

## CONSUMER IDENTITY DISCOURSES IN POLISH WOMAN'S MAGAZINE

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** In the first part of my article, I refer to the theoretical basis of my line of argumentation: I compare two opposing, though, still popular approaches dominant in Polish reference literature on the quality and role of popular women's magazines in shaping consumer attitudes.

**Methods and results:** In the second part, based on the analysis of the content of the most popular women's magazines (24 issues from 2013), I propose my own theses, abandoning already overused arguments of dominant, repressive or heterogeneous, libertarian nature of these cultural texts. I present the results of investigation into women's magazines and point to four main conclusions to be drawn from them:

- 1) Women's magazines as a market product
- 2) Orientation towards conventions and aestheticization of commercial identity discourses
- 3) Search of 'authenticity' of commercial messages of celebrities.
- 4) Contradiction between identity models promoted therein

**Conclusions:** I have shown the inadequacies of studies focusing on criticism of 'emptiness, banality and conformity supported by the cultural industry' [1] as well as papers in which women's magazines are merely a place of 'semiotic democracy' [9], still producing resistance-full, oppositional meanings. Even if some dominant groups attempt to create in a society an 'unarticulated consensus' [9], it is necessary to ask questions what this 'unarticulated consensus' would be about or what content and forms it conveys.

The results obtained in the presented analysis rather motivate us not to agree with postmodernists' thesis that there are increasingly fewer distinctive meanings that would reflect some kind of meta-narrative or some tolerably coherent ideology. In fact, new possibilities are offered to the feminine, playing with tradition and innovation without falling into a rigid dichotomy. The magazines encourage women to embody a certain kind of "liberated" identity instead. However, an important question arises, what really is this "liberated" identity. It is definitely not connected with encouraging women to step outside their carefully outlined yet imaginary boundaries determined by what is 'stylish' and 'fashionable'. Women's magazines clearly represent contemporary society within categories of consumer culture as a pleasant bricolage of goods and services and social order as one big cultural jumble sale.

To research this issue further, it is necessary to have a combination of an in-depth reception and text analysis, both of which would add new quality to this discussion.

**Keywords:** Consumer identity, content analysis of women's magazines, cultural studies

## INTRODUCTION

The studies regarding women's magazines conducted thus far, not as numerous as, say, TV program analyses, indicate the complexity, multi-layered and divisive nature of this problem. This refers both to the magazines' very character, content, their role in shaping women's identity as well as methodology of their analysis. Attention is drawn to the fact that most of the research is undertaken by women, who may be somewhat "burdened" with their feminized attitude, which separates them from an objective academic perspective [18].

Janice Winship emphasizes the "double-edged" nature of women's magazines, which evokes "simultaneous attraction and rejection" towards them. On one hand, one may draw pleasure from the offered escapist content and appreciate their mass popularity, while on the other hand, it is difficult to agree with disseminated sexism and objectification of the female body.

"Many of the guises of femininity in women's magazines contribute to the secondary status from which we still desire to free ourselves. At the same time it is the dress of femininity which is both source of the pleasure of being a woman (...) and in part the raw material for a feminist vision of the future" [26].

Press and other media may be, therefore, treated as a metaphor of a mirror that is supposed to reflect social reality, one may also reach for the theses of John Fiske, according to whom, the media discourse should be included in categories of freedom and emancipation. One may also - assume the point of view of the Frankfurt school that defines it in the categories of power and subjugation. This line of reasoning takes us to the conclusion regarding negative influence of the media and their dominant role in perpetuating damaging stereotypes of sexes. Attempts are then made at deconstructing this objectification of womanhood. In Polish topical literature this perspective seems to be dominant. By exposing ideological meanings, female authors want to reveal this outside-driven, infantile, objectified female identity. From this perspective, beauty, fashion, marriage, maternity - as depicted by the press - seem to be not only goals in themselves but woman's destiny, central or even the only object of her interest.

This type of criticism is frequently based on subjective opinions of female authors or quantitative analyses of the image, which list the one-dimensional of women's images but omit - as stipulated by Angela McRobbie - the more interesting questions, which may be posed while analyzing popular women's magazines. McRobbie suggests that by merely criticizing popular magazines as "not good enough", researchers escape the responsibility of saying what they would really like to see in a magazine for young women that would actually be popular. What makes this format of magazines so popular? How do the readers refer to them? What is it precisely that does (or does not) interest them, makes their content memorable, helps women with their everyday lives?

