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Polished Floor: Female Identity and Resistance Strategies. Autoethnography

ABSTRACT

The article presents the process of constructing female identity with the reference to the traditional model of womanhood. The arguments presented refer to the changes in the division of housework. According to the stereotypical model of a womanhood, the ‘polished floor’ that appears in the title is described as one of the effects of a diligent fulfillment of the obligations assigned to women. The autoethnographic narrative that demonstrates personal experience of the author accompanies the conducted analyses. The article presents an analysis of a popular Facebook fan page ‘Sh* Housewife’, which constitutes an embodiment of the women’s resistance strategy against the housework being treated as a ‘natural’ calling and obligation of a woman. The final conclusions clearly indicate that the social and cultural changes that have led to the equality of women and men have not altered the convictions and models of performing housework.

Keywords:

housework, female identity, resistance strategy, autoethnography, Facebook

INTRODUCTION

A juxtaposition of a polished floor with female identity is a provocation. At first, it does not seem legitimate. However, it allows conducting an analysis of a female identity formation process in relation to the traditional model of womanhood and its requirements concerning obligatory housework. Autoethnographic relations comprise an important element of this paper and they are the result of my personal

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experience analysis.² It is not the first time that I decided to include them in article in the form of autoethnography – a narrative research method that combines autobiography and ethnography, a manner of writing and conducting research that combines the personal with the cultural, social, and political (Ellis, 2004, p. XIX; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 283). Although practicing autoethnography still carries a risk of being labeled as a non-scholar researcher (Keça, 2012), its cognitive values are extraordinary. It arches across past, present, and future. It is a narrative about the past events that simultaneously provides a reflection about the present and refers to the future (Hamdan, 2012, p. 588).

The advocates of the autoethnographic manner of discovering and describing the world emphasize the value of referring to the life embodied in a biography of an individual (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, pp. 273, 276). Autoethnography offers vivid and first-hand experience (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 764). One of its functions is “[...] creating a space for dialogue and debate that investigates and shapes social change” (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 763). This was one of the reasons that I decided to apply this method to conduct a cultural reflection aiming at deconstructing the female identity perception defined as diligent fulfillment of housework.

My first encounter with autoethnography took place during the workshop conducted by Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner³ – the creators and supporters of the paradigm of the evocative autoethnography, who have strengthened my belief that knowledge derived from the research can be discovered and transferred based on the down-to-earth experience of an individual. Therefore, it was no coincidence that to write this article, I decided to apply the evocative autoethnography method which is most frequently presented as a narrative, personal narrative, and storytelling. It is characterized by narrative writing, creating texts that influence the readers and evoke their emotions (Ellis & Bochner, 2016; Kacperczyk, 2014, pp. 46–47; Kacperczyk, 2017, p. 134).

Therefore, I am far from realizing the analytic paradigm of performing autoethnography (Anderson, 2006).⁴ I am more in favor of evocative inquiry,

² In this article, I refer to my experience of parental home. I lived in a two-floor apartment building where the neighbors were obliged to clean the staircase.

³ The workshops Narrative and Autoethnographic Inquiry comprised a part of the conference entitled *Autobiografia – biografia – narracja. Perspektywy biograficzne w praktyce badawczej (Autobiography – Biography – Narrative: Biographical Perspectives in the Research)* organized by the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Łódź, May 29–30, 2012.

⁴ By opting for evocative approach in autoethnography, I recall the discussion about the division of autoethnography into emotional and analytical that was initiated by the analytical autoethnography project proposed by Leon Anderson (2006). After many years, Anderson reassessed his stand on the firm boundaries between these two manners of understanding and implementing

which assumes that the autoethnographic actions and texts filled with emotions can resonate in the reader; therefore, they become tools that evoke change (Kafar & Ellis, 2014, p. 131; Holman Jones, 2005). I do not want these changes to be revolutionary. The value of autoethnography is in its ability to ‘nourish the real experience’, uncover what is unseen on a daily basis, and cause fractions in the shell of obviousness. The evocative autoethnography can cause strong cognitive and emotional reactions that allow introducing a cognitive change, taking a new stand on the issue studied. Moreover, it has ‘illocutionary force’ (Bielecka-Prus, 2014, p. 87; Kacperczyk, 2014, p. 67).

