

Representation of the female body in modern yoga: theoretical and methodological approach

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This article aims at building an integrative methodological approach for analyzing the visual representation of the female body as a social and cultural phenomenon in modern yoga through the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism and structuralism. An enhanced methodological tool was developed based on the framework of commercial realism by Goffman combined with the concepts of constructed body and technologies of the self by Foucault. The critical approach to visual socio-semiotics by Kress and van Leeuwen were also brought to the development of the integrative methodological scheme. The tool was tested on the visual representations of the female body from the websites of the popular yoga schools in Moscow. The authors conclude that the designed methodological approach could be successfully applied to visual analysis of different areas of female physical activities such as yoga, fitness practices and strength training.

Key words: female body, gender representation, visual analysis, gender display, technologies of the self, modern yoga

Introduction

Today yoga practice has transformed significantly from the traditional authentic activity, especially for men in India, to a mass activity especially for women in Western countries (including Russia). Some experts argue that contemporary yoga is a Western and modern invention for women's leisure and physical wellbeing in the context of the growing popularity of healthy lifestyle (Singleton, 2010), while the original yoga was more about spiritual, mental knowledge and sacral practice of self-awareness (Eliade, 2014). For instance, a study of yoga in America shows that in 2012 around 20,4 million Americans practiced yoga, and 82% of them were women (New Study Finds..., 2012). Similarly, according to a study conducted by the University of Yoga in Moscow, as perceived by young people in Russia, yoga is associated almost only with women (Attitude of the Moscow Youth to..., 2012)¹.

We can observe as well an increasing number of best-sellers (handbooks, manuals and brochures) devoted to the topic of yoga practice especially for women in different countries

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¹ Approximately 90% of respondents agree or totally agree with the statement «There is more woman than man practicing yoga today».



(See: Khalsa, 2007; Sparrowe, 2002; Freedman, 2004). There are also many courses and training classes consisting of teaching special female yoga practices with an accent on women's reproductive cycle. For instance, one of the most popular international yoga schools *Birthlight* focuses on a «holistic approach to pregnancy, birth and babyhood» and «responds to unmet needs relating to women's health and wellbeing» (Well Woman Yoga Training). In the same way, the Russian yoga school *Sat Nam* specializes in yoga techniques for women with particular attention to the female body and health (Sat Nam Yoga Club). These examples highlight that one of the branches of contemporary yoga is firmly institutionalized as a physical and mental practice oriented mostly towards women. This raises the question of the particular importance of the female body as presented in the context of modern yoga.

The importance of studying women's corporality is determined by the fact that the personality and social role of women in contrast to men historically tend to be perceived mainly through the bodily aspects, especially through the compliance with the canons and standards of physical beauty of a certain epoch (Bordo, 1995; Morgan, 1991). Therefore, the study of the female body as a social and cultural phenomenon requires the incorporation of a gender dimension which cannot be ignored (Golman, 2015; Vanke, 2011). This conclusion is especially relevant for a visual analysis of such a female-oriented physical practice as modern yoga.

Accordingly, we claim that the representation of the female body in the context of modern yoga has a gendered character, which means that it is intimately connected with sex identity not only expressed but generated as well by the means of visual support (De Francisco, Palczewski, 2013). We assume that the female body has a special status and significance in the context of modern yoga. Consequently, the analysis of its representation can shed light on the deeper understanding of a more general trend concerning the meaning of women's individuality and social role in contemporary society. More importantly, we consider schools and studios of yoga to be the primal medium of gendered representations in yoga largely due to the fact that these institutions perform the role of an authoritative promoter and carrier of modern yoga values to the general public.

However, a significant obstacle to the study of the representation of the female body especially for novice researchers could be the methodological pluralism prevailing in the sphere of female corporality and bodily practices (Golman, 2015). In order to address this issue the article builds an integrative methodological approach to the qualitative visual analysis of representation of the female body in modern yoga and assesses the future prospects of its application to the empirical material.

