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## **THE DESTINY OF SUBJECTIVITY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF POSTFEMINISM**

### *Abstract*

The article examines the relationship between the development of feminist ideas in the positioning of the subject in feminist theory (Simone de Beauvoir) and postfeminism (Judith Butler) in a dynamic relationship with social practices of modern society, their impact on public attitudes and on **observance of equality between its representatives** according to the different identities they could take: not only gender, but also racial, age, economic, political, etc.

Philosophy of postmodernism is the theoretical basis of this research. This means the non-logocentric, non-fallogocentric and non-textocentric research intentions. Fallogocentric world is the world designed from a men perspective. Feminist theorists – such as Simone de Beauvoir – try to argue that fallogocentric world is just a world-view construction, but not the world as it is in real. So feminist theorists construct their own feminist world – designed from feminine perspective. However postmodern methodology denies any absolute centre and centrism. So, postfeminism rejects feminist project of just female history, just female culture, just female world. The world is the one, and it has both dimensions – male and female. Therefore feminism matters to the men too, not only the women. Logocentric methods should be supplemented with methods focused on emotional dimension of human life. Textocentric methods should be supplemented with methods focused on images and their presentations. Non-centric methodology is proper and adequate approach to the rhizome structure of the postfeminist field of inquiry.

There are practical and theoretical planes that characterize the current situation of feminism: from declarative denial of classic feminism principles in real life to the further development of emancipatory ideas in academic studies. It is emphasized that existing discrimination on the basis of gender or other grounds is often supported not only by members of dominant groups, but also by people who are the object of oppression or violence. The defining role of the media in the formation of a policy of tolerance / intolerance to gender identities is noted. The characteristics of the representation of male and female visual images inherent in both patriarchal culture and the world of modern media are highlighted.

**Key words:** subjectivity, gender, identity, feminism, postfeminism, media.

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**ДОЛЯ СУБ'ЄКТИВНОСТІ У ФІЛОСОФІЇ  
ПОСТФЕМІНІЗМУ**

*Резюме*

У статті розглядається взаємозв'язок між розвитком феміністичних ідей у позиціонуванні суб'єкта у феміністичній теорії (Сімона де Бовуар) та постфемінізмі (Джудіт Батлер) у динамічних взаємовідносинах із соціальними практиками сучасного суспільства, їхнім впливом на суспільне ставлення та дотримання рівності прав між представниками різних ідентичностей: не лише ґендерних, але й расових, вікових, економічних, політичних тощо.

Теоретичною основою цього дослідження є філософія постмодернізму. Це означає не-логоцентричні, не-фалоцентричні та не-текстоцентричні наміри дослідження. Фалоцентричний світ — це світ, розроблений з точки зору чоловіків. Теоретики-феміністки, такі як Сімона де Бовуар, намагаються стверджувати, що фалоцентричний світ — це просто світоглядна конструкція, але не той світ, яким він є насправді. Тож феміністичні теоретики будують власний феміністичний світ — розроблений з жіночої точки зору. Однак, постмодерна методологія заперечує будь-який абсолютний центр та центризм. Отже, постфемінізм відкидає феміністичний проект лише жіночої історії, просто жіночої культури, просто жіночого світу. Світ єдиний, і він має обидва виміри — чоловічий і жіночий. Тому фемінізм має значення і для чоловіків, а не тільки для жінок. Логоцентричні методи слід доповнювати методами, орієнтованими на емоційний вимір людського життя. Текстоцентричні методи слід доповнювати методами, орієнтованими на зображення та їх презентації. Нецентрична методологія є правильним та адекватним підходом до ризомної структури постфеміністської сфери дослідження.

Існують практичні та теоретичні площини, що характеризують сучасну ситуацію фемінізму: від декларативного заперечення класичних принципів фемінізму в реальному житті до подальшого розвитку емансипаційних ідей в академічних дослідженнях. Підкреслюється, що існуюча дискримінація за ознакою статі чи за іншими ознаками часто підтримується не лише членами домінуючих груп, але й людьми, які є об'єктом пригноблення чи насильства. Відзначено визначальну роль засобів масової інформації у формуванні політики толерантності / нетерпимості до гендерних ідентичностей. Висвітлено характеристики представлення візуальних образів чоловіків та жінок, властивих як патріархальній культурі, так і світові сучасних медіа.