Since autoethnographic research remains an experimental technique characterized by ‘methodological openness’ (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2015, p. 64), I decided to develop my method which enriches the conducted analysis with the cultural and social factors that have formed me as an individual. In this article, I decided to combine the autoethnographic reflection with cultural analysis of the Facebook fan page called ‘Shitty Housewife’ [Polish: Chujowa Pani Domu]⁵ that has gained an unprecedented level of popularity which serves as an example of a resistance strategy towards the perception of housework as ‘natural’ obligation and calling of every woman.

The narratives presented in the autoethnographic form that are embedded in this article are the stories about the experience that embodies the stereotypical assessment of female obligations. They are rooted in time and space and they are contextualized. They comprise a record of small events and the emotions that used to accompany them. In the autoethnographic narrative, I am not limited to participating in the discussion about socially and culturally created notions, actions, and emotions, which also comprised my personal experience. I also give voice to other women – my Mother, Sister, and female Neighbors, who have spent years cleaning the staircase of a two-floor apartment building in a small Polish town.

In the autoethnographic fragments of this article, I focus on the issues that are inconspicuous and seemingly too trivial to gain the attention of a researcher. I provide a narrative about the action the value and meaning of which are not noticed on a daily basis. Using the ‘floor rag’ is not a socially acclaimed experience. The dirty

autoethnography (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2015, p. 64). Although the evocative and analytical approaches are rooted in different epistemological assumptions, today researchers talk about blurred boundaries pointing at the similarities of both perspectives that are expressed by the ‘visibility of self’, ‘strong reflexivity’, ‘engagement’, ‘vulnerability’, and ‘open-endedness/rejection of finality and closure’ (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2015, pp. 71–79; Kacperczyk, 2014, p. 67; Kacperczyk, 2017, pp. 142–144).

⁵ The name of the fan page contains an expletive; therefore, I will refer to it as ‘Sh* Housewife’.

floor bothers us, but the mere act of cleaning does not absorb our attention. If we ever think about it, we also feel that it is an obligation that needs to be fulfilled. When I write about cleaning the floor I am not able to anticipate the reaction of the reader. I can expect empathy from those who have experienced this activity in various social and cultural contexts. There are, however, people who will not be able to personally relate to this experience. I am aware that readers are more affected by texts focusing on subjects that resonate, such as traumas, loss, passion or love. However, I am convinced that the autoethnographic texts can be applied to inconspicuous and everyday events as the ‘epiphany’ can be experienced also when we realize that what seems to be ‘normal’ is socially and culturally conditioned.

PREPARATIONS

We would pour water directly into the bucket which we had put in the bathtub for this occasion. Then, we had to go to the drying room, which was located in the basement. We had to take a rag. Dry and stiff, it was hard to take it off the washing line. It was unpleasant to touch. Fortunately, once it touched warm water, it lost its roughness and became soft. Then, we had to insert a piece of a match in the light switch on the staircase. Thanks to that simple operation the light, which would be on for a short period of time needed to enter one’s apartment, would not turn off.

POLISHED FLOOR AND FEMALE IDENTITY

Despite the complexity that characterizes human identity, gender remains one of the fundamental notions that determine the sense of self. The categories of femininity and masculinity do not refer to the sexuality and reproduction only. They influence such spheres of life as work, free time, politics, and religion determining relations in the family and public domain (Frąckowiak, 2003, p. 69). Social and cultural models assigned to women and men are created and preserved by the activities that are undertaken on a daily basis. Moreover, they comply with the “current cultural conceptions of conduct becoming to – or compatible with the ‘essential natures’ of – a woman or a man” (West & Zimmerman, 2009, p. 114).

The traditional division was evident and clear. Men played the role of a ‘head of a family’ – husband, father, breadwinner. The woman’s calling was to take care of the children, husband, and household. Today, despite numerous social and cultural changes that have occurred in this sphere, polishing the floor remains

an obligation, which in the common view, should be fulfilled predominantly by women. This is a result of the social and cultural reproduction mechanism according to which the performative roles fulfilled by generations are rarely questioned (Bourdieu, 2004). The traditional gender stereotypes assign the majority of housework to a woman, as she is supposed to perform it more effectively. Every day, unnoticeably repeated behaviors and phrases repeated at home, school and in the media retain the convictions about the obligations and tasks attributed to men and women. We learn about the ‘proper’ gender behavior from early childhood. It is difficult to stop this process (Risman & Myers, 1997).