In the first part of this article we consider the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism by applying the framework of commercial realism by Goffman. In the second part the structuralist approach to bodily practices is analyzed through the concepts of the constructed body and technologies of the self by Foucault. The third part of this article presents an integrative methodological approach for the visual analysis of the representation of the female body as a social and cultural phenomenon. Finally, we test the developed methodological tool on the visual material from the web sites of the popular yoga schools in Moscow and conclude by proposing some spheres of its application for further empirical research.

Interactionist approach: femininity through a glance

Body and symbolic interaction

Considering the female body as a social and cultural phenomenon, we focus on the specificity of its social regulation, practices of instrumental use and the role of corporality in translation of gender stereotypes by visual means. From this point of view, symbolic interactionism seems to be a relevant sociological perspective from which to study the female corporality because it considers body practices to be an equal component of interaction (Golman, 2015).

The theoretical tradition of symbolic interactionism is oriented towards the problem of body and embodiment, as well as the interrelation of the body, the Self and social interaction. From the point of view of interactionist tradition, the body cannot be understood only as a mere physical and corporeal object, but should be analyzed in its social entirety as «an enormous vessel of meaning of utmost significance to both personhood and society» (Wascul, Vannini, 2006, p. 3). Human beings are considered to be active and creative agents who mutually shape their world in an endless process of action and interaction in which subjectivity, meaning and consciousness are born. Therefore, the body is both the subject and object of action and is defined as a primary conceptual and analytical focus.

Taking into account the diversity of philosophical ideas within the contemporary interactionist tradition, we consider the theoretical model of the looking-glass body, which understands the body as reflexive act of seeing in the process of mutual interpretation, to be a starting point for building an integrative methodological approach for the visual analysis of the female body in the context of modern yoga.

As D. Wascul and P. Vannini note, the looking-glass body is not a direct objective reflection of others' feelings and judgments, but only an «imagined reflection built of cues gleaned from other» (Wascul, Vannini, 2006, p. 5). Thus, reflexivity is perceived as a necessary condition of embodiment. Using the terminology of G. Mead applied to the concept of embodiment, Wascul and Vannini note a crucial difference between «I» and «me»: «The I embodies and repeats its history in the form of the habit; the me, by contrast, is constructed in the web of narrative discourse and imaginative representation which the I spins in its various reflexive activities and projects» (Wascul, Vannini, 2006, p. 5).

From this point of view, we can understand «me» as an «outer social shell» which consists of all possible types of imaginative representations, including the reflections and realities that can be seen in the mirror of mass culture. In such a way, the Western cultural mirror can be regarded as a source of insights into the construction of gender identity, which affects the «me» of millions of men and women all over the world. In this context, we consider visual analysis of the gender representations as a fruitful method for identifying the particular positioning of the gender reality which can be reflected in gender-stereotyped images and sexist pictures. Therefore, gender representation in mass media is a particularly valuable object of research, because individuals very often perceive media images as an objective reflection of reality, thus bringing them value and authority (Barthes, 1997).

Gender identity and gender display

The symbolic interactionist approach to empirical visual analysis of gendered images in mass media was developed in the work of American sociologist E. Goffman (Goffman, 1987). According to Goffman, the presentation of the Self in everyday life is closely related to corporality and bodily performance that are the core factors in the formation of mutual interpretations and impressions in face-to-face communication (Goffman, 1959). Moreover, the body performs a key role in the process of the construction of one's identity. Various bodily aspects from appearance to gestures serve as a basis for building communication with others, but also demonstrate the status affiliation, the ability to define the situation and the degree of «normality» of a particular individual (Goffman, 1963; Goffman, 1951).

Starting from the significance of the body to identity, Goffman developed a dramaturgical interactionist tradition, according to which the body is constantly and systematically produced and reproduced in ritualized social and cultural conventions. In other words, the body is realized and made meaningful during social interactions — «the body is something that people do» (Wascul, Vannini, 2006, p. 7). In such a way, Goffman extends the concept of the looking-glass body and elaborates the framework of the body as performance (dramaturgical body).



Goffman's problematization of gender identity, which is formed through specific patterns of behavior based on essentialist beliefs about the nature of sexes, acquires a special significance. Drawing on different empirical materials such as images in fashion magazines and advertisement, Goffman made the conclusion that in modern consumption society life is portrayed by the use of stereotypical codes of masculinity and femininity in which women are often symbolically oppressed and subordinated to men (Goffman, 1987).