**Ключові слова:** суб'єктивність, гендер, ідентичність, фемінізм, постфемінізм, медіа.

### *Introduction*

The evolution of the philosophy of feminism and the introduction of the term «gender», which denotes not so much a biological complex of specific sexual characteristics of man, rather a set of psychological behavioral models, but, above all, a set of social and cultural practices of one sex or another. This evolution is due to the changes in philosophical thought, which focuses on the problems of human being and his/her world / worlds. Types of social relationships, dominant cultural practices, features of the functioning of communities and small social groups, including the family, play a key role in the formation and existence of gender identities.

The phrase «gender identity» became terminological and widespread after the publication by American psychiatrist Robert Stoller which was a result of decades of his observations on the development and manifestations of male and female patterns of behavior and types of sexuality in the book «Sex and Gender: The Development of Manhood and Femininity». This book has already been reprinted three times by leading publishers and is rightly considered key in promoting ideas about gender as a social construct, in contrast to the concept of gender, which is due to the biological structure of the body. R. Stoller himself, according to him, did not claim copyright for this term, nor for its scientific conceptualization: «It is a working term. We know that though it deals with another realm of feelings, thoughts and behavior, than that encompassed by, say, *sexual activity*, the two terms are contiguous and at times inextricably intermingled. With gender difficult to define and identity still a challenge to theoreticians, we need hardly insist on the holiness of the term «gender identity»» [12, p. 6]. R. Stoller only sought greater conceptual accuracy in the use of the terms «sex» and «sexuality»: «Trying to be more precise, we split off «gender» as a distinguishable part of sexuality» [12, p. 6]. He tried to correct the situation when discussions of sexual relations, either male or female, are mostly

connoted as biological components of a living organism, or are too vague, and «tremendous areas of behavior, feelings, thoughts and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations» [12, p. 7] remain as if aside. R. Stoller insisted on «the fact that the two realms (sex and gender) are not at all inevitably bound in anything like a one-to-one relationship, but it may go in its independent way» [12, p. 7]. It is to denote such a complex of non-biological phenomena in the 60s of the twentieth century, R. Stoller used the concept of gender, and since then it is this division between gender and gender has become entrenched in the theoretical field, primarily philosophical, although in everyday life, especially in English-speaking environment, these two concepts remained interchangeable.

### *Methods*

Philosophy of postmodernism is the theoretical basis of this research. This means the non-logocentric, non-fallogocentric and non-textocentric research intentions. Fallogocentric world is the world designed from a men perspective. Feminist theorists—like Simone de Beauvoir—try to argue that fallogocentric world is just a worldview construction, but not the world as it is in real. So feminist theorists construct their own feminist world—designed from female perspective. However postmodern methodology denies any absolute centre and centrism. So, postfeminism rejects feminist project of just female history, just female culture, just female world. The world is the one, and it has both dimensions—male and female. Therefore feminism matters to the men too, not only the women. Logocentric methods should be supplemented with methods focused on emotional dimension of human life. Textocentric methods should be supplemented with methods focused on images and their presentations. Non-centric methodology is proper and adequate approach to the rhizome structure of the postfeminist field of inquiry.

### *Scientific result*

From a philosophical point of view, the meaningful representation of the concepts of sex / gender, as somewhat different from the biologically determined nature, was most clearly outlined by Simone de Beauvoir in her two-volume work «The Second Sex», although the philosopher used the terms «male and female». The famous phrase of the French thinker «One is *not born*, but rather *becomes*, a *woman* (On ne naît pas femme, on le devient)» [2, Vol. 1, p. 216] eloquently characterizes the socio-cultural conditionality of the subordinate position of women in patriarchal society, as well as in modern society: in both to some extent a view of women is forming as a social construct, non- biological phenomenon. Beauvoir took theorizing about the female subject beyond the practical plane of the feminist struggle for women's rights in society and counteracting the complete dependence of women on their husbands. Relying on the philosophy of existentialism and inspired by the main ideas of Marxism, Beauvoir endowed