How do these magazines function in a broader socio-medial context? [22]. An attempt to answer these questions was undertaken by Joke Hermes, by undermining one of the key methodological assumptions that texts must mean something to their readers, which she labels as *'fallacy of meaningfulness'* [11]. The magazine readers she interviewed, actually had very little to say about the magazines, indeed often had great difficulty recalling what they have read. One of the salient characteristics of the magazines seemed to be that they were easily put-downable.

"Although readers may recognize the codes of a given text and accord it limited associative meaning, they do not always accord it generalized significance, that is, a distinct and nameable place in their world views and fantasies" [12].

Readers approach popular women's magazines with significant reserve with browsing or viewing alone not being tantamount to content consumption. Such a magazine may be taken, browsed through and put down, with little engagement in the reading process. In this respect, the actual influence of such magazines on their readership, understood as modification of attitudes, becomes problematic. Moreover, reading/browsing of colorful magazines is fragmentary in nature, one rarely reads such magazines "from cover to cover". Readers select from the available content single elements as if from a vast reserves that you store in a bank [9], considering one as interesting and others as naive and not worth reading.

References are made to the notion of media 'flow' drawn from Raymond Williams, hinting at our experiences in media interpretation more in the context of 'watching television' than saying that we have 'watched the news', 'watched a play':

"We can be 'into' something else before we have summoned the energy to get out of the chair, and many programmes are made with this situation in mind: the grabbing of attention in the early moments; the reiterated promise of exciting thing to come, if we stay" [25].

Hermes's 'fallacy of meaningfulness' is nothing new, since William Belson [3] had discovered long ago that reading the newspaper often seemed to serve no other function than filling time and, around the same time, Penn Kimball [17] pointed out that during a newspaper strike people experienced the lack of a newspaper as a 'time vacuum'. The metaphor of 'flow' seems quite often to be almost taken for granted when combined with discussions about 'everyday life' routines.

Although I appreciate Hermes's desire to focus on knowledgeable readers, I tend to agree with Jim McGuigan's criticism, according to which, such an approach collides with the possibilities of any form of exerting influence on the reader [21]. The press emerges here as a medium being solely a source of pleasure. One may not speak of propagating meanings, preferences, social identity or manipulation, since it fulfills only the requirements of the entertainment discourse, which the recipient fully controls and which he consciously and playfully confronts. With such an approach, it is almost impossible to deal with the question of the media's power over people's lives.

Hermes is also too quick to dismiss the merits of textual analysis, treating them as the 'moralizing voice of the author' [13]. It would be difficult, however, to undermine the coherent, objective, reliable, representative nature of the sample in scientific analysis. And they are especially important in content analysis. One may agree with some critics of this method, that it is difficult to capture the meanings, if the messages are divided into categories (and this division is here a key element). Insulating certain elements from the entirety, in order that we may quantify them, changes their meaning. Apart from that, too big an importance is attached in this analysis to "repetitiveness" of symbols, while too little to what they may mean for the recipients. In fact, it is not important how something appears in e.g. commercials, if the recipient does not understand it or understands it differently.

Therefore, in this paper, I combine textual (semiotic) analysis with content analysis content analysis. Although in the literature dealing with the subject both are understood interchangeably, one must stress, that the textual analysis focuses on the qualities of substance in the researched material. It serves the examination of the intentions and looks for a deeper layer of the discourse's meaning. Although those theoretically complex scientific criteria - as it turns out - encompass, most frequently, elements of both these scientific attitudes, since the "quantitative ideas (...) do not express objective features of objects and facts, but merely our subjective manners of approaching certain aspects of objects and facts, which after closer inspection always disintegrate into qualitative features" [28]. If one ventures a stratifying description of social phenomena with symbolic nature (such as the axiological system) he/she shall use a quantitative perspective to a qualitative problem. The presented research includes both the manifested content, i.e. visible and (theoretically) unquestionable as to the quantitative approach as well as hidden content creating an internal structure of the message, illustrating the model of the world that undergoes qualitative analysis, along with its system of value.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

I assume that media (including new media) may constitute for the recipient a relevant source of information disseminating specific values norms and patterns of behavior. Women may see magazines overall as permanent sites through which they experience and express the social world. So magazines seem to be important for society as they create a culture, a "feminine culture" where a common experience of womanhood is shared.

I concentrate on the characteristics of press messages in terms of specified consumer meanings combined with the image of a woman. The undertaken substance and content analysis of press messages is based on singled out indicators of specific socio-economic phenomena.

