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"You've come a long way, baby:" the Evolution of Feminine Identity Models on the Example of Contemporary Language of Advertising

Abstract

The article presents the evolution of the language of advertising from the 1960s to the present, presenting various images of women in advertising. Simultaneously a theoretical analysis has been carried out of the demands of second-wave feminism, which exerted significant influence on the creation of images of women in the mass media. The objective of our comparison of feminist theory with advertising practice is an attempt to answer the question of whether the present media image of women liberated from the binary sexual order and weighted towards the genderqueer and/or transgender phenomena is the desired realisation of the feminist demands for emancipation of and equality for women announced in the second half of the twentieth century.

Key words

language of advertising, gender identity, second-wave feminism, binary sex order, genderqueer

In 1969 the Leo Burnett advertising agency ran a famous advertising campaign for the Philip Morris cigarette company. The advertisement was addressed to strong, independent women, who were encouraged to buy Virginia Slims cigarettes with the slogan "You've come a long way, baby." The 'baby' was supposed to be a modern woman who had won freedom and independence for herself, including the right to smoke cigarettes on

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a par with the famous Marlboro Man. This campaign coincided with the advent of second-wave feminism, which was centred on critiques of the patriarchal social order and rectification of the inequality between men and women in social, political, economic and cultural areas. However, the demands of the second-wave feminists, which had a noticeable influence on the shaping of social consciousness in modern societies, were not fully satisfied. It seems that the main reason behind the subsequent criticism of these demands was the desire to maintain the binary sex order and to create a feminine identity in opposition to what traditionally had been perceived as masculine features. A good example illustrating this critical moment in the development of feminist thought is the language of advertising prevalent in the mass media of the 1970s, 80s and 90s. The woman from the Virginia Slims cigarettes campaign indeed had come a long way; the culminating point was represented by two models of femininity presented in the mass media: a traditional woman, presented as a model housewife and caring mother, and a modern woman, presented as a narcissistic consumer and desirable sex bomb.

The first part of the paper presents an analysis of the main demands of second-wave feminism in relation to stereotypical views of women in the language of advertising; the aim here is to show that both at the level of feminist theory and in the realm of advertising practices, these demands have led to a dead end. The construction of a new feminine image based on the 'male gaze' has brought visible development, from the classical approach to women as mothers, wives and wards of hearth and home to emancipated hedonists, but still has not enabled the independent definition of feminine identity.

The Nike advertising spot "From your first mile to your first marathon," broadcast in September 2015, is the end point of the advertising continuum presented in this analysis. In this advertisement the woman faces the challenge of running a marathon, as the first man did in 490 BC. The woman is no longer a classic sex bomb: she wears no makeup, and is extremely tired and sweaty. We know nothing about her financial status or relationships. It seems that this ad not only contradicts the stereotypical image of femininity in the language of advertising, but also, more importantly, at the level of theory, it presents femininity beyond the traditional binary sex order. Thus, it fits in well with the latest discussion on the developments and trends in creating contemporary human identity.

The second part of the paper presents a new way of thinking about feminine identity, which at the theoretical level is evolving towards the

phenomena known as genderqueer (agender, bigender, genderfluid). The current discourse in the contemporary language of advertising will serve as a practical example of the implementation of demands to move away from a rigid binary division of human identity. On one hand, this departure is associated with the contemporary appreciation of the harmonious coexistence of masculine and feminine elements in every human being, on the other, with the opportunity to exclude any of these elements in one human being.

The overriding problem of the analysis undertaken here is limited to the question of whether a radical departure from the category of biological sex was the real goal of evolution within the process of building feminine identity, as initiated by successive waves of feminism. Isn't the final blurring of the category of biological sex within the framework of the genderqueer phenomena paradoxically another 'demon' which modern feminists will have to face? It appears that blurring of the traditional model of human sexuality, or its complete exclusion as postulated by genderqueer movements, is in fact a negation of the feminist ideal of building an independent feminine identity.