Housework and child raising remain the spheres that are predominantly assigned to women. Clean house serves as an evidence of their ‘value’ and womanhood and combining career and private life remains a problem that affects mostly women (Nowakowska, 2008, pp. 157–161). The fact that all the housework has been performed with due diligence defines a woman as a mother, wife, and housewife not only in the eyes of the society but in her own eyes. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the authors of the handbook *Dom to praca. Podręcznik dla grup kobiecych* [House Is Work: Handbook for Women Groups] published by the Civil Affairs Institute [Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich] commence their narrative by advising women to learn to appreciate themselves for who they are and to free themselves from making their self-esteem dependent on the perfect execution of their housework (Goś-Wójcicka & Michalczak, 2014, pp. 56–59).

It needs to be added that the fact that a woman is proud of her achievements as a mother, wife, and housewife does not guarantee that she feels fulfilled and satisfied in life. The society recognizes professional accomplishments visibly higher than private success. Although housework is indispensable for both social and economic reasons, the domestic chores are not commonly considered work. Strikingly, women who resigned from the professional career to take care of house and children share this opinion. When asked about their work, they often claim that ‘they are unemployed’, that they are housewives (Goś-Wójcicka, 2011, pp. 33–34; Renzetti & Curran, 2008, p. 262).

Women have difficulty building a positive image of self based on work that is not considered as prestigious as the professional career. Housework is not paid. Its low value results from its repetitiveness, monotony, and lack of visible effects of the effort invested. Housework has no end and its effects are short-term and fugitive. Moreover, it is considered that this type of work does not require formal qualifications (Titkow, Duch-Krzystoszek & Budrowska, 2004, pp. 128–131).

The difficulties in constructing female identity result from the fact that women’s professional career is often regarded only as an addition to their domestic work

(Renzetti & Curran, 2008, p. 353). Therefore, women who decide to combine both paths need to fulfill double obligations. In 1989, Arlie R. Hochschild (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) described this phenomenon as ‘the second shift’. She claimed that women who take care of their house and children after returning from work feel responsible for fulfilling these duties. Many of them treat this responsibility as natural and obvious (Renzetti & Curran, 2008, p. 353). The research conducted in Poland indicates that women who have professional career spend barely shorter period of time performing housework than women who stay at home full time: “An average value for a women who does not work professionally was 16.2% higher than for a woman who was employed” (*Budżet czasu ludności...*, 2015, p. 148). Therefore, women who work professionally fulfill ‘their’ duties at the expense of their sleep and free time (*Budżet...*, p. 148). This is the effect of the above-mentioned cultural reproduction that preserves the common belief that the public domain is male and the ‘private world of a domestic heart’ belongs to women.

THE FIRST MOVES MADE BY THE RAG

The rug placed in water became soft and warm. Now it was the time to remove all the doormats, shake out the dirt and dust. When the weather was bad it was very difficult to remove it with a rag. The grains of sand would stick to it. Just by the doormats, there were rows of slippers and rain boots which neighbors put on to go outside or go to the basement. All the shoes had to be lifted and the dirt that was underneath them had to be removed. Then, they would be arranged as they had been before so that people leaving their apartments would not have to search for them with their feet.

WHEN A MAN POLISHES THE FLOOR...

Although we are witnessing the generational change in the degree to which men are engaged in the housework, the research indicates that men still perform few domestic chores. In March 2015, the Statistics Poland (GUS – Główny Urząd Statystyczny) published a data showing that the monthly average value of housework performed by men is as little as 1218.01 PLN, whereas, the value of housework performed by women is 2113.24 PLN (*Budżet czasu ludności...*, 2015, p. 147). Daily, women spend 105 minutes more than men performing domestic chores (*Budżet...*, p. 75). The analysis of the housework models presented by the media

indicate that although young men are more frequently presented in the ‘house roles’, the domain of cleaning, including polishing floors, is still dominated by women (Goś-Wójcicka & Michalczak, 2014, p. 22).

Most frequently, men who decide to work at home perform ‘manly works’, the result of which is more spectacular than the effect of work assigned to women. Fixed appliances, completed renovation, or taking a child to the movie theater are more noticeable than lack of dust on the shelves or a clean bathroom. The results of men’s work are deeply rooted in the consciousness and memory of the family members, unlike the wiped floor. A kitchen that is cleaned after lunch needs to be filled with the smell of a new meal within few hours (Baber & Allen, 1992, s. 208). Women are also expected to possess more self-discipline in performing housework that needs to take place in a strictly defined time.