There are over 100 women's magazines on the Polish press market. They can be divided into "traditional" and "modern". The first ones have titles: 1) inspired by names of women ("Tina", "Claudia", "Olivia"), 2) suggest social role ("Pani Domu", "Poradnik Domowy", "Dobre Rady", "101 porad") and magazines about a particular topic devoted to kitchen, interior design, raising children, hand craft etc. 3) expose womanhood and relations of both sexes ("Kobieta i Życie", "Kobieta i Styl", "Świat Kobiety", "Przyjaciółka", "Kobieta i Mężczyzna") 4) accompanying readers in self-determination ("Kobieta i Styl", "Magazyn Kobiet Myślących", "Wysokie Obcasy"), 5) concentrating on "real stories", i.e. slightly scandalizing stories about life's successes and failures ("Życia wzięte", "Kalejdoskop losów", "Sukcesy i Porażki", "Na ścieżkach życia", "NAJ", "Blaski i Cienie", "VIVA", "Sekrety serca", "Życie na gorąco", "Takie jest życie").

The second group is made up of "modern" magazines dedicated to the higher income reader segment. They are, therefore, more expensive and bear titles: 1) Using woman's names ("Marie Clair"), 2) Indicate the essence of womanhood ("Elle"), 3) reflect life, society, geography, in which the readers function ("Cosmopolitan", "Glamour"), 4) support the addressee in self-determination ("Twój STYL", "Sukces"), 5) are oriented toward looks, beauty ("Uroda", "Zwierciadło", "Votre Beaute", "Shape", "Avanti").

Materials for analysis included these magazines which are characterized by systematic nature and repetitiveness as well as biggest scope of recipients in both abovementioned groups. These were, therefore, "Twój Styl" (Bauer Media Group) - monthly magazine read by 12% of researched persons as well as "Claudia" (Burda International Poland) with a result of 9,35%<sup>1</sup>.

The format of the magazine is in itself a 'sign' as it 'connects together the mythic meanings of femininity and pleasure' [4]. Reading the pages, a reader will gain insight into the world of a woman and will be taught what is expected of them as women. Bignell argues that the function of magazines is "to provide readers with a sense of community, comfort, and pride in this mythic feminine identity" [5]. It must be mentioned, that an important element of the policy of magazine's editors and owners (or primary policy as I reveal below) is to strategically manage the magazine's brand, so as to, as in the case of every other product, increase profits by attracting more advertisers.

## 1. Result analysis

### 1.1. Women's magazines as a market product

We can tackle the issue of commercialization of women's press in two aspects. The first one, when we diverge from the constitutive features of journalism, i.e. maintaining own style, goal-oriented selection of well verified facts, autonomic decisions of the editors. Journalists of "Claudia" distance themselves from these principles by mixing commercial and non-commercial content in a way that gives priority to the former, thus, frequently leading the reader astray as to their nature. In the second case, commercialization occurs when the magazines are filled with advertisement, editorials, sponsored articles etc. These days, editorials seem to be relevant in indicating the significant role of consumer discourse in lifestyle publications. Many sections of both magazines feature reviews of products and styles that will enable its readers to replicate the looks of well-known celebrities. The juxtaposition of paparazzi-style photography with precisely composed close-ups of shoes or clothing in editorial studio, is something more than product placement.

Even sections that include advice (these are most frequently articles, which tackle problems commented on by experts, e.g. doctors, make-up artists, sportsmen), which - it might seem - do not include content that refer to particular products, brands, start to carry such meaning by direct proximity to product advertisement.

I back the commercial and non-commercial content of press messages by particular indicators. These will be:

For commercial content:

1. Advertisement - single page, half- page or 1/3 of page.
2. Advertorial

<sup>1</sup> PBC General survey at the request of Polskie Badania Czytelnictwa Sp. z o.o. was conducted by Millward Brown SMG/KRC. The survey was conducted with the CAPI technology in the period between November 2012 until March 2013 on a random sample of 22 596 and in a period ranging from November 2013 to March 2014 in a random sample of 20 988. All-polish sample was collected from the PESEL sampling frame and was realized until it was exhausted. The provided numbers are CSS indicators (Seasonal Cycle Readership).