'True' illusion, or, the normative character of advertising

The aim of the advertising industry is to persuade people that the good or service being advertised is something that consumers need and must have. In order to grab the audience's attention, advertisements frequently use images of beautiful men and women. These images, idealised visions of masculinity and femininity, reflect the way the society believes that each gender should behave. Around these idealised images of both genders (sexes) is constructed the essence of advertising, or the so-called 'added value:'[1] the fictional world created around the advertised products. The goal of advertising is to convince the viewer that he or she should desire everything connected with this 'added value,'[2] which is why advertising has real influence on our decisions and actions in the real world. Ad-

[1] J. Bator, *Wizerunek kobiety w reklamie telewizyjnej* [The image of women in television advertising], Warszawa 1998, p. 5.

[2] Joanna Bator stresses that the persuasive nature of advertising gives it a normative character: through the use of fiction, it creates real needs in human life. See: ibidem, pp. 7–10.

vertising is a fictitious picture that we paradoxically consider to be a true picture – as "the embodiment of normative ideas about 'real life.'"[3] Erving Goffman wrote about the advertisements he had analysed:

> Although the pictures shown here cannot be taken as representative of gender behaviour in real life or even representative of advertisements in general or particular publication sources in particular, one can probably make a significant negative statement about them, namely, that *as pictures* they are not perceived as peculiar and unnatural.[4]

Advertising therefore not only affects customers on an economic (commercial) level, disseminating information about the product or service so as to induce potential customers to act in accordance with the intention of the advertiser, but also fulfils an important cultural function. Advertising in fact stimulates cravings associated with the world of values shared by the part of the population constituting the target group. The illusion created in advertising is aimed at persuading the viewer that by purchasing a given product he or she becomes a citizen of a superior, idealised world.

Given the essence and the function of advertising thus defined, I am saying that advertising is a kind of cultural transmission which reflects selected elements of awareness within a given culture, rather than actively creating them. The strength of advertising is, thus, its ability to reproduce and perpetuate stereotypes existing in the culture, which in addition makes it especially attractive and desirable. In advertising everything acquires a dimension of unusual glamour and beauty; ordinary items become extraordinary objects of desire, and marketed services guarantee significant improvements in the quality of our life.[5] Advertising furthermore perpetuates existing forms of our perception of the world, ideals, and social behaviour, and exerts real influence on the sphere of gender relations. Joanna Bator writes that in advertising "patriarchal gender inequality takes the form of romantic harmony, in which people are indeed completely different, but this difference makes them very happy,"[6] and no one questions the roles assigned to them or the patterns of behaviour and standards of appearance imposed on them. Erving Goffman

[3] Ibidem, p. 7 (translation mine).

[4] E. Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, New York 1979, p. 25.

[5] In the case of advertising we can talk about the so-called aesthetics of *glamourisation*, whereby daily activities, ordinary objects, and mundane services are beautified and valorised.

[6] J. Bator, op. cit., p. 13 (translation mine).

calls the phenomenon of perpetuation of the existing social order in the world of advertising, which encompasses defined gender roles, 'hyper--ritualisation.' This researcher states that "the standardisation, exaggeration, and simplification that characterise rituals in general are in commercial posings found to an extended degree, often re-keyed as babyishness, mockery, and other forms of unseriousness."[7] Advertising therefore distorts everything that its subject does: it functions as a parasite on existing forms, signs, and cultural messages, giving them the new value desired by the viewer. The easier the 'hyper-ritualisation' of given content, the greater the degree to which that content has already been socially processed and the better the universally accepted stereotypes associated with it are able to function.

Among the stereotypes most firmly established in every society are those associated with both sexes. Moreover, this is true regardless of the culture being considered. In every culturally-shaped community, in fact, certain perceptions of both women and men are reflected at all levels of life: in both the public and private spheres, in the arts, sciences, politics, etc. Nor is the world of advertising indifferent to the phenomenon of cultural perceptions of gender, one expression of which may be the ubiquitous presence of stereotyped images of women which constitutes the subject of this analysis.