the female sex with subjectivity (any existent is characterized by the desire for transcendence), gave her the status of the Other in relation to the male being, and regarded woman as an active figure. Woman «fights for her transcendence» and realizes her own freedom [3, Vol. 2, p. 337]. Of course, economic emancipation is not the only thing a truly independent woman have to achieve in order to get the status of an autonomous subject in a patriarchal world where the male person is in unison with his nature to strive for social success and independence, and the woman has to overcome social attitudes and existential contradictions between her own social position and her desire for transcendence, autonomy, and freedom. According to Simone de Beauvoir, true freedom can only be collective, for all women, but not all women are ready to fight for it and therefore build individual freedom as if «within their own immanence», reminiscent of trying «to turn the prison into a sky of glory, their obedience — into the highest freedom, which we find in daffodils, mistresses, witches» [3, Vol. 279].

Thus, the options for constructing women as a gender subject, according to Simone de Beauvoir, due to a set of socio-civilizational factors that dominate a society, should in the future lead to the common emancipation of women and their true freedom of the transcendent subject. On the other hand, if a woman does not go beyond the immanences formed by social relations, she is also not deprived of the opportunity for self-realization in the roles of narcissist, mistress and witch.

Simone de Beauvoir's high degree of philosophizing and theorizing about female identity does not call into question the masculinity / femininity dichotomy itself. Criticism of the position of women in her works is designed to change social circumstances in order to free women from the oppressed, humiliating and inferior position in the world of men. This intention is inherent in many theoretical works of feminist orientation. It is no coincidence that the most important works of feminist theorists, including Judith Butler, are increasingly drawn to socio-political issues. One of the leading researchers of the theory of feminism, Irina Zhrebkina, directly shifted the emphasis from Judith Butler as a philosopher of queer identity to Butler as a philosopher of politics. This approach seems convincing in the context that in the field of social theory, which Butler criticizes from different positions, and Irina Zhrebkina and Sergei Zhrebkin talented demonstrate the archeology of this critique [4], any feminist theorist in seeking to find the limits of social injustice will face women understanding of social injustice in general and in particular for other identities: postcolonial, class, racial.

If Simone de Beauvoir spoke of the assertion of woman as a transcendental subject in the existential sense, Judith Butler thought of the feminist subject in the social and political vein to problematize the conditions of existence of a stable / consistent subject of political action, including object of feminist political action, based on Paul-Michel Foucault's idea of the death of the subject, which

was designed to symbolize the interaction of deep (archaeological) interactions on this subject's formation. According to Judith Butler, despite the theoretical postmodernist positions presented in the rather diverse concepts of a number of mostly French authors, in addition to Foucault, regarding the fate of the subject, it is still worth «asking questions about the process of its construction and its political significance and logical analysis of the subject as a requirement or a necessary prerequisite for the theory» [1, p. 236]. A portion of feminist criticism has been given to impersonal power, like the Foucault's power discourse, which predetermines by a «set of exceptions and selection procedures» who will act as the subject and to whom the subject will turn. Thus, Butler argues that for feminist theory the determinant is not just the subject itself, but its constitutive formation, and philosophical doubts and critical analysis should relate primarily to the subject as «a construction of a predetermined or fundamentalist premise» [2, with. 242–243].

Emphasizing the broad social and practical significance of feminist theory, the methodology of general application of feminism as a set of political practices to a wide range of contemporary social issues is demonstrated in the main work of feminist theorist and culturologist bell hooks (Gloria Gene Watkins) «Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics» [7]. In this book, the author uses her own experience of political life, professional teaching to analyze the essence of feminist theory, which is not directed against men, but is rooted in the practical problems of everyday sexism and sexual exploitation, which are institutionalized in the cultural patriarchal system and formed in processes of socialization of men and women as well. We can see at all times and, by the way, according to bell hooks, that women can also be sexists [7, p. viii], although it seems illogical, many women consider their oppressed position to be a social norm that should be followed and, most importantly, reproduced it in future generations.

