

Agata Szuba

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# #TRACES#FEMINISM

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It is a truism to say that the modern humans take more and more experiences from virtual reality, presented by the media in such a way that they seem more real and more in-

teresting than the reality itself. Thus, these are virtual stimuli which have a significant influence on social behaviours, being an important instrument of social impact. The strategy of virtual messages comprises numerous functions: informative, entertaining, educational, authoritative and integrating. The Internet is the medium for these messages, being a world of an unlimited number of stimuli delivered to users, giving not only the sense of healing, but also the satisfaction of growing curiosity. Therefore, the media message connected with the transmission of content through mass media, such as the TV, the Internet or radio, is equally both an informative and a persuasive platform. In the environment of digital media it is not possible not to see the issue of feminism (which is obvious).

I believe that an especially interesting issue is the presentation of women functioning in digital media. As said by Simone de Beauvoir, *Once the subject attempts to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is nonetheless necessary for him: he attains himself only through the reality that he is not!* After the war the image of women was their role of mothers and excellent wives, who gave the impression of finding fulfilment in that aspect. The continuing growth of mass production created the so-called image of the woman-consumer (to a large extent existing also today). That model promoted basically three images: a competent housewife, an altruistic mother and a 'flibbertigibbet' (sales assistant, secretary, telephonist), putting women in a bad light. It was the first wave of feminism and the ascending second wave that partially freed women from this cliché.

'Feminism of equality' and 'Feminism of difference' criticised the patriarchal attitude towards life and art. Feminists put in question the existing modern art, tried to find their own imaging system. The 1970s were the time of intensive search, highlighting gender differences and fight against discrimination.

The modern media message may be considered at two levels: the active one, where the very women play the role of journalists and editors, and the passive one, where they become a part of the media message. The latter, due to many reasons, raises the most controversies. Walter Lippmann defines a stereotype as an image created in one's head, allowing the categorization of a given part of reality *a priori*. In the opinion of Joanna Bator, the discussion regarding women presented in the media does not stop, and the image of a woman – a mother, a wife – will never disappear. Advertisements, for example, show a stereotypical division of roles between a husband and a wife, presenting a woman as an 'easy-to-use' sexual object. It is, therefore, difficult to talk about the presence of women in the media, however, their role is often limited to unimportant gestures or providing information. According to the advertisers, such an image of women sells well: it gives an example of proper behaviours and advertises products efficiently. The overriding objective of presenting women in the media to propagate the so called equality of sexes should be promoting balanced information, not carrying on any gender image stereotypes. An equally important issue is to guarantee women more decision-making in the mass media. Currently, this process is taking place on other layers.

The noticeable negative impact the new media have on women makes them create the reality beyond the acceptance limits, presenting themselves in a way which is expected by the audience. There appears a new type of feminism, namely feminism which addresses the needs of the audience (being subject to expectations and exposed

to being seen), therefore the question arises: should feminists, in the times of feminist legacy, and thus changes resulting from the development of the media, work to have their own unique style? It has started to happen, in a sense. *Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she must be compared with man in her becoming; that is, her possibilities must be defined: what skews the issues so much is that she is being reduced to what she was, to what she is today, while the question concerns her capacities*<sup>2</sup>

It is the woman herself who breaks the stereotypes, appearing in the social media. According to researches, women have dominated the Internet environment and they are the largest part of social media users. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube become the audience and the performers of the content they create themselves, very often a controversial content. Research of the Internet users' activity has proved that women are interested mainly in building relations and thematic groups, in contradiction to men, who use the Internet mainly for utility purposes. Women who create their own blogs or websites (the so-called influencers) are relatively the smallest group of network users. They write mainly to start a dialogue or contacts, present the reality in which they live to a wider audience (for fun, promotion and income)<sup>2</sup>

The *National Programme for Women* in the chapter titled *Women and mass media* determines the first objective as the pursue of women to equal participation in the mass media. Promotion of the equality of sexes and support for balanced participation in the mass media is the second objective. The image of a woman and the information it carries is treated as the second-category content, as it is often dominated by other events (violence, pornography, consumer behaviours)<sup>3</sup>. Young women show great initiative in the mass media environment, in particular social media. There they get the 'right to speak' and get to the audience via various means of communication.