Typology of female images in advertising

a) The 'traditional' woman – the patriarchal vision of femininity

In the advertising industry, women play a particularly important role. In most cases, they are both the subject and the object of the advertising message, in which we can distinguish two fundamental images of women: on one hand, the 'traditional' ward of hearth and home, wife and mother, on the other, the 'modern' narcissistic female consumer. This division, cited in accord with many researchers of advertising,[8] was rigidly enforced until

[7] E. Goffman, op. cit., p. 84.

[8] See: J. Bator, op. cit.; D. A. Yanni, "The Social Construction of Women as Mediated by Advertising", *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 1990, No. 1; P. H. Lewiński, *Retoryka reklamy* [The rhetoric of advertising], Wrocław 1999; B. Czerska, "Reklama jest kobietą" [Advertising is a woman], *Aida-Media*, 1996, No. 11; S. Bratu, "Gender Representation

the end of the twentieth century, and even if present advertising trends are gradually evolving (more on this later in the article) it remains one of the most popular advertising strategies.

The 'traditional' woman appears in advertisements in the role of mother, wife, housewife, or several of these roles simultaneously. She is characterised by average looks; little or nothing is known about her job or interests. This woman also falls into the category of everywoman, with whom any average housewife can easily identify. The universal nature of the traditional image of women in advertising is grounded primarily in the patriarchal world order, which is not called into question here in any way. In addition, this type of femininity fits in well with the cultural and social expectations of the dominant male segment of the society. Indeed, for all her vagueness and blandness, the traditional woman has clearly defined objectives: the happiness and comfort of the members of her family. What a woman buying the advertised product or service gains is, above all, the satisfaction of her nearest and dearest – and, as well, her own satisfaction at having fulfilled the social role with which she has been entrusted (this kind of customer satisfaction is, precisely, the already-mentioned 'added value' of the advertisement). It makes no difference whether the family members are children satisfied with tasty snacks (Mum knows that the snack is healthy and nutritious so she gives them to her kids every day), a husband in a snow-white shirt proud of his wife's resourcefulness (she proved her mettle by washing his shirts with the best washing powder), or a mother-in-law who has just been served a succulent roast (she added the magical spice powder to the recipe). The space in which a 'traditional' woman moves is almost always the interior space of the house, in which she finds herself alone (men are somewhere 'outside' or only in the background of the work being done by the woman), and, most importantly, each activity she carries out brings her joy, happiness and satisfaction.[9] In the literature, the phenomenon of the assignment of women to domestic

in Advertisements", *Analysis and Metaphysics*, 2013, Vol. 12; W. M. O'Barr, "Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Advertisements", *Advertising and Society Review*, 2006, Vol. 7, Issue 2, [online] https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/advertising_and_society_review/v007/7.2unit07.html [accessed: 4 January 2016]; S. Craig, *Men, Masculinity and the Media*, California 1997.

[9] On the relationship between gender and space, see: J. Umiker-Sebeok, "Power and Construction of Gender Spaces", *International Review of Sociology*, 1996, Vol. 6, No. 3.

space is classified as a form of gender territorialisation,[10] which in turn is a reflection of the popular stereotype regarding the 'proper' places for women.

The subjects of advertising involving 'traditional' women are most often food products, cleaning products, household goods, medicaments (especially painkillers) and hygienic products (sanitary napkins, tampons). The heroine of these adverts is presented in several well-established stereotypical situations: she is all alone; she finds herself in the company of an 'expert' (most often a male authority in a given area or a personification of the product being advertised); she is spending carefree time with children; she is accompanied by another woman who shares the same problems. The last case is highly symptomatic: the 'between us women' style promoted in many commercials is paradoxically used to perpetuate gender inequalities, as it persuades potential customers that there exists, separate from the realm of men, a hermetic female world.

b) 'Modern' woman: a liberated feminist?

The narcissistic consumer appeared in the advertising world at the developmental peak of the American consumer economy, i.e. in the 1960s. This was also a crucial moment in the development of feminist thought, which was revived then with redoubled strength. The postulates of equality proclaimed by feminists at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, included in many legal codes, were not, however, reflected in practice in the social and cultural spheres. The adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 was undoubtedly the culmination of many years of effort on the part of women to be granted their basic rights in the public sphere, but it brought no marked improvements in the living conditions of the average woman. It was not until the 1960s that women again attempted existence in the masculinised public sphere through joining together in so-called women's rights or women's liberation groups.[11] In addition to the operation of these grass-roots movements, one may cite the emergence of feminist philosophy, which had a significant impact on the development and expansion of knowledge on the subject of women and their perceptions of the world. All these factors contributed significantly to

[10] Bator, op. cit., p. 22.