It needs to be emphasized that to a great extent these are women who hold responsibility for the uneven distribution of housework. As the research indicates, they frequently sabotage men’s attempts to perform domestic chores in order to manifest their perfectionism and ‘sacrifice’. Very often, they do not create favorable conditions for men to learn how to perform housework and to actually do it; therefore, they become their own enemies in the struggle for equality in that aspect of life. Women who constantly take their husbands’ towels to hang them, take their dirty plates, get angry when they use improper pot to cook or dress children in clothes that do not match, adopt a defeatist attitude and are automatically doomed to failure (Simmons, 2010).

POLISHING NEXT STEPS

My favorite part was cleaning the first step after I’d dealt with doormats and shoes. Although there were still nineteen of them ahead, everything seemed to be easier. Cleaning the landing required some effort, but there was not a lot of sand there. There were no big things standing there either.

‘SH* HOUSEWIVE’ FAN PAGE AND STRATEGIES FOR RESISTANCE

Work at home, performed mostly by women, is marginalized and pushed into the background in a public debate (Chutnik et al., 2012, p. 3). One can observe that there is a lack of knowledge, void of simplification and stereotypes concerning this sphere of women’s activities. There are too few possibilities to discuss this issue in

the public sphere. Magdalena Kostyszyn and Paweł Bielecki (2015) made this observation and on 6 December 2012 they created a Facebook fan page ‘Sh* Housewife’ which uses irony to question all the gender stereotypes. The authors describe the fan page as “the profile where we share with our female readers all the blunders concerning housework and we publish photos uploaded by them. Shortly, we teach how to become a bad housewife” (Kostyszyn & Bielecki, 2017). The fan page gathered over 700 000 fans, 80% of which are women. The largest group is comprised of fans between 25 and 35 years of age (Kostyszyn & Bielecki, 2015). The female users share their ‘home failures’. One can assume that the success of the fan page results from the fact that the authors noticed and embraced women’s need to free themselves from the obligation of being an ideal housewife. Helplessness evoked by a pile of dirty dishes or a pile of dirty clothes is taken with a pinch of salt. ‘Sh* Housewife’ is a place where the feeling of guilt and shame is substituted with the desirable distance towards the domestic order. Magdalena Kostyszyn (2016) writes: “being a Sh* Housewife doesn’t mean that you need to have a mess at home, but it’s about letting go”. Accepting the dirt and disorder brings together and allows becoming a member of a group of women who are liberated from the ‘terror of house duties’.

In 2016, Magdalena Kostyszyn received an award of the ‘Superhero of “Wysokie Obcasy” Readers’ in the Internet plebiscite and this serves as evidence that there is a need for such ‘neo-tribe’. The author of the laudatory article published in the weekly magazine “Wysokie Obcasy” claimed: “it operates in the dimension that brings women together in the times of deep and painful political divisions. She made women realize that they did not have to be perfect housewives, but they can be perfect in other spheres of life. Thanks to women such as Magdalena Kostyszyn we have a chance to remember that there is more than brings us closer than divides us; that our lives are more valuable than these impossible and unreal expectations that we all face” (Ziomecka, 2016). Moreover, the weekly magazine “Wprost” listed Magdalena Kostyszyn as number 17 in the ranking of the 50 most influential Polish women (*50 najbardziej...*, 2017). Her book that describes the philosophy of a ‘sh* housewife’ is also a bestseller (Kostyszyn, 2016).

However, the most important part of the fan page comprises women who are these non-perfect housewives...

I NEED TO GET RID OF THE REST OF MUD

After cleaning the last step, I had to pour out the dirty water and wash the rag. I would take it to the drain in the backyard. When I was smaller, my Dad would

help me. Then, I had to clean really well both the bucket and the rag. I didn't like using water from the tap in the backyard. It was very cold. I preferred warm water, so I would carry the bucket upstairs and clean it in the bathtub. There were some cons, as well. Although every time water got dirty I would pour it into the toilet bowl, the bathtub always carried the stains of mud that I had to clean afterwards.