Agata Bielik-Robson calls it practical feminism, *where more and more Polish women consciously decide to present assertiveness, in a psychological, social and political sense, which naturally gets local colours. Theoretical feminism, however, cultivated in universities and meant to guarantee ideological background to women's emancipation, seems astonishingly 'pure', that is, free from local interpretations*<sup>4</sup>

Feminism used to deal with fighting only for equal rights for women, it was motivated by underlying political, social and cultural ideas. Currently, it deals mainly with issues related with femininity, the construction of cultural gender – and its power.

The best reflection on social relations women are entangled in is brought by art – showing them as goddesses, allegories, courtesans, associated with nature that can be conquered.

Linda Nochlin, a prominent feminist art historian, claimed that there have never been great women artists, as they had no possibility to present their undoubted talents to a wider audience, being left in artistic niches (decoration and applied arts); they eventually were given less important positions in art. This situation contributed to an increased activity of women creating projects that are feminist in their nature, as an imperative of having a voice in the world of arts. There started feminist actions aiming at propagating feminine art through the presentation of their work, creating galleries, collectives, publishing houses (*Womanhouse*). In line with Linda Nochlin's postulates of 1971, Lucy Lippard, an American art critic, organized an exhibition '26 Women Artists', as the starting point for further presentation of women art. For her it was important to emphasize the difference in means of expression of women art, thus contradicting the vision of an artist who should go beyond the social context. In her understanding, what was recognized as universal art, was indeed a masculine point of view. Giselda Pollock says that feminist art *functions as a text linked with dominating artistic codes and conventions*

*and ideologies of femininity. It is feminist as it undermines the habits of living with art, towards which the stereotypes of oppressive culture incline us<sup>5</sup>.*

The revision of the value of thinking and presentation directs attention to one detail – that daily life, or private life, attempts to define itself through relations with the audience. The artist/feminist focuses on their physicality – gender, enriching their performances with fictitious elements. Works of art more and more often become autobiographic, being at the same time camera-directed performances (*live* transmission), with the participation of the audience. Such presentation of a woman allows for building reciprocal interactions and development of a discourse on feminism with social media users.

Women/artists/feminists do not try to be equal to men anymore, they try to create their own art.

### **#feministki#ubierają#się#u#Chanel**

‘Rebranding of feminism’ – that was the heading of the British fashion magazine ‘*Elle*’ which invited the most notable advertising agencies in Great Britain to cooperate. As a result of this cooperation they created a series of posters inclining women to fight in the private and public area. One of the slogans of that campaign was: ‘If he holds the same position, ask him how much he earns’. Remi Eddo Lodge, a journalist dealing with feminism, encouraged her readers to stop underestimating fashion and therefore look at it consciously. One of the issues of ‘Feminism issue’ was fully dedicated to feminism approached in many aspects. After that, one of the London galleries opened an exhibition ‘London Fashion Power’ including the area designed by a prominent architect Zaha Hadid displaying clothes of the most influential women (e.g. designs by Vivienne Westwood, Natalie Massenet, photos and videos). There were also fashion shows organized that showed the power of women (not only in the sense of the beauty of their bodies or perfect body proportions). One of the

Chanel shows pays tribute to the designer Coco – the unaware pioneer of feminism in fashion. It was Coco who freed women from tight corsets, making them wear loose jackets, trousers, in line with the slogan: ‘This is the woman that I want to be’. She changed dummy pockets to real pockets. She designed the famous purse 2.55 (with a chain) to free women’s hands.

With the death of Oscar de la Renta, the period when women were treated like jewellery ended, as well as the opinion that the only duty of a woman is to look beautiful. Women of the largest fashion houses, as a result of many changes, started to understand that the conviction of having to be permanently in pain to look good does not have to be true.

The modern woman is active, the era of her wearing uncomfortable valances is getting to its end. Similar thinking accompanies Stella McCartney, Phoebe Philo or Isabel Marant – called the new generation of designers. The first coefficient of the fashion they design is functionality of form, notwithstanding the imposed style. Irreversible changes are happening. Karl Lagerfeld cites Simone de Beauvoir; a young generation actress Emma Watson speaks up for rights of women in the United Nations. There is one of the largest Chanel fashion shows organized in the Grand Palais (2015). The stage design looks like streets of Paris, there are dummy old houses arranged around the catwalk, and the very catwalk is paved with stone. The models in the catwalk do not speed up their walk to be in line with the music, they walk firmly, in their own pace – (not like before), they are dressed like young suffragettes. The culmination point of the show features women holding banners: ‘History is her story’, ‘Women rights are more than all right’. A generation is born whose emancipation and fashion are an inseparable duet, where blood red lipstick and new Saint Laurent stiletto shoes emphasize feministic beliefs.