[11] See: J. Hole, *Rebirth of Feminism*, New York 1971, pp. 15–166.

an increase in public awareness of the issue of women and femininity to which the advertising industry could not remain indifferent.

Raised at the level of social movements as well as on a theoretical philosophical basis, these demands for emancipation related primarily to the liberation of women and femininity, broadly understood, from the patriarchal status quo. The patriarchally-organised world was based primarily on a binary order regulating all spheres of life. Thus, the efforts of second-wave feminists focussed on breaking down that order and attempting to transcend traditional paired concepts. Carolyn Korsmeyer writes that

> [...] feminist philosophers take note of certain concepts that appear in 'binary' combinations: mind-body; universal-particular; reason-emotion, sense, and appetite; and so forth – including male-female. These are not merely correlative pairs, they are ranked pairs in which the first item is taken to be naturally superior to the second.[12]

Because what was traditionally seen as 'masculine' was automatically evaluated as superior to what was 'feminine,' feminist criticism took two divergent roads. Within the framework of the present analysis, it is necessary to briefly outline the main views on the question of the masculine-feminine binary order in terms of two currents of feminist thought, liberal and radical, in order to justify the claim that, on the level of their practical realisation (in the advertising industry), they did not produce the expected results.

The tradition of liberal feminist thinking has its origins in the classical formulations of Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790)[13] and in the works of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, such as their joint *Early Essays on Marriage and Divorce* (1832).[14] We find its full development in the works of Betty Friedan: *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), *The Second Stage* (1981) and *The Fountain of Age* (1993).[15] While

[12] C. Korsmeyer, "Feminist Aesthetics", [in:] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [online] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/ [accessed: 4 January 2016].

[13] See: M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. C. H. Poston, New York 1975.

[14] See: J. S. Mill, H. Taylor, "Early Essays on Marriage and Divorce", [in:] eidem, *Essays on Sex Equality*, ed. A. S. Rossi, Chicago 1970.

[15] See: B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, New York 1974; eadem, *The Second Stage*, New York 1981; eadem, *The Fountain of Age*, New York 1993.

the eighteenth and nineteenth-century postulates, now historical, are not essential to this discussion, the evolving views of Betty Friedan may be representative of liberal thought on the collection of demands concerning transcendence of the binary order as applied to gender. In *The Feminine Mystique* Friedan criticised the lifestyle of white American middle-class women, demanding a departure from the traditional model of mother and wife along with active participation in the public sphere. However, the project of the emancipation of women through adoption of masculinised forms of participation in the public arena met with sharp criticism from the ranks of women excluded from Friedan's analysis. This criticism is accurately summarised by Rosemarie Putnam Tong, who states that Friedan, like Wollstonecraft, Mill and Taylor, sent women into the public world, but did not summon men to the domestic sphere.[16] Less than a quarter of a century later, in *The Second Stage*, Friedan revised her views, stating that equality between the sexes cannot depend on the adoption by women of traits traditionally seen as masculine and the minimalisation of their femininity, but on their appreciation of their femininity, so as to make it an equal force in the public space. As indicated by the title of Friedan's work itself, it was no more than another stage in the evolution of her views, since in *The Fountain of Age* the author encourages both women and men to work on an androgynous model for the future, when everybody will present a mixture, in terms of mentality and behaviour, of male and female characteristics.[17] Modern trends in liberal feminism have picked up on the androgynous ideal of the individual, agreeing that his/her biological sex should not determine his/her psychological or, above all, social aspect of gender.