'SH* HOUSEWIVE' FAN PAGE – WOMEN ABOUT THEMSELVES

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

The majority of posts on the 'Sh* Housewife' fan page is published by the users and they are inspired by their experience. There are photos of 'home disasters' with comments taken with a pinch of salt. Among them we can find images presenting unsuccessful culinary attempts with comments 'Imagination vs. Reality'; tangled lace curtains with a comment: 'Overachievement never pays off. Joanna washed the curtains'; trash scattered on the corridor: 'A sh* housewife throws the garbage away'; ironing board which serves as a 'kitchen island' with a claim: 'What's the point in buying a kitchen island if the ironing board is all you need'; a ski pole leaning over the appliances and serving as a wardrobe with a claim: 'If you can make a wardrobe out of a ski pole, you are a really successful lady'.

COMING OUT

Many posts published by the imperfect housewives serve as a 'coming out' which liberates women of their guilt and this is highly encouraged by the creators. Paweł Bielecki (2013) wrote: "Every woman transforms into a Sh* Housewife from time to time. It turns out that many of them do not feel well in the role that the society requires them to play – we channeled it in the social media and we induced the massive coming out". The images that serve as admitting to the 'unacceptable faults in house works' present piles of non-ironed laundry with a question: 'Do you also "love" to iron?', rooms filled with objects scattered around with a comment: 'When I return, I will say that there was a housebreaking', or piles of unwashed dishes with a comment: 'Washing or moving out?'

CREATIVITY AND OBLITERATING THE TRACES OF BEING IMPERFECT

The solutions applied by the 'imperfect housewives' which they share are very creative: frosted car windows are cleaned with a wooden spatula, a plastic bottle becomes a rolling pin, a cardboard vegetable box from the supermarket is turned into a serving dish, and a table soccer becomes a sock dryer. Many smart ideas are

born in order to obliterate the crime of taking ‘imperfect’ care of the house and to create or maintain an impression of a perfect order. Among the pieces of advice that are very popular are cleaning the oven with a vacuum cleaner and washing an enormous number of dirty dishes in the bathtub performed as a ‘quick cleaning before the guests arrive’.

Following the posts that are published on the profile allows noticing that the users are ever more willing to share their creative approach to housework that they perform with a distance and a sense of humor. Therefore, it seems natural that women who join the society of the ‘Sh* Housewife’ very frequently pose such questions: “Why have you named this fan page ‘Sh* Housewife’? I’d call it ‘Creative Housewife’” (Zielińska, 2018); “This profile should be called smart housewife. Girls, you are not sh*, you are genius” (Asia AD, 2018).

(CITED) GRASSROOT CREATIVITY

A sense of humor and distance to house works can we observed in the condemnation of a traditional division of obligations. Certain users work independently to create a funny image or a picture. Others cite grassroot creativity of the Internet users related to the issue of expecting women to perfectly fulfill obligations towards the family and household. Among them we can find a picture of two women hanging curtains saying: ‘When I feel like cleaning my house, I open a bottle of wine, drink, and wait until it’s gone’. A protagonist of a different meme is a woman sitting in an armchair who watches TV and hears: ‘Now, a cooking show which will show you how to tell your husband that there’s no lunch today’.

REPETITIVENESS

In the end, the rug would be taken back to the drying room and it would wait two weeks in the corner to be used again. We (my Mom, Sister, and I) would polish the staircase from the first floor to the second floor. We turned shifts with our female neighbor (who had two sons). I don’t remember time when a man would polish the staircase, but maybe it had taken place. Yet, I perfectly remember that sometimes we had to clean the floors every single week. For example, when my neighbor couldn’t do it by herself or we would do it as a favor towards the neighbor. Women still tackle the task of cleaning the staircase without the male participation; in fact, it is highly probable that men would never come up with the idea of fulfilling this obligation by themselves.

LIBERATION (?)

The ‘Sh* Housewife’ profile has greatly influenced the renegotiation of the image of a perfect woman. It has become liberation for many Polish women. Some of them express their satisfaction from feeling the distance towards domestic works that they have reached thanks to the neo-tribe of the ‘imperfect housewives’. Among the comments one can find those that are engaged and open: “You have the right to be a sh* housewife! If a girl is mad, she can iron socks and fold underwear perfectly. [...] A sh* housewife is intelligent and happy. Be a Sh* Housewife” (Aleksandrowicz, 2016).

