

Summary of the doctoral dissertation *Comparative analysis of the ways women perceive their own sexuality, on the example of native residents and foreigners living in Akureyri in northern Iceland* written under the supervision of dr hab. Wojciech Klimczyk.

In this dissertation, I analyze the socio-cultural phenomenon of female sexuality. I assume that female sexuality is a heterogeneous construct, which is particularly visible in places where cultures, and thus codes, values, ideas and expectations mix. An example of such a place is Akureyri, where I conducted my research. They confirmed that there is no single imaginable female sexuality. Ways of perceiving it differ as much as the culture that gives it its basic shape. An additional impact is also exerted by the resultant of individual characteristics and experiences of an individual, however, occurring in specific social contexts.

The methodology of my research included autoethnography and participant observation, as well as the author's questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The work was written from the perspective of a woman living in Akureyri, a town located in the northern part of Iceland, and coming from Poland. The research perspective was thus situated and embodied in accordance with Donna Haraway's ideas of situated knowledge and Rosi Braidotti's nomadic writing. I consciously expose a subjective point of view in my work, I adopt a "partial, incomplete perspective", I propose a qualitative analysis of a smaller number of cases without striving for full representativeness of the sample. My intention was to work at the foundation of the theory of new feminist materialism. The embodiment I study falls into two categories: firstly, the research topic of sexuality, which is unquestionably about the body and the ways of "thinking about" the body and perceiving oneself in the world, and secondly, the sentient body (mine and those who have taken participation in research), which leads, signals and encourages to constantly break the dominant cultural codes, to rewrite own and others' experiences with an affirmative approach.

The questionnaire, which became the main source of data, was created as the first and consisted of twelve thematic blocks: upbringing, family structure, education, social environment, religion, social norms, gender, relations between women and men, ways of communication between women and men, sexual freedom and equality, attitudes towards sexuality, norms and boundaries. The questions in the questionnaire were drawn up based on the closest cultural patterns and ideas about female sexuality to me, observation of the life of the Akureyri community and interviews with selected women living in the city. In this way, the questionnaire became a cartography of my problems as understood by Rosi Braidotti. Then, in-depth interviews were conducted with women interested in the subject of the research, willing to talk about female sexuality and their own experiences related to this issue. I used the interviews as a supplement to the results of the survey, which is why I did not separate a separate part of the work with a collective view of the interviews. They took place during the collection

of questionnaires, while getting acquainted with individual answers to the questionnaire, which became an inspiration and a pretext for discussing topics during the interviews.

The survey was conducted on a group of randomly selected women living at least half a year in Akureyri. The premise for adopting such a determinant was the fact that the right to residency was vested after six months of permanent residence in Iceland. I divided the respondents into two groups according to the variable, which is nationality. The first group consists of Icelandic women living in Akureyri: representatives of the native culture, which can be described as the dominant culture, which does not mean that they are not subject to external pressure for change. Foreigners constituted the second category of people: immigrant individuals, still a minority in Iceland. The surveyed women come from Europe, Asia and Africa. Based on a 2012 study by Markus Meckl, Berglind Rós Karlsdóttir and Kjartan Ólafsson from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Akureyri on residents of foreign origin living in the city, these continents can be considered as the main areas from which women immigrate to Iceland. Although the juxtaposition of people from very different cultures into one category may seem arbitrary, it is justified for two reasons. Firstly, the number of foreign women from one cultural background in Akureyri is too small to constitute a group representative of the immigrant population. Secondly, I was interested in the sexuality of these women in the context of Icelandic culture, i.e. how they perceive their own sexuality in the socio-cultural dimension while living in Akureyri, where the values represented by their culture clash with the values of Icelandic culture. Therefore, I was interested not so much in the specific culture from which individuals come, but in the challenges they face and their role in the process of shaping individual sexual identities. Of course, the culture of primary socialization is of great importance to the latter, but I proceed from the hypothesis that it does not explain it in its entirety, and therefore in my research the dynamic relationship between the native culture and the receiving culture becomes the focus.

The theory on which I base my way of "thinking about" female sexuality is feminist new materialism, which fits into the posthumanist paradigm. New materialism is a trend in contemporary philosophy that assumes a return to the category of matter as the basic building material of reality. At the same time, new materialism offers the possibility of multifaceted thinking about the body, because it is polyphonic and heterogeneous. Feminist new materialism, on the other hand, is a theory of culture that advocates "pushing dualisms to extremes." This consists in transcending the dualisms characteristic of the philosophical discourse of modernity, striving for a new conceptualization of difference, based on an affirmative relationship, not criticism. The new feminist materialism produces a practical philosophy that consists in creating concepts and presenting reflections that are interventionist and emancipatory. Some of the topics I found most useful for my research come from the theories of Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Donna Haraway, and Judith Butler.

The main thesis of the research is that female sexuality is a cultural construct, as evidenced by the results of my research. Native Icelandic women perceive their own sexuality in a more liberal way than most immigrant women. From the very beginning of the country's existence, women have been an important and significant part of Icelandic society and culture due to the specificity of island life. This and many other factors influenced the formation of a specific emancipated sexuality of Icelandic women. One of the respondents from this group wrote that Icelandic women are "women with a well-learned lesson in feminism". Icelandic

women are characterized by independence, self-confidence, agency and knowledge of their rights.

In turn, women from the group of foreign women more often than Icelandic women associated sexuality with stereotypical social roles, a sense of shame, guilt or duty. The results of the research and the interviews showed that foreign women were more often characterized by a negative attitude towards the body and its needs, as well as a certain kind of embarrassment and uncertainty. These features were particularly visible in the subgroups of women from Asia, Africa and in the group of Polish women. The factor influencing such perception of one's own sexuality is most often being brought up in culture-specific codes, where women are treated subordinately to men. Religion had a significant impact on shaping the sexuality of women from Poland, which in many cases was the reason for building a negative narrative.

What could be captured in the research was the changes taking place in the perception of one's own sexuality, which occur in the place where cultures mix, on the ground of Icelandic culture. An important variable here was the length of residence in Iceland. The foreign women who have lived in Akureyri for more than two years said that their way of thinking about the body and sexuality had changed. Living in a culture with different codes leads to transformations in existing ways of thinking. Another variable that I took into account when analyzing some of the results was the age of the respondents. As research has shown, women from the group of Icelandic women also differ in their perception of sexuality, family and relationships: older respondents are nevertheless more conservative than Icelandic women who are a decade or two younger than them. Age was also an important variable during the comparative analysis of the research results in both groups of respondents. I noticed a greater similarity in answers between middle-aged Icelandic women and foreign women a decade or two younger than them. However, despite the liberal approach to the issue of sexuality among Icelandic women, very young women with children are a common phenomenon in Akureyri. It was an element of social life which was noticed by many female respondents from the group of foreigners, considering such a phenomenon to be at least non-standard.

As research has proven, the way women perceive their own sexuality is constructed by socio-cultural factors. Each woman also has her own personal herstory, her own experiences, motives and perceptions. Despite this, it is undeniable that women from a given culture are characterized by a similar way of perceiving their own sexuality in many of its dimensions.

I believe that culture sets a clear tone for women's perceptions of their own sexuality. Despite individual differences, cultural patterns are visible in the behavior and ways of thinking of women to such an extent that it was possible to identify them on the basis of belonging to a given cultural circle. Therefore, cultural codes are, in my opinion, the main source of ways of perceiving one's own sexuality.

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