Radical feminism, appearing in several distinct varieties, amounts to the assertion that the main reason for the oppression of women and depreciation of characteristics considered feminine is the oppositional system of biological sex/gender. Regardless of the direction of the thought

[16] R. Putnam Tong, *Myśl feministyczna. Wprowadzenie* [Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction], tłum. J. Mikos, B. Umińska, Warszawa 2002, p. 40.

[17] In focussing on the ideal of androgyny, Friedan moved away sharply from the ideals of feminism toward 'general human' humanism. This controversial shift in the views of this American feminist has become the basis for subsequent criticism of her views, but has also created a foundation for the further development of this current of thought about human identity, echoed in the latest genderqueer and/or transgender theories (agender, bigender, genderfluid). See: ibidem, pp. 45–46.

of radical feminists (libertarian vs cultural trends),[18] their views, as in Friedan's case, revolve around the concept of androgyny. Therefore, the abolition of the culturally and socially well-established division of characteristics into male and female (and the simultaneous depreciation of the latter) depends, according to them, on the realisation of the ideal of the harmonious combination of the two elements in one human individual. Radical-libertarian feminists such as Kate Millet or Shulamith Firestone postulate an androgynous model involving the integration of the best male and female features.[19] On the other hand, radical-cultural feminists such as Marilyn French and Mary Daly postulate a kind of androgyny in which the feminine element dominates the male, though what is traditionally regarded as 'feminine' must first be subjected to criticism and redefined.[20]

The theoretical demands of radical feminists were weighted in favour of an unequivocal rejection of the division of characteristics into male and female, both at the most fundamental level of the constitution of human identity and at the level of the sociocultural superstructure in the form of gender stereotypes. Liberal feminists also took the androgynous model into account, but for them the starting point was the adoption by women of traits traditionally seen as masculine and the assumption of masculinised forms of participation in the public sphere. Here, the foregoing brief discussion of the demands of second-wave feminists enables the referral of theory to the practice of the language of advertising – for example, the Virginia Slims cigarette adverts, marking the halfway point of the continuum presented here, in which the modern, narcissistic consumer takes the place of the 'traditional' woman.

The 'modern' woman in the adverts usually appears as an object of sexual desire, an aesthetic object, or an independent professional with an active career. This type of heroine is portrayed as a physically attractive person (according to the currently applicable canon of sensual beauty) whose highest values are comfort, self-satisfaction and the aesthetics of her own body. Joanna Bator writes that in adverts of this type "the place devoted to mothers of families, wives and housewives is occupied by narcissistic consumers, whose identity goes no deeper than the surface of

[18] This distinction, and its description, I again take from ibidem, pp. 63–68.

[19] See: K. Millet, *Sexual Politics*, New York 1970; S. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, New York 1970.

[20] See: M. French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York 1985; M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Boston 1973; eadem, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Boston 1978.

Fig. 1. 'You've come a long way, baby', Virginia Slims, 1969
Source: *Flavorwire. Virginia Slims 1969 Ad*, [online] http://flavorwire.com/183675/adman-vs-the-beatles-who-drove-60s-culture/virginiaslims

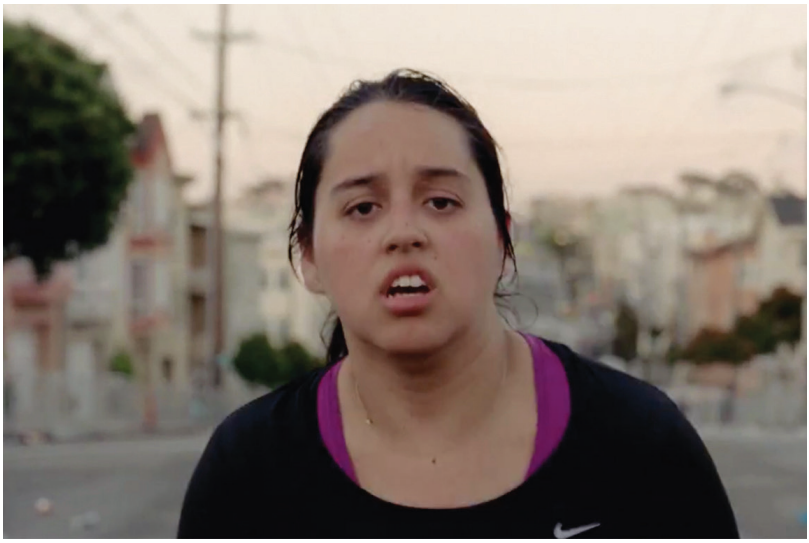

Fig. 2 and 3. 'From your first mile to your first marathon', Nike, September 2015
Source: *YouTube, Nike: Last*, [online]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMZB8X4CG6E