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However, the society gets used to the culture of pictures, it is this culture that with increasing power 'pushes out' the written word, and almost every question finds the answer in a picture. Such needs are addressed by Instagram, which is a compilation of relations, social promotions and individual campaigns. Also, feminists have their space to talk here. In their fighting they focus on the rights of women and they undermine the modern canon of beauty that every woman should suit. The key part of each bigger groups are influencers and celebrities. There is a belief arising that you must be present in the social media, as these channels have the largest amount of information and they are the place of the fiercest discussions regarding politics, culture, media, etc.

The position of a woman growing up in the modern times is strongly problematic – it is a constant fight for autonomy in creating her own image in the social media. People who do not have accounts in the well-known portals are excluded from the group. Growing up in the Internet means permanent deals and arrangements on many layers at the same time.

Women, joining or initiating feminist actions with a wider audience, support equality of sexes, fight for help for kidnapped young girls, object body mutilation trends or intimidating menstruating women, or censorship. The Instagram service gradually fights the view of women breasts or menstruation blood, however, slogans written on paper are not a threat for the portal. Amongst many feminist actions on Instagram there was one action #Freethenipple (in response to the strict policy of the portal forbidding women to show nipples). The action was made popular by an actress Scout Willis, whose topless walk around New York was documented and published on Instagram and Twitter with that hashtag. The pioneer was very quickly followed by copycats, who also started to show their breasts.

With time social portals became the platform for young artists and activists who gained the courage to realize their own feminine projects. Photos of unshaved legs, sanitary pads with feminist slogans, blood-stained trousers (with menstruation blood), pastel armpit hair started to occur, each time with a subliminal message, often not understood by radical antifeminists.

Those with pastel armpit hair and hairy legs contrasted with the standards of beauty, menstruation blood undermined taboos, the famous freeing of nipples was a symbol of fight for equal rights through presenting the nakedness of women and men. Each of the following initiatives, especially those joined by celebrities, becomes a new trend, not just a frivolous fun, and attracts with a number of pictures, having a good chance to get to a larger group of addressees.

Iwona Demko, a sculptress and a visual artist, in her artistic activity affirms female sexuality talking about inequality of sexes, keeps an Instagram account, where a woman's body does not fit in the canons of beauty. Karolina Suboczewska struggles with a mental disease in her account, Agata Zbylut shows 'cyber yoga', where she subjects her body to various aesthetic treatments (on the level of graphic design software), leading to total body deformation. Zuzanna Janin shows #cryingselfie, Alicja Gąsiewska develops her own series about herself, showing daily life in provocative editions. There is a confession-like Instagram account created by Zofia Krawiec, Molly Soda or a blog by Penelope Trunk shocking her audience with a photo of a scar on the body with a note about being beaten by her husband.

*Selfie-feminism means that crying in public does not have to be a defeat, may be a victory<sup>6</sup>.* Selfie-feminists are women (unlike their audience) who are not from the generation growing up in the Internet. They are culture animators, developing systems of signs giving strength to young women. When one decides to judge feminists in the social media, one may think that posting on Facebook or Instagram is nothing

compared with real manifestations – pickets, strikes – as slogans on line end up in a large repository of unread postulates. The truth, however, is on the other side. On the Internet you can experience a large sense of solidarity, preserving anonymity at the same time. Every woman present online, notwithstanding her profession or circumstances, may post #iamafeminist and does not have to be afraid to do that.

#theemptychair, #notguilty, #survivorprivilege are hashtags with which thousands of women share their experiences related to sexual abuse. Hashtags #effyourbeautystandards, #celebratemysize, #honormycurves fight stigmatization of women's body because of its size. These and similar hashtags have an important influence on the growing awareness of women regarding single incidents and discussions, which – if it was not for the social media – would not have a chance to occur.

### **#Sad girls and #selfie-feminism**

#women, #girlspower are hashtags which change their context depending on the need to shape the reality in the social media. They influence the world of business and particular target groups of known brands, promoting delicate and harmless feministic movements. In the social media each user may feel important and this feeling grows when the floor is taken in a conversation on a significant issue. Numerous filters that can be applied on photos follow the myth of ideal life, realization of dreams of beauty and perfection. Self-presentation is a new tool for feminism, used in order to gain subjectivity. Women using 'selfies' were accused of exhibitionism, eccentricity or hysteria; this myth was lost with the courageous exploration of this phenomenon.