Although Magdalena Kostrzyn who created the fan page was awarded for the fact that “women do not have to be perfect housewives in order to gain space to develop in other areas of life” (Ziomecka, 2016), the fan page itself does not seem to abide with narratives about passions developed by women who are liberated from domestic obligations. We can see an owner of a motorcycle who can take care of it by herself or a ‘housewife’ who is engaged in reading and drinking a glass of wine. These comments are published rarely. Although this profile was not created to share ‘out of home’ successes, it is noticeable that numerous posts that appear as a ‘substitution’ of the house work relate to beauty and taking care of one’s looks. The ‘liberation’ from the felling of responsibility for the domestic obligations carries a danger of being transformed into the ‘imprisonment’ by the ‘beauty myth’, the existence and constant strengthening of which was described at the beginning of the 1990s by Naomi Wolf (2002). The theses that she presented can be applied to the fan page described here. Wolf claimed that: “As soon as a woman’s primary social value could no longer be defined as the attainment of virtuous domesticity, the beauty myth redefined it as the attainment of virtuous beauty” (2002, p. 18). According to Wolf, when women regained time and were granted rights to achievements in the public sphere, they were forced to invest their energy, money, and effort to take care of their physical beauty (2002, p. 16).

The claims of the author of *The Beauty Myth* are of a special meaning when opposed to the photographs published by a number of Sh* Housewife’s readers. Beautiful, sleek, and slim half naked women pose in front of the untidy rooms. One can make an assumption that a number of the ‘imperfect housewives’ unconsciously surrenders to the ‘terror of beauty’ and pose a question: to what extent the photographs of the readers in lace underwear published on the fan page manifest their liberation or serve as an evidence of the public objectification of women, often by themselves.

EMBARRASSMENT

When I attempted to polish the stairs, I would always look around to make sure that nobody was parking in front of the building, I would listen to the sounds of neighbors to check if they were about to leave their apartments. I felt embarrassed every time someone passed by me when I was polishing the staircase. I would stop and wait for them to close the door before returning to work.

RENEGOTIATION OF THE HOUSEWIFE PARADIGM

A perfect execution of the domestic chores is presented to women not only as their obligation, but a manner of regaining self-confidence and self-fulfillment.⁶ A clean and polished floor becomes a fundament on which self-confidence can be constructed. Nonetheless, it is difficult to rely one's 'self' on pillars that are shattering and the work which remains depreciated.

Unpaid women's work in the household remains a deeply internalized manner of functioning of both men and women strongly related to the deeply rooted assumption that housework is not work (Goś-Wójcicka, 2011, p. 7; Renzetti & Curran, 2008, p. 353). Depreciating housework results in the fact that even the women who feel responsible for fulfilling it do not see the value of their work (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 116). Additionally, according to the common belief, work is performed out of home. Home is meant to be a place for relaxation (Titkow et al., 2004, pp. 128–131).

A house obligation is a never-ending work, an obligation that rarely brings satisfaction (Titkow et al., 2004). The lack of equal division of housework between men and women will be present as long as these obligations will be assessed as tiring, boring, 'unmanly', and 'stupefying'. Therefore, the aim is not to liberate women from taking care of home and children, but to assign housework a positive meaning. Only then will the society be deprived of 'homebody' women and 'hen-pecked husbands'.

Feminism played a crucial role in the process of assigning higher value to housework. However, it needs to be remembered that in the history of the feminist movement one could find an univocally negative approach towards the housework obligations performed by women. The work of women was depreciated by the

⁶ An example thereof is a TV program entitled 'Perfect Housewife' [Polish: *Perfekcyjna Pani Domu*] broadcasted by the Polish TV station TVN.

second wave of feminism. Simone de Beauvoir (1972), Betty Friedan (1963), Ann Oakley (1975) and Germaine Greer (1970) emphasized that women are enslaved by the imposed subordinate roles.

From today's perspective, associating housework with limitation of women's liberty is treated as an important and compulsory stage in the development of the Western feminism. It allowed manifesting the 'widespread subjugation and entrapment' that the majority of women were subjected to (Genz, 2008). In the long-term perspective, associating the role of a housewife with a 'trace of violent traditionalism'⁷ that unconditionally needs to be substituted by the division of housework based on partnership remains a trap. It is not against the idea of the women liberation if a woman decides to resign from the professional career and fulfill house obligations. It needs to be emphasized that today the perfectly polished floor does not mean and should not be associated with the woman's subjugation.

THE CHARM OF POLISHED FLOOR

When one entered the freshly polished staircase, the damp floor would have this earthy smell that was sometimes enriched with the smell of fresh laundry. One of the neighbors has this idea to add a bit of fabric softener to water that was used to clean the floors. Even today, my Parent's staircase 'enchants' with this smell. It bears a promise of stepping on clean stairs.