- A. Photo sessions with male / female models including famous people photographed in stylized interiors featuring products or clothes. Prices and brands are provided in a clear way, frequently the addresses of shops are provided, where they can be bought.  
These may also be photo sessions of "average" persons, who thanks to particular products go through a "metamorphosis". With this goal in mind, pictures from "before" and "after" the make over are presented. Such a contrasted comparison is supposed to show the radical nature of the change, i.e. how successful it was, which is tantamount to the effectiveness of the product.
- B. The product (with the provided brand and price) as a competition prize, crossword competition, or for the reader who send the most interesting "letter to the editor", etc.
- C. The product (with provided brand, price) recommended by the journalist, which is an "inspiration for the interior/beauty" ("Cosmetics, which your skin will love", "Wonderful vacation in Poland - 20% off in SPAs and hotels", "Overview of the pretties bathing suits", "Beautiful dresses in the most fashionable styles of the season", "Christmas gifts", "Seasonal shopping", etc.)
- D. Product recommended by a celebrity or his paparazzi-style photography ("Evening celebrity-style handbags", "7 polish stars in an incredible underwear session", etc.)

For non-commercial content:

- A. Articles  
B. Feuilletons  
C. Reportages (e.g. "Real life stories")  
D. Reports (e.g. novelties, news from around the world)  
E. News (e.g. fashion trends - without indicating particular brands and prices)  
F. Content related to celebrities (without brand recommendations):  
Interviews  
Reportages (e.g. "Celebrity love stories")  
Reports ("Life style", anniversaries, competitions)  
G. Soft news [19] (culinary, psychological, health and legal advice, horoscopes - without indicating particular products, brands and prices)

Table 1. Commercial and non-commercial content of "Claudia" and "Twój Styl" magazines

	"Claudia" (provided in percentages)	"Twój Styl"
Commercial content	50.5	37.7
advertising	25	20.3
advertorials	25.5	17.4
Non-commercial content	46.5	53.5
articles	3.7	8.0
feuilletons	1.1	2.5
reportages (e.g. "Real life stories")	2.2	2.2
reports (e.g. novelties, interesting facts from around the world)	2	5.3

news (e.g. fashion, trends)  
Content related to celebrities:

5.4 4.1

Interview with a celebrity  
reports ("Life style", anniversaries, competitions)  
reportages (e.g. "Love story")

6.3 15  
1.6 2.1  
2.2 3.1

Soft news (culinary, psychological, health and legal advice, horoscopes)

21 11.2

Various

3 8.8

Advertising in commercial content constitutes half of the content, while in "Claudia" advertorials constitutes an even slightly bigger part. Over half of the substance within "Claudia" includes commercial content, 40% in the case of "Twój Styl". Non-commercial content does not include sections with advice or messages regarding fashion trends, make-up, hair-style, etc if they did not point to a specific brand. One might, however, point to at least four premises to place them in the first group of commercial content. First, even if the names of the products were not featured, many companies boast in their promotional materials, that their products are recommended by journalist in lifestyle magazines. Second, even products the names of which were not mentioned, could be recognized by female more fashion-savvy readers. Third, there are no names of particular products, brands, but frequently that content is placed in direct proximity to advertisement of products from that sector (thus, the persuasive influence can be even stronger.) And finally, popularization of content related to fashion or, simply, the broadly understood appearance, carries clear consumption-oriented relevance. If, therefore, these categories are classified as commercial content and certainly consumption-oriented ones, the results would be as follows:

Table 2. Commercial and non-commercial content of "Claudia" and "Twój Styl" magazines having included advice-like consumption-oriented content

	"Claudia" (provided in percentages)	"Twój Styl"
Commercial content*	66.9	47.8
Non-commercial content	30.1	43.4

\*From the "Soft news" category (advice) only that material has been moved to commercial content in the direct proximity of which one could find advertising regarding products from the sector that the text regarded.

The analyzed magazines should be treated primarily as marketable products, the strategy of which concentrates either on increasing or maintaining advertising revenue. With this in mind, it is necessary, to broaden the target group, increase the readership (increasing circulation), as well as shape the loyalty of current readers. "Twój Styl",

III cover	200 700,00 PLN
1/1 page	175 600,00 PLN
1/2 page	123 600,00 PLN
1/3 page	101 800,00 PLN
junior page	168 200,00 PLN
*1 PLN is ca. 4 euro	

Prices of advertisement in „Claudia” start from 298 900 PLN (spread), and finish at 7900 PLN (1/4 left page). To each amount, one should also add 23% tax, but also 20% if the advertisement is placed in the first 1/3 part of the magazine, 15% if it is placed between 1/3 and 1/2 part of the magazine or in the section "Beauty", "Fashion", "Kitchen" or next to a selected editorial.

For example, in "Twój Styl" there are, on average, 35 whole page advertisements (excluding advertorials), therefore one does not have to make a profit and loss account to conclude that the argument of resorting to commercialization as a possibility to maintain the newspaper became, at some point, already groundless. The border between journalistic goals and advertising was crossed long time ago, i.e. the goal of this medium is no longer to "broaden knowledge on the modern world" (as may be read on the magazine's website), but delivering information about their client's products in a more pleasant editorial form which is far more attractive than "regular" advertisement.