Audrey Pollen is the author of the 'sad girl' on Instagram (poses in front of a mirror in a public toilet, in tears). A similar form is taken by at least a dozen of users, and their number is growing. Lying naked on

a bed, the artist refers to a representation of the famous painting by Velazquez *Venus with a mirror*. In the photo by Wollen the mirror is replaced with a computer screen. The selection of such presentation was not a coincident. The baroque work had been attacked with an axe by a suffragette Mary Richardson, freeing it from the patriarchal oppression of the look. With this photo Wollen started a feministic revolution on Instagram.

An artist, Petra Collins, takes photos only of sudden breakdowns, large sensitivities characteristic of the 'teenage girl' period. She shows her characters in a bad emotional shape, assuming that each case of sadness may have political overtones and be a rebellion against the society. The *selfie* itself is not a sign of narcissism or a symptom of a revolution or struggle in the internal world of girls. This is a fight for self-subjectivity, for the audience, and a failure in this area very often pushes girls to commit suicide as a radical refusal to function in the society.

One of the first works by Audrey Wollen refers to a typical image of a woman in the history of art, thus, a woman in bed. It shows her in such a way so that she gets empowered, without merely being an object to watch. She approaches the most popular waves of modern feminism with a large dose of criticism, as it propagates an image of a strong and balanced woman, treating weak women, suffering women like victims – therefore, strengthening their feeling of alienation. Sadness appears here as a contrasting agent, without which we cannot feel the importance of happiness. Sadness that may be used as a real valuable emotion, being an important voice that does not require permissive acceptance. It is enough to listen to it. Thanks to these actions sad girls may be seen as activists struggling with internal pain which is one of many ways to fight the domination of men. It is the 'teenage girl' thing that Wollen uses as a resistance tool (as the majority of the viewers of this debate incessantly fight

with the creation of their own perfect images). The private sphere starts to be political and intimacy and public sphere fuse.

Today, it is a frequent phenomenon that girls from small towns treat the Internet as the main source of information; it influences their view of the world to a large extent. Instagram, as one of many applications, has become the centre of information regarding fears, anxieties and attitudes of modern women. Profiles with the feminist *selfie* transformed into a social network where girls may feel free and may build female solidarity.

Zofia Krawiec is one of the representatives of the Polish self-feminism, known on Instagram as *Neurotic girl*. She is famous for her very controversial photos and sarcastic statements, like 'Tears are the best makeup remover', sometimes using feminist quotes. Her life, daily fed with new photos, has several thousands of followers. Thanks to the ostentatious eroticism of the presented photos the Instagram user is very popular. The project of Krawiec, even though it broadens the canon of presentations of women's bodies in the social media (disputing the local look), still remains indifferent to the issue of class, as if it stopped at the wave of the young-girl enthusiasm.

Selfie-feminists started to get to know their sexuality in order not to adapt to the look of men, but to become independent from it, and consequently feel good in their own bodies. All behaviours of selfie-feminists, even if seen as fake in some areas, have one thing in common – they undoubtedly succeeded – this way of presentation is considered a phenomenon in the virtual world.

### **#Olympia**

According to Johan Huizinga, a Dutch historian and culture philosopher, there was a crisis of the view of modern people. Many educated and not educated people take life as fun, similarly do their children, and, in the end, it becomes their permanent attitude. This eternal



audreywollen

Volgend

2.001 vind-ik-leuks

41 w.

audreywollen do crying selfies turn u on? does capitalism erode all joy? is all work an erotic exchange? is there a difference between a minimalist grid painting and an excel spread sheet? will we make it out of this image alive?

alle 113 reacties bekijken

debauchaudrey thanks for the recognition @reecetsisto

cheshicat @ksmoira I feel like you'd appreciate

2d.babe I still love u

birdbyblue @meme\_slut566

birdbyblue @tonymont is all work erotic exchange??? @sosensitive @impersonalbest @b\_goutish

\_\_terra\_\_ @kellyelenadugan omg

michaelbaker17 @charlie\_herron55 saw

♡ Een reactie toevoegen...