a (beautiful) body," adding that "just as in the case of traditional women one could speak of imprisonment in the domestic space of the kitchen and bathroom, so modern women are locked in the prison of a body that must be constantly changed and beautified according to the latest norms."[21] We note, therefore, that the theoretical project of the second-wave feminists cited above, as implemented in the practice of the language of advertising, failed to produce the anticipated results. The change in image – from the 'traditional' to the 'modern' woman – ostensibly liberated women from their previous enslavement in the patriarchally-ordered reality. The feminist demand for the valorisation of femininity in advertising practice was reduced to an exaggerated image of the 'fair sex' and resulted in the perpetuation of traditional ways of perceiving it. The stereotype of housewife, wife and mother was replaced by the new stereotype of the 'narcissistic sex bomb,' and even if the demands placed on the average woman changed, the principle that restricts her remained the same. The 'modern' woman thus has no chance of breaking free from this particular form of perception. The practice of advertising has never advanced beyond the traditional 'male gaze': the identity of mother and wife has become the identity of the body,[22] which is always seen from the male perspective.

The heroine of Virginia Slims cigarette advertisements is undoubtedly a modern, liberated woman, conscious of her power of choice. The male (yes, these advertisements were created by men!) creators of these adverts attempted to give each potential viewer the feeling that she was responsible for choosing these cigarettes rather than others. One advert recalled a scene in which the men sat down after dinner to drinks and cigars, while the women politely left the dining room: "when after-dinner cigars were passed and the political discussion began, she would rise gracefully and lead the ladies to the sitting room." Virginia Slims cigarettes transformed women's lot: "now you can sit through dessert, coffee and long after with your own cigarette." These cigarettes, 'made just for women,' are therefore a pretext for a better life, since, through purchasing them, a woman gains 'added value,' which in this case consists of freedom, independence and the opportunity to taste the pleasure traditionally reserved for the male world. This advert persuades the viewer, "You've come a long way, baby"

[21] J. Bator, op. cit., p. 30 (translation mine).

[22] See: Z. Melosik, *Tożsamość, ciało i władza. Teksty kulturowe jako (kon)teksty pedagogiczne* [Identity, body and power. Cultural texts as pedagogical (con)texts], Poznań–Toruń 1996.

– but has she really? For alongside these lovely slogans we see a relaxed, slim, young, well-groomed, fashionably-dressed woman – in a word, one epitomising the canons of beauty current at the time (late 1960s and early 70s). It seems, therefore, that even though a woman is supposed to be the subject desiring the advertised product, she is simultaneously the object of male desire. At this point one reaches the pessimistic conclusion pointed out by William M. O'Barr, that "women are and must be sexual creatures in order to attract attention – whether it is that of other women or of men."[23] Thus, even in an advert for feminine cigarettes, the body and appearance of the woman are the highest values, and thus any attempt to isolate 'modern' women from the context of the relationship between the sexes is rendered impossible. Therefore, writes Joanna Bator, "the image of the 'modern woman' – a confident, satisfied, sensual and actively narcissistic consumer – is only a façade, behind which lurk the same patriarchal values."[24]

The image of 'modern' women promoted in the media of the 1970s, 80s and 90s was thus supposed to convince potential viewers that the emancipation of women had taken place and that women were free and could focus all their attention on their bodies and (mostly dietary!) pleasures. Popular culture immediately absorbed this trend: feminism-tinted slogans emphasising the freedom of women became favourites among advertisers. Zbyszko Melosik notes that "the feminist image attributed to the goods made them sell better (here, feminism is in and of itself a form of merchandise) […] The consumer society is reminiscent of a vacuum cleaner which absorbs every form of criticism, feminist included."[25]