John Keane acknowledges that media financed by advertisement do not remain in line with the freedom of communication: "Advertisement has the tendency to quietly remove from the public domain all non-commercial opinions and non-commercial forms of life" [16]. With this being the case, a non-democratic message is born that consumption driven lifestyle is the best. Commercial publishers are not interested in extra-market preferences of recipients. They are absorbed, however, in satisfying the needs of the public within the bounds of market competition. Advertising is being given the position of extreme importance by commercial media [16].

### 1.2. Orientation towards conventions and aestheticization of commercial identity discourses.

The Polish press market has almost one hundred women's magazines. The all have different circulation, they are addressed to different groups of readers, have various characteristics, volume, format etc, but what connects them all is, surely, the repetitive nature of patters that organize the text of a monthly magazine, the way in which the cover is composed.

The main graphic element of the cover is a face or bust of a woman ("Claudia" features a bigger part of woman's body a lot more frequently than "Twój Styl"), which according to Eileen McCracen, reflects media's pressure on beauty and necessity to reach perfection in this aspect [20].

Meaning is organized around very traditional assumptions about color, design, language and photography. Covers do not differ almost at all. They feature predominantly centered photos of models or celebrities with precisely placed titles. The objectification of the female body emerges as a key issue. Images of bodies presented on magazine covers are an important aspect of the magazine as they initially attract the reader to purchase another issue of the magazine. The front cover will promise that "the

"Claudia", just as other product brands run a wide promotional campaign, using both advertising as well as social campaigns, awarding prizes to public figures or other brands, that journalists consider best or - what is puzzling - which are frequently advertised in those magazines.

The analyzed women's magazines are a vibrant advertising vehicle, which is particularly disturbing in the context of aspirations to be a "lifestyle" guru, an expert in all matters related to goals, values or even sense of human life. "Claudia", similar to "Twój Styl" proposes "highest quality" advice in the area of everyday life". They are a reflection of the close relationship between signifying women's identity and the consumption of material items (both advertised within the magazines as well as the very magazines with their "lifestyle" ideology of womanhood and luxury). The main function of these media is the effective management of customers i.e. advertising agencies and producers so that they could effectively communicate, via the magazines, with their target group. The commercialization of American media was already extensively covered by Michael F. Jacobson and Laurie A. Mazur from the Center for the Study of Commercialism in 1995. They indicated that the media, not only realize marketing goals of companies purchasing time or advertising space, but they themselves become the tool of marketing, significantly influencing the shape of their content. Jacobson and Mazur postulate that the media are like a Trojan horse - they walk into our homes, promise entertainment only to deliver their proper "package" - commercial messages [14].

In one of the studies, the employees of American media when asked about the scope of the pressure exerted by the advertisers, agreed that it is more frequent than the pressure exerted on them by their own employer. They had a problem with providing particular examples of such involvement. Therefore, this pressure may assume the form of auto-censorship and fear of the sponsor's dissatisfaction rather than actual advertiser's pressure. "It is no longer censorship related to someone's particular pressure, with social conservatism or religious considerations" - states Barney Rosenzweig, a producer. "It is strictly related to money. This problem comes to light in numerous aspects of work, changing it more then ever" [14]. The writer Bruce Paltrow notices: „Such a climate changes the way in which one thinks. Only after some time you realize that you are censoring yourself" [15]. Therefore, content is generated which in its form does not differ much from the advertisement itself; programs, which "seamlessly flow into advertisements, avoiding relevant matters, promoting a style of perception similar to a hypnotic session" [15], which has already been discussed earlier.

Naturally, not every form of sponsoring is harmful. It is often assumed that media could not function without a "certain" form of support. Yet, almost always, this "certain" form of support gives the sponsor a "certain" degree of control. It is not easy to maintain right proportions of commercial funds in the budget. Below I provide an advertising price list in "Twój Styl".

Table 3. Advertising price list in "Twój Styl"

	left side	right side
opening spread	427 900,00 PLN*	
spread	332 900,00 PLN	
IV cover	292 800,00 PLN	
II cover	241 900,00 PLN	

content of the magazine (...) will fulfill the needs of the individual and her group" and sells a "future image" of the reader as "happier, more desirable" [6]. By merely looking at the front cover of a magazine a potential reader will be able to determine how far it will fulfill their needs.