...



zofia.krawiec • Obserwuj

zofia.krawiec Złącz nogi i usiądź jak dama rottenpumpkin.exe nigdy

zofia.krawiec @rottenpumpkin.exe ♡

marryzima eat my pussy

zofia.krawiec @marryzima ;)

mateuszstanislaw Loud as heeeeeeeell

ironetflon\_Słowa mojego dzieciństwa

XDDD

theworstboo cudowna

skorvider Mama mówiła na mnie Pani Rozkraczevska

zofia.krawiec @skorvider Haha

chabraszewska My rozklapochla dont

molto\_ka 🤔🤔🤔🤔

kv.3m.tuminski Między nogami nigdy nie

kuć paszki ale jakby tak dawać spada by

♡ 💬

Liczba polubień: 887

8 MAJA

Zaloguj się, aby polubić lub skomentować.

...

immaturity is characterized by forgetting one's own dignity and lack of respect for others and their views, which results from excessive focus on one's own personality<sup>7</sup>.

The culture of 21<sup>st</sup> century is called a narcissistic culture with an intensive promotion of youth, beauty, power; these features a proof of a perfect human being. The idealized world presented by the media exposes hedonistic ideas which seduce the audience. Maturity becomes dull, unattractive, and delaying this process is more than recommended. The dispute fighting this idea is undertaken by Katarzyna Kozyra, showing a woman's body posing a challenge to the audience. It is a body that is badly perceived in the media; sick, tired, a body that should not be talked about loud. Kozyra poses a question regarding the role of a woman in the society and the role models that she needs to fulfil. *Olympia* by Edouard Manet (1893), when it was first put on public display, was heavily criticised. It was seen as an evil omen of the growing women emancipation movement. These reactions resulted from the presentation of a naked woman-prostitute who looked at the audience emotionlessly. The haughty woman is served with flowers and is taken care of. The literalism of the picture (dirt-resembling colours of the body), the contraposition of the passive body against the idealized body was very confrontational. A similar idea is followed by the work of Katarzyna Kozyra under the same title (1996). The work is composed of three parts. The first shows the naked artist lying in a hospital bed during the inflow of chemotherapy to the body; the next part shows an old naked woman sitting on a couch, the last is a pastiche of the famous Manet painting. The series of the photos is accompanied by a video of the drip infusion. Intimacy during a cancer treatment is interrupted. The idea of that work is not, however, to expose the sick, it is to reinstate the dignity; it is a dispute with the healthy and beautiful body generally promoted in the media; an objection against the fact that being sick

entails directly becoming 'invisible'. The threat of being sick is neutralized, its side effects are tamed – what is visible is the exposure of the canons how to present women. *Olympia* was used by the artist to renew her own gender identity.

*And nakedness means deprivation of clothes, which entails a certain embarrassment, felt by each of us in such situations. A nude act deprived of that embarrassing awkward subtext, gives an image of a body full of balance, certainty and bloom. A nude act shows a body that is transformed, exposed to display – its imagination which is to evoke even a shadow of erotic feelings. Quoting John Berger: 'To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others. [...] Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. [...] Nudity is a form of dress'<sup>8</sup> A socially significant problem started to function as a symbol of strength in the social media (Instagram). *Obscenity of Olympia is a challenge for the patriarchal order, limits of its identity, of what is allowed and what is forbidden [...]*<sup>9</sup>*



 zofia.krawiec • Obserwuj  
Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej

zofia.krawiec Not pregnant  
#100yearssowhat

girlfromdearborn Kocham 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰

zofia.krawiec @girlfromdearborn : \*\*

sebastianrypson Hence, sunlight emanating from a nipple...? What a conundrum.. 😊

luvmezack Piękna 🌹❤️

zofia.krawiec @luvmezack 📩

eva.lazarz ❤️

twojazbroja <3333

chabraszewska jak nerka na cycku to dusza na ramieniu czy serce na cłoni dzisz?