It should be stressed once again that the analysis of the advertising image of 'modern' women exposes the flawed nature of the demands of the second-wave feminists. The traditional stereotype of women as mothers, wives, and housewives was indeed shattered, but the result was the re-enslavement of women to the demanding ideal of a beautiful body, absolute satisfaction with life, and the need to emulate male behaviour patterns. Nor did the criticism subsequently directed at the chief theoretical demands of second-wave feminism omit the language of advertising, which, under the guise of emancipation, remained hermetically enclosed within the framework of the patriarchal and masculinised

[23] W. M. O'Barr, op. cit.

[24] J. Bator, op. cit., p. 34 (translation mine).

[25] Z. Melosik, op. cit., pp. 261–262 (translation mine).

traditional view. Nor was the feminist ideal of androgyny ever fully realised at the practical level. Femininity, as patriarchally defined, became even more prominent in the language of advertising, and the freedom to choose what was traditionally seen as masculine (such as smoking, in the advertisement analysed here) was reduced to the necessity for women to assimilate masculine models. This leads to the conclusion that despite the commitment of second-wave feminists and their attempts to change the language of the narrative in the mass media, "the advertising revolution went sideways: cigarettes in advertisements are once again smoked mainly by men on the prairie or on elegant yachts [...] and the 'era of women' widely praised in the media is limited to various variations on the slogan 'Women of Worth.' Worthy of elegance, beauty, sex appeal, clean bathrooms and sated families."[26]

'Anyone can be a runner?,' or, gender transgression

From the research perspective adopted here, the closure of the presented advertising continuum is represented by the completely new model of femininity promoted in the media in recent years. The advertising campaign of the sports brand Nike, which in September 2015 broadcast the advertising spot "From your first mile to your first marathon," can serve as a representative example of the new form of recognition of women in the language of advertising. This advert presents an urban landscape in which a marathon is being run, but the viewer cannot see the winner of the race, only the last tired runners. The street is almost empty, the spectators have gone home, the clean-up has begun. However, as it turns out, there is one more contestant in the race. The woman we see has remained at the back of the pack. Running is a challenge for her. Tired and struggling with every step, she has nothing in common with the previously discussed images of 'traditional' and 'modern' women. In the context of this research, it is worth noting several important elements of this advert which will provide a practical point of departure

[26] A. Pielechaty, "Czasem słońce, czasem deszcz, ale fryzura zawsze idealna, czyli o kobiecie w reklamie" [A little sunshine, a little rain, but her hairdo is always perfect, or, about women in advertising], [in:] "Kobiet-Art. Kobiety w kulturze audiovizualnej" [Women-Art. Women in the audiovisual culture], *Panoptikum*, No. 4 (11), 2005, p. 146 (translation mine).

for theoretical reflections on the new ideal of feminine identity launched in the mass media in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

First and foremost, the heroine of this ad is outside the traditional household space. The street and the view extending over the city suggest that this woman has crossed the border of the private sphere and in this sense is free – that it is she who chooses the place in which she finds herself. Thus, the form of territorialisation of sex so common in the case of the 'traditional' woman collapses. Urban space is just as 'right' for women as household space. It is also worth noting that this woman is accompanied by neither family nor friends. She is alone, and her solitude is her own conscious and free choice. In fact, this woman is free in the most fundamental sense, because she has no patriarchal aesthetic requirements to meet. Unkempt, sweaty, comfortably dressed, she has no need to 'please' anyone. The woman in this advert is a subject, but does not become the object of male desire (as was the case in the Virginia Slims cigarette advert). The previously discussed 'added value,' as an essential element of every advertisement, plays a particularly important role in the context of this analysis. The creators of the advert persuade the potential consumer: "Anyone can be a runner. All you have to do is start running." Thus the value we buy along with the Nike product is freedom of choice: a woman decides, as the heroine of the advert did, whether or not to run her first marathon.