In "Twoj Styl" the covers include mainly images of celebrities, ready-made products, ideally crafted figures, body weight, proportions, sun tan, teeth, hairstyle, make-up, dress etc. Such a form puts the reader, as if, in front of a mirror. The cover presents an idealized reflection and perfect images of women. Eyes of a beautiful model always gaze in the eyes of the reader, triggering an identification mechanism - a projection that offers the image of her ideal "ego".

In fact, "Twoj Styl" carefully selects its celebrities (...), always being guided by the principle of credibility and elegance. The magazine, as opposed to "Claudia", avoids inviting interviewees, who are "well known for being recognized (featured, shown)" i.e. created by the media. These are persons known for certain achievements, have particular accomplishments, skills, abilities. Despite their achievements, professional successes of actors, singers, journalists, sportswomen "shine" on covers of magazines directing the manner of thinking of an average reader not only to the star herself but also her preferred features: looks, cosmetics used to remove specific "imperfections" etc. Some of them include middle-aged ladies (after 40), and only in one case - Kinga Preis - wrinkles are visible on the forehead and under her eyes (cover of the August issue of "TS"). Photographs of all other, sometimes older celebrities are perfectly airbrushed.

Being aware of the convention also in relation to the category of sex, makes us not treat such images as a reflection of reality. They are, however, coherent with other images, which are used by popular women's press, thanks to which the text does not collapse into an array of incoherent elements. Even if we are not able to name the convention, or consider it in analytical categories, we know that the model or celebrity, is not a woman "taken out" from reality. What is more, we would be probably strongly surprised finding pictures on the covers, which would break such conventions e.g. an image that is not properly lit or presenting a woman in "real" situations without airbrushing.

### 1.3. Search of 'authenticity' of commercial messages of celebrities.

The analyzed magazines have a clear trend of featuring celebrities. A celebrity, as a talented leader, may generate pleasure via identifying oneself with him. Fascination with stars may also be an element that helps build relations by common admiration (or denouncement). Engagement in narration of a celebrity's life may foster the verification of own behavior, ethics, interpersonal relations. According to Graem Turner one may stipulate that celebrities deliver material for identity creation [24], fulfill also therapeutic functions - allow to experience the feeling of being freed from gray reality and a sense of belonging to the world of luxury, beauty and success.

<sup>2</sup> Metaphor by Jacques Languet in relation to a child's stage of development.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Wright Mills long before other thinkers has observed that within societies there are individuals whose success is based on them being "seen" - he was, therefore, the first one to notice the social role of "being visible" (see: 8).

Therefore, the advertising industry reaches out so eagerly toward celebrities. Stars take over an increasingly big authority of experts and social elites who until now controlled knowledge generating processes. It depends increasingly frequently on media messages, including those coming from celebrities. They may, more flexibly, i.e. depending on the type of the task, recommend lifestyles, in a not necessarily objective way, with all accompanying accessories, thus influencing decisions regarding what one buys and does to one's body, how one dresses, what career aspirations one has. Our behavior is very strongly determined, not as before by institutions and doctrines, but by individuals - by stars [see 2].

Stars are exactly there to be commodified, they embody dominant ideologies: individualism, capital and consumption. They are an important pillar of those ideologies, since they are both sold as well as bought. They are an object of consumption, as well as its powerhouse. They compel to purchase products, services, values etc, but they themselves are also products, services, values.

With press coverage (within media) a celebrity, in a way, "comes to us" from his "other" world and shows us his second face, similar to the image of an average viewer. He/she shows his household life, presents himself/herself as a person with problems, someone who has authentic personality which differs from the marketable one [7]. We may identify with that person as with a regular mortal who complains about the "difficulties", talks about "devouring" her "real" self. Rather perversely, he/she treats the "devouring" as an evidence for having a "real" personality [23]. What is important is that the recipients want it to come to light, they want celebrities to be "normal" and to become part of everyday life and experience.

The singer Anita Lipnicka tells, therefore, about her "difficult love". The Krauzes admit that they try not to argue because arguments are a "waste of time". The actress Magdalena Cielecka lists her mistakes and sums up that "life is smarter" than her. Maja Ostaszewska mocks "big fame" stating that it is a joke, because "there is nothing worse than a pompous actor". Another actress Maria Seweryn talking about the "men of her life" describes them as "Monsters Inc.". Katarzyna Żak admits that she is an absolutely "imperfect housewife". The Journalist Dorota Wellman ridicules her lack of beauty and Szymon Bobrowski, "sits and cries when he hears the Polish anthem".