zofia.krawiec @chabraszewska o, dzień dobry ;)

patojaro.pl Zosiu jesteś śliczną ozdobą



Liczba polubień: 873

20 KWIETNIA

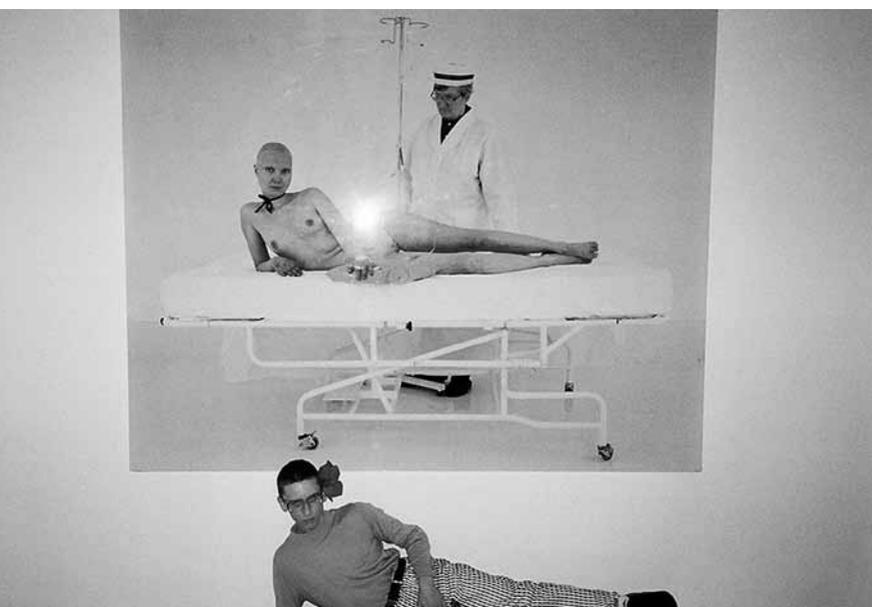
Kacper Szalecki, one of Instagram users, when taking a photo, spontaneously captured his female friend in a pose confusingly similar to the painting by Manet and Katarzyna Kozyra, re-interpreting that painting. That similarity became the starting point to use such pose, or motive, in the next performances. Apparently unimportant, this gesture, touching on cultural and gender roles, became popular and repeated by other users. *Olimpia's Diary* transformed into a kind of feministic manifest, an invitation to pose. The photo was a record of everyday life in which the main motive was Olympia's pose. The style of Kacper Szalecki's photos refers to the 1990s – called *Ninetieswave* – youth turned into a fetish, with a simultaneous lack of perfection, second-hand clothes and blurred make-up.

The sub-depressive quality of this performance becomes the reason for reflecting on the attitude to arts, canons and the question whether the audience also has the courage to argue with that canon.

Feminist art has no specific markers, does not imply any stylistic level and is not homogeneous. Its artistic activity breaks the systems of discrimination and oppression, destructs the existing names given to women by the patriarchal society and encourages to have a discourse with the very art. It is a characteristic game of contradictory information, a play with meanings and structuring new identities against the stereotypes.

Thanks to the development of the media women gained unlimited opportunities to express their views and beliefs, and the scope and accessibility of the media eliminates limitations and makes an inconspicuous person able to move crowds while his/her voice in the discourse is not possible to be ignored.

As written by Dorota Majkowska, feminist art *infringes defined imaginations and, in a sense, moves the limits of cultural acceptance. But women who create these works of art and theories moving the mass imagination bear the consequences of infringing the convention. Due to that*



*they are from time to time categorized as insane conspirators, witches, condemned haunted, rising against the Nature and Will of God. They become heroines of the reversed world, a world of the order upside down, in which feminine sexuality will be appreciated and valued for the period of carnival, Sabbath night, moments excluded from strict guardianship of culture controlling the body*<sup>10</sup>

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Agata Szuba

*#tropy#feminizm*

The contemporary media message can be perceived in two perspectives: an active one, in which women perform a role of journalists and editors, and a passive perspective, in which they become a part of media message. The latter aspect is the most controversial for many reasons. Walter Lippmann defines a stereotype as an image created in the mind which allows a subordination of a certain fragment of reality a priori. The media's visible, negative influence on women has them create a reality beyond the boundaries of acceptance, presenting it in a way the audience expects. A new kind of feminism appears, i.e. one which answers the receiver's needs (succumbing to the expectations and exposing to the look), and a question appears – whether in the time of the feminist legacy, thereby changes resulting from the development of the media, feminists should gain their own unique style? In a way this is beginning to happen.

Due to the development of the media, women gained an unrestricted possibility to express their views, and the reception and availability of the media lifts the restrictions and causes an inconspicuous person to please and sweep the crowd and his or her voice to be impossible to be ignored in the discourse.

KEYWORDS:

**OLYMPIA, FEMINISM, SOCIAL MEDIA, INSTAGRAM, SAD GIRLS, WOMAN, RIGHTS, BREASTS, NIPPLE, NINETIESWAVE**



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