The freedom and independence of the heroine of this advert has one more dimension, the most important in the context of our considerations. This woman seems to be liberated from 'femininity' itself. Indeed, her image transcends the traditional binary order of 'feminine/masculine' and becomes the realisation of the androgynous ideal of second-wave feminists. It seems, however, that the androgyne takes on new significance here. In the present case there is no basis for the assertion that the heroine of the advert embodies the ideal of the harmonious combination of features traditionally seen as masculine and feminine. The non-binary gender identity associated with the androgyny postulated by second-wave feminists is transformed and can be identified as genderqueer and/or transgender. I assert not only that the woman in the Nike advert can decide herself on her gender identity, but, most importantly, that the term *gender identity* is not essential to her. She feels no need to display her femininity or masculine elements; rather, she is characterised by freedom in the creation of her own sexual image.

But can this complete freedom in shaping and choosing gender identity be regarded as the ideal pursued by successive generations of feminists?

Rejection of the binary sexual division at the biological level as a factor in determining gender identity was undoubtedly an essential contribution of feminist thought in historical reflections on human identity. The androgyne postulated by second-wave feminists was intended to strike primarily at stereotypical perceptions of women (and men as well) and thus was aimed at eliminating inequalities between the sexes in all spheres of human life. The contemporary genderqueer phenomena, open to complete freedom in creating one's own cultural gender, can be interpreted as the logical consequence of feminist demands, which, however, seem to have been turned against the feminists themselves. For – if one can freely determine one's own gender identity as (among others) agender, i.e. generally genderless or gender-neutral,[27] bigender, i.e. having exactly two gender identities, either simultaneously or alternating between the two,[28] or genderfluid, i.e. feeling that the ascendancy of one's gender(s) change(s) over time[29] – then the feminist struggle for revaluation of such terms as 'woman' and 'femininity' loses all significance.

Blurring the category of biological sex and replacing it with the concept of androgyny and genderqueer impacts women themselves. Indeed, if the price of freedom in creating one's own gender identity is not only the devaluation of concepts such as women and femininity, but their complete invalidation, then feminist demands for women's emancipation and equality are no longer necessary. On a practical level, more and more

[27] Moreover, people who identify as agender may describe themselves as one or more of the following: gender- neutral (this may be meant in the sense of being neither man or woman, yet still having a gender), neutrois or neutrally gendered, having an unknown or undefinable gender, not aligning with any gender, having no other words that fit their gender identity, not knowing or not caring about gender as an internal identity and/or as an external label, deciding not to label their gender, or identifying more as a person than as any gender at all. See: S. Stryker, *Transgender History*, Berkeley 2008; L. B. Girshick, *Transgender Voices: Beyond Women and Men*, Hanover 2008; *Genderqueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*, eds. J. Nestle, R. Wilchins, C. Howell, Los Angeles 2002.

[28] These two gender identities can be male and female, but may also include non-binary identities. Bigender people may also identify as multigender, non-binary and/or transgender. See: S. Stryker, op. cit.; *Genderqueer*..., op. cit.

[29] A genderfluid person may at any time identify him/herself as male, female, neutrois, or any other non-binary identity, or some combination of identities. Their gender can also vary at random or vary in response to different circumstances. Genderfluid people may also identify as multigender, non-binary and/or transgender. See: S. Stryker, op. cit.; L. B. Girshick, op. cit.; *Genderqueer*..., op. cit.

often the language of advertising reflects a trend away from the 'traditionally' understood feminine ideal. Advertising campaigns exploiting both the 'traditional' and 'modern' image of woman still appear, of course, but the presence in the mass media of women liberated from this imaginary dichotomy has become noticeable in recent years. And since the purpose of any advertisement is to encourage potential consumers to purchase the advertised product or service, advertisers are attempting to respond to these latest gender trends and to ensure that we are also going to buy the freedom to create our own identities.

Modern women undoubtedly want liberation from the 'femininity' imposed upon them in a patriarchally-ordered world. The foregoing considerations tend, however, to assert that this emancipation has taken the form of the complete denial of feminist ideals and led to a situation in which freedom has been turned against women. Thanks to the efforts of successive generations of feminists, women truly have come a long way, but it would seem that today they need to redefine the objective of their chosen path.

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