations regarding an authentic (in relative meaning of such term) masculinity and femininity (Melosik, 1999, p. 174). It is also applicable to femininity, its perception and the

image of the contemporary woman, about whom A. Gromkowska-Melosik writes as follows: “she possesses at her disposal unlimited amount of the «cultural sources» which she can use for the construction of her own identity. In the past the women socialization used to be (...) disciplining. Woman has been closed into a corset—in literal and metaphorical sense. She was supposed to fulfill all the expectations, which were very unequivocal (...). Today «everything is possible»—a woman can construct and reconstruct herself in free manner and widely understood—popular culture grants her with unlimited options to do so. However, it does not mean that in contemporary reality corset does not exist—although paradoxically it has been created by unlimited freedom to construct one's own identity and cultural stress upon attuning—according to changing requirements regarding the shape of the body and identity. The discourses of the femininity are spinning faster and faster” (Gromkowska, 2002, p. 99).

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