It seems that readers discern the existing tension between the celebrity as a commercialized product and his/her private individual side. They understand that stars are a product (which is included in the processes of creating meaning, and becomes a source of pleasure), but also eagerly "look for" something that is authentic, which may be identified or confronted.

Celebrity stories are among the most frequently appearing topics on the covers of "Twoj Styl" and "Claudia".

Table 4. Topics appearing on the cover of "Twoj Styl" and "Claudia".

	"Twoj Styl" (percentages)	"Claudia"
Celebrity stories	42.2	21.3
Fashion	11.3	16.8
Love, relationships, sex	12.3	6.7
Beauty	5.1	10
Cooking	2	14
Advice (mainly psychological)	6.6	8

Gifts, shopping	1.9	2.7
House, family	7.2	6
Health	4.1	6.7
Work, career	3	1
Stories of "ordinary" people	3	2
Various	1.3	4.7

#### 1.4. Contradiction between consumer identity models

Apart from interview and information about celebrities, another frequent theme that appears in women's press is fashion, male-female relations and beauty i.e. topics related to female body. The mission of both magazines is to encompass the "widest spectrum of issues regarding the life of modern women". "Twoj Styl" – according to the information provided on the magazine's website - is supposed to be "object-lens and the eye", through which the reader can learn about the world, gain knowledge and information which he/she can trust. Claudia, on the other hand, is supposed to "broaden the knowledge about the modern world" and distinguish itself with "expert-level content". Claudia's subtitle is prominently featured on the cover with the phrase: "magazine for real women". This signifies to the reader that the title offers consumer values of "real" femininity. To clearly, undeniably, authoritatively indicate what femininity is.

On the cover of the May edition of "Twoj Styl", apart from the photo of the actress Katarzyna Bujakiewicz, the subtitle "Who are you?" takes most space. The Polish female is defined in three categories: strongwoman, citizen of the world and housewife. Just as "Twoj Styl" most frequently promotes the image of a strongwoman - a superwoman, "Claudia" is dominated by the image of a well-groomed, elegant "housewife". The strongwoman seeks to meet all the challenges that she took up. She combines the features of a traditional woman (mother and wife) with modern woman (professionally engaged), for whom "there is no leniency" (TS March 2013).

Analysis of the very content of covers of "Twoj Styl" indicates, however that there is an internal inconsistency: traditional relationship (marriage) may be good or bad, individual relationship is more important than family, but the cover of that very issue informs that family is what gives strength to professional life ("Three years spent with my family gave me strength" - interview with the journalist Hanna Lis) or a woman without a man is not able to function ("I am not beautiful when he is not looking at me - interview with the singer Kaya). On one hand, we are dealing with images of strong women: Iwona Guzowska, i.e. "female parliamentary gets into the ring" (August issue), Danuta Stenka, who is being "lulled by pace and quiet" and needs constant changes (December), Dorota Wellman, who God gave a strong personality (March), Anna Czartoryska who "will not allow herself to be locked in a golden cage" (July), or Agnieszka Grochowska who "is a far cry" from Danuta Wałesa (known for her devotion to her family) (TS October). We have articles about war reporters, sportswomen, travelers.

On the other hand, however, most of those interviews take such form as to (even if it is generally a conversation about professional life) touch upon the issues of femininity, or what is stereotypically related to a woman - beauty, marriage, children. Next to the interview entitled: "Birth certificate? It has no meaning. Famous actresses in

an honest conversation", we have clearly airbrushed pictures of those actresses and articles how to cover and reduce wrinkles.

In this very same edition which exposes the model of a "strongwoman", one places content strongly concentrated on the body. Every issue of "Twoj Styl" harbors constant tension between being independent and looking for a partner, father of future children; between "being oneself" and complying with the predominant paragons of beauty and physicality. This strategy is being presented by non other than the publisher, describing a prototypical reader of "Twoj Styl" as "ambitious, independent, aspiring woman, appreciating both knowledge and personal development as well as the world of pleasure and fun. (...) First of all, however, attached to universal values: family, love". Similarly, a model reader of "Claudia" is an active and modern female who, at the same time, does not reject traditional values, is able to work out a flexible image of a wife and mother devoting time to her family and a free woman realizing her professional ambitions. Such a woman is supposed to be "brave and romantic" (July issue of TS), "feminine and delicate" (January issue of TS), although she is supposed to have also "a lot of male strength", just as the actress Katarzyna Gnievkowska, who "changes tires, plants trees in the garden of her Krakow house and then is an overprotective mother. As a child she hated being a girl; today, she liked her emotional swings".