Bell hooks exposes the negative role of most media, which reproduce patriarchal practices and contribute to the misunderstanding of the true role of feminism, instead of again and again educating sexism in men, women and children. This statement is illustrated by intolerant statements that we can sometimes hear from Ukrainian and Russian viewers who consume a Hollywood media product such as «why are so many black actors in movies?» or «why is this fictional female heroism?» and so on. Perhaps for residents of areas where racist problems have not been experienced as acutely as in North America, the situation when the cast of various films such as the Middle Ages or modern fantasy includes black actors seems strange, however, such assessments indicate the readiness of some women and men to tolerate discriminatory policies no matter what – racism or sexism.

The American Film Academy has recently changed the requirements for films that can be nominated for the world-famous Oscar – to increase gender and racial representation by at least 30% of women or members of the LGBTQ

community, ethnic minorities, Asian and African actors among the film crew [13]. These innovations have received controversial reviews. Our compatriots are mostly misunderstood this decision, and in some places there are even accusations of the latest discrimination. Such a reaction only demonstrates the extent to which our society tolerates discriminatory sexist social orders. Although without such an insufficiently tolerant reaction to Hollywood innovations, the deeply patriarchal status of our society very eloquently characterizes the gender composition of the Verkhovna Rada and the presence, or rather the absence, of a sufficient number of women among Ukraine's top politicians. Ukrainian scholars T. Martsenyuk and S. Oksamytna devoted their research on the fluctuations of public opinion on women in politics quotas, so even among the female population there is a «gradual and irreversible statistically significant decrease in the idea of gender quotas for political parties» [6, p. 9]. And if in economically developed countries, where the human rights system operates, society demands equal rights not only within a privileged social group, but for people of all racial, ethnic or gender groups, Ukraine will still have to work hard in this field to achieve equality for all.

Why is it important to portray people of different races in the visual media and to demonstrate gender diversity? As we can see, the media, and most of all television, play almost the biggest role in the modern world in reproducing discriminatory rules. As bell hooks wrote about racist attitudes — the privileged social status of white women, girls are shown on television, glossy magazines in such a way that images of black women are critically small compared to images of white ladies, as if black women do not exist for public life [7, p. 55]. It was the active position and work of black feminists, including the bell hooks herself, that helped rethink racist issues not only in a feminist vein, but also caused positive change in society as a whole. The new rules of the Hollywood Oscar committee are proof of that. According to the activist theorist bell hooks, such efforts «can become the sound foundation for the building of a mass-based anti-racist feminist movement» [7, p. 60] And, much more broadly, it could be the sound foundation for the mass understanding of non-discrimination and effective adherence to the Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

So we find that the modern struggle of women against sexism can take many forms — it is still the acute social struggle of white women for equal pay, the struggle for equal rights of blacks, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities or members of the LGBTQ community. On the other hand, a lot of criticisms to feminism can be seen as leveling its practical achievements in improving the position of women in society, because some young women are so free to make their own decisions and are so post-feminist that they can consciously choose a housewife lifestyle: not to work, and to devote the time to education of children and housekeeping. Angela McRobby wrote about the generation of such young women who know how to earn a living, «avoid any aggressive or overtly

traditional men, and they brazenly enjoy their sexuality without fear of sexual double standards» [9, p. 37–38]. However, on a practical level, this situation of the modern generation should be due to the feminist struggle, which has influenced the modern general social norms. Undermining the achievements of feminism, according to A. McRobby, is due to popular culture.