CONCLUSIONS

Reflexivity is a compulsory element of the autoethnographic process as it "entails taking seriously the self's location(s) in culture and scholarship, circumspectly exploring our relationship to/in autoethnography, to make research [...] more meaningful" (Berry, 2015, p. 212). An essential characteristic of the autoethnography is its lack of uniformity as a 'practice of producing knowledge'. It applies various methods and modes of generating and presenting the results of the research (Kacperczyk, 2014, pp. 33, 68). Taking into account these guidelines, in this article I integrated the autobiographic narrative with the cultural analysis.

⁷ The notion of 'a trace of violent traditionalism' was used in a substantial and vivid statement of Justyna Kowalska (2014).

The narrative presented in the text is the report on my personal experience that comprises an element of a script that is still being delivered by women inhabiting a small block of flats in a small town. These are women who still clean the staircase regardless their age and education with a feeling of a diligent execution of their obligation. Working on this article, I embedded my personal experience within the context of the experience of my closest family members (Mother and Sister) and other women – also those who make attempts to break the traditional female obligations in a patriarchal culture. Therefore, I juxtaposed the experience of women who humbly support one another in taking care of the cleanliness of the staircase with the acts of resistance by those women who rebel against the necessity of arduous housework and openly present their perspective on Facebook. Both groups of women are entangled in the demand to declare their approach towards the traditional gender-based division of obligations. Some of them attentively fulfill them and others, sometimes with a degree of clumsiness, try to find a manner of avoiding them.

Although the traditional division of housework is still characterized by durability, the changes in the sphere of assessing and sharing housework are taking place. This is the result of the emancipation of women and the development of the culture of an individual. “Earlier scripts on how to run one’s life and relationships have disappeared, leaving the individual with (at least the impression of) endless choices and possibilities of constructing one’s self-biography. Individualization also brings the ideal of gender equality to the fore: since both men and women enter the paid labor market, an equal sharing of housework and care of children is assumed to follow” (Eldén, 2012, p. 5). However, the analyses and research presented in this article indicate that sharing housework still remains a declaration. In practice, in most cases women preform the housework. Men only help them (Kwiatkowska & Nowakowska, 2006, p. 40; Titkow et al., 2004, pp. 128–131).

The most effective form of introducing social and cultural changes in the realm of equality is applying them in everyday actions taken by individuals. The theses were presented in the articles on performativity written by Pierre Bourdieu (2004) and Judith Butler (1999) that comprise an analysis of the meaning of gender in culture. Nowadays, our activity is mostly performed in the cyberspace. The social media greatly influence gender relations, gendered norms, and identities (Miller et al., 2016, pp. 114–115). The ‘Sh* Housewife’ fan page can be regarded as a place where traditionally female roles are being renegotiated. Although the steps taken by the female users are insecure, they should be noticed and examined.

A perfect example of the renegotiation of meaning assigned to domestic obligations comprises activities and testimonies of the feminists who share their expe-

rience of being mothers and housewives. Agnieszka Graff (2013) claims: “The feminism should not tell women how to live. It has to fight for the broader spectrum of choices [...] and it is true that the sphere of life described as care was totally depreciated in the post-industrial societies and the feminism has been focused so much on encouraging women to leave houses that it has completely forgotten about this sphere. This sphere is key for equality and it is a crucial experience for the majority of women”. Sylwia Chutnik (2008), who calls herself a ‘radical housewife’, adds: “Many women do the cleaning. The majority of them depreciate their work. It’s time for coming out. This is the moment when you can say, ‘I clean the toilet. It’s ok. Then, I’m joining the feminist manifestation””.

It needs to be added that meanings that are embedded in polishing the floors have a metaphysical aspect. Recalling them is an element of the process of ennobling reality in the journey to discover its values. At the end, deliberations of Jolanta Brach-Czaina should be quoted. She claims that “Fighting the element of dirt on the floor, we are not aware of the dramatic aspect of this battle [...] The aim of the efforts of the cleaning persons is [...] a strive for everyday existence that is reborn with each small act. [...] The monotonous movements of rags address the calm repetition of events. The cleaning rag becomes an everyday recording of the daily history” (Brach-Czaina, 1992, pp. 96–97, 171).

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