These "emotional swings" are part and parcel of her sex and age as the most universal key concepts in the representation of consumer culture in lifestyle magazines. Femininity is articulated by women's bodies, by women themselves. Women are encouraged to become consumers on their own body with an array of advertorials regarding beauty and rejuvenating products and fashion. Only sporadically, in some perfumes adverts do we see the female body as a sexual object.

Both titles are not covert in their pre-occupation with consumer values, but "Twoj Styl" is more engaged in propagating aspiring materialism. The images of a woman in "Twoj Styl" seem to play upon the insecurities of its readers in the representation of idealized and unrealistic depictions of female lifestyles. Advertising and other images of women in "Claudia", by contrast, are more reassuring: woman's lifestyle is articulated in the vernacular of familiarity of the "everyman".

Gender identities are both fixed and flexible. "Twoj Styl" is a self-awareness magazine (as understood by Janice Winship): being a woman centers around the constant adjusting of one's own image to the proper time and place [27]. This is both about the "metamorphosis of the looks" (most frequently), as well as a change of lifestyle. Known personalities share the way in which they had to re-evaluate their life and what the costs were. The analyzed material rarely takes up the issue of roles and place of women in public life, but if such social practices do appear, then usually in the context of woman's guilty conscience or the difficulties that are associated with it. Information regarding the participation of women in social and political life is transferred on that same level of relevance as their propensity to e.g. sweets. The problem of beauty is dominant but it is cleverly juxtaposed with career and professional life. Self-realization is paramount, but we are reminded that family and sacrifice are also important. The trash and chaos of values emerge from the content of analyzed magazines.

David Gauntlett believes that such contradictions are important because multiple messages contribute to the perception of an open realm of possibilities. "In contrast with the past - or the modern popular view of the past - we no longer get singular, straightforward messages about ideal types of male and female identities (although

certain groups of features are clearly promoted as more desirable than others). Instead, popular culture offers a range of stars, icons and characters from whom we can acceptably borrow bits and pieces of their public persona for use in our own. In addition, of course – and slightly contradictorily – individuals are encouraged to 'be yourself', and to be creative – within limits – about the presentation of self [...]. Today, nothing about identity is clear-cut, and the contradictory messages of popular culture make the 'ideal' model for the self even more indistinct – which is probably a good thing" [10].

In fact, new possibilities are offered to the feminine, playing with tradition and innovation without falling into a rigid dichotomy. The magazines encourage women to embody a certain kind of "liberated" identity instead. However, an important question arises, what really is this "liberated" identity? The magazine presents it mainly as an artifice and a pleasant bricolage of goods and services.

## RESULTS

One may reveal the inadequacies of studies focusing on the criticism of 'emptiness, banality and conformity supported by the cultural industry' [1] as well as producing resistance-full, opposing meanings. Even if some dominant groups attempt to create in a society an 'unarticulated consensus' [9], it is necessary to ask questions what this 'unarticulated consensus' would be about or what content and forms it conveys.

Women's magazines, especially "Claudia" are characterized by evading everything that exists outside a certain element of playfulness in terms of clothing and make-up. Magazines rarely encourage women to step outside their carefully outlined yet imaginary boundaries determined by what is 'stylish' and 'fashionable'. They represent contemporary society and social order as a one big cultural postmodern jumble sale.

One may also subscribe to the stipulations of Janice Winship or Joke Hermes according to which, in order for the women's press to be able to achieve maturity, researchers should focus on interpreting what it is for recipients. What should count more is not what scientists think of it, but what relevance is ascribed to it by the public. Indicating the multiplicity of meanings and their diverse nature may prevent misshaping this field of research and approaching it in a subjective and simplified manner. Women's press and stars featured in it are market products and perceiving them as such may be included in the reader's processes of creating meaning.

We might, then, be able to verify the extent to which macro-level dominant system of meanings is embodied in reality at the micro level, in everyday life of ordinary people, or whether such a system is in fact – as often as John Fiske would want it – questioned and rejected. The results obtained in the presented analysis rather motivate us not to agree with postmodernists' thesis that there are increasingly fewer distinctive meanings that would reflect some kind of meta-narrative or some tolerably coherent ideology. Women's magazines clearly represent contemporary society within categories of consumer culture as a pleasant bricolage of goods and services and social order as one big cultural jumble sale. The question that remains is, how serious female readers are in their treatment of identity-oriented propositions.

This issue, however, for future research requires a combination of an in-depth reception analysis and text analysis, which could contribute new quality to this discussion.

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