However, in academic terms, there are many current trends that position themselves as postfeminism, exploring the interactions of feminism and youth subcultures, such as the Goths, or critically analyzing the cult of youth that leads to age discrimination, examining the position of women in postcolonial societies and so on. Because theoretical research has shown that discrimination, oppression, and exploitation /sexism are supported not only by dominant groups, such as men, capitalists or youth, but also by other social groups, «the focus [of the feminist struggle] has shifted to comprehensive efforts to achieve gender justice» [7, p. 3]. Due to such concepts as social classes, sex, age, race, financial status, some social groups dominate over others. Indeed, it may be an illusion that feminism seems to have dissipated and lost clear definitions. Researcher Chris Holmlund wrote about these difficulties in defining that postfeminism simultaneously indicates a certain «an attitude... an optic... or object» and «all of the above» [8, p. 116]. Or as the bell hooks herself said, «feminist politics is losing momentum» [7, p. 6], therefore called for the return of strength and energy to feminism, and, on the other hand, to use the full potential of modern media to achieve this goal.

The logic of the dominance of the visual, which was discussed by Lucy Irigaré in the essay «Sex that is not single» [5, p. 129], which is directly related to modern media, in her opinion, is fundamentally different from female characteristics and female eroticism, but is inherent in male desire. How the specific forms of visual media, such as cinema and television, reflect and even sometimes directly reproduce the social norms of sexual difference that pour water on the mill of male sexism, through images and ways of view, was analyzed by Laura Mulvey in her famous work «Visual pleasure and Narrative cinema» [10]. First, the screens reproduce the masculine subjectivity due to the fact that the male characters predominate in their expansive actions, dialogues, while the female actresses are forced to be just beautiful pictures that serve to please the male audience. Secondly, the camera reproduces the male gaze, so there are so many close-ups of the female body (it is well known her expression «male gaze»). That is, both the inner narrative of the film and the methods of filming correspond to the existing model of patriarchal society. It should be noted that the situation with active female characters is constantly improving, especially in world cinema. We have a number of films where the main characters are active women with real subjectivity. It's not just about Marvel studios, such as «Black Widow», «Wonder Woman», the character of Captain Marvel, etc., but about feature thrillers — «Miss Sloan», «Atomic Blonde» and the like. The

policy of gender equality has touched on such classic patriarchal narratives as the Cinderella story (Kenneth Branagh's Cinderella in 2015) or the story of enchanted princesses (Kevin Lima's Enchanted in 2007) who are not just passively waiting for their liberating princes, but also take an active part in their destiny, demonstrating courage, the ability to defend their own rights and resist evil. Thanks to such theoretical works that expose implicit ways of reproducing social discrimination, natural aspirations for equal rights and freedoms have gained practical tools to achieve them — public pressure has forced Hollywood to change its own rules, as mentioned above.

The further development of feminist emancipatory ideas, which in productive interaction with postmodern philosophy and the expansion of ideas about culture as a set of anthropological practices led, firstly, to the focus of cultural characteristics of society instead of purely socio-political issues and, secondly, exacerbated differences between types of identities. Interestingly, there have been specific male studies that have studied male identity or masculinity, including Sean Nixon and his visual codes of male sexuality [11], which differ from traditional patriarchal culture stamps. Well, if we already study social gender oppression, according to feminism, then without restrictions. Due to the development of feminist ideas and the establishment of the now obvious fact that the problem is not in men, but in sexism, in socio-cultural norms that support and cultivate, including women themselves, the target of criticism became the system of oppression itself, which has many forms, therefore, the male sex also received its share of attention. Not all men easily dominate, for some it is a socio-cultural and psychological burden.

### *Conclusion*

Thus, the question of the choice of transcendence / immanence of the existence of the female subject, posed by Simone de Beauvoir as the best or worse fate of women in society in the postfeminist movement, is even more rhetorical in such a way that the question concerns the already patriarchal system as a social institution of oppression. The question of choosing a female identity as one of the gender models of identification arises, as the male / female dichotomy loses its leading role, and the problems of race, postcolonial identities, age social groups, and features of cultural practices become relevant. Now it is not fate — it is destiny for women to choose their own subjectivity. The issue of visual media means of forming gender identities is actualized and their role in maintaining the oppressed position of the bearers of some class, national, racial identities in societies is highlighted. A number of postmodern intellectuals, most notably M. Foucault, provided a philosophical basis for critical thinking about the construction of the gender subject, and the works of cultural studies theorists have identified this field of construction in cultural practices, where visual media currently play a leading role.

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