In his work «Gender Advertisements», Goffman opens a new tradition of analysis of pictures and illustrations in contemporary advertizing that is called «commercial realism» (Goffman, 1987, p. 15). Goffman defines two concepts relevant to the current topic: «display» and «gender». Basing on J. Huxley's definition, Goffman describes displays as «certain emotionally motivated behaviors» (Goffman, 1987, p. 1) that are formalized (simplified, exaggerated and stereotyped) and become a depersonalized social portrait. As a result of this process of formalization, displays are deprived of any particular context and specific meaning and serve as ordinary available indicators for consumers. According to Goffman, gender is a «culturally established correlate to sex» (Goffman, 1987, p. 1) which is actively used by contemporary advertisers. In this way, the conventionalized social portraits of gender diffused through mass media serve as special signals and translators of stereotyped impressions and images of «femininity» and «masculinity».

One of Goffman's main arguments is that in the gender display of commercial advertisements the image of heterosexuality is rooted in the traditional model of the relationship between parents and children. In such a way, a man is usually pictured as an adult and a responsible and independent parent, while the role of a dependent child is more common for a woman. From the point of view that the relationship between parents and children is natural and biological, dominance and subordination are ideologically «natural» in displays of gender. In his work, Goffman argues that those gender displays diffused through mass media are constructed in order to affirm basic social norms regulating the relationship between men and women according to traditional gender roles (man as a breadwinner and woman as a housewife). The author claims that sexist practices are embedded in advocated gender differentiation (Goffman, 1987).

It is worth noting that the gender stereotyped differentiation described by Goffman in 1970-s has been revealed and confirmed to different extents and aspects in various contemporary sociological research devoted to gendered body images in modern mass media (See: Brickell, 2002; Choi, Leshner, Choi, 2008; Fullerton, Kendrick, 2000; Wolska, 2011). Thus, almost half a century later, sexist practices of women's oppression continue to persist in mass media, and this fact cannot be ignored.

Structural approach: docile bodies or the technology of the self?

The symbolic interactionist approach focuses on the interrelation of the body, the Self and social interaction, but does not emphasize the influence of society and social structures on the individual body and bodily experience. The theoretical framework of structuralism highlights the importance of the social structures and power relationships which shape the individual bodily experience and impose specific ways of dealing with the body. M. Mauss was one of the first social scientists who described how body techniques vary according to culture, gender, social status, education, prestige and customs (Mauss, 1973). M. Douglas pointed out that the body is at the center of social control and the individual physical experience is ruled by social categories (for example, «purity rule»²) (Douglas, 1984).

² Douglas concluded that the primitive rituals of purity are symbolic and create unity in experience. Reflection on purity rules is reflection on the social structure.

M. Foucault influenced the structuralist tradition within the sociology of the body. In the work «Discipline and Punish», he described different ways of training the body to make it socially productive: «the body is [...] directly involved in a political field; power-relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs» (Foucault, 1979, p. 25). Foucault paid much attention to the body in the context of the complex relations of power and knowledge, and placed it in the regimes of power and discourse.

Discipline is considered one of the most important mechanisms of power regulating the behavior of individuals by organizing space, time, and people's activity (postures, movements) to make the docile body, which is «normal» and socially productive. The concept of the docile body highlights that the body is shaped by multiple discourses, disciplinary processes and *power technologies*, which are the finely detailed mechanisms of control applied to the body and soul in different historical eras. The notion of power goes beyond the sphere of the state; it circulates through individuals, and it is immanent in the structuralist sense of the term. The study of the punitive methods and the political technology of the body provides an understanding of the common history of power relations. Foucault concluded that the reduction in penal severity (the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle, less cruelty, less pain) is not a turn to humanity but just a change of the objective from the body to the soul, in which a punishment acts through the thoughts, and the will, that is why «the soul is the prison of the body» (Foucault, 1979).

In his later works, Foucault developed the opposite concept of *the technology of the self* which permits individuals to influence «their own bodies and semis, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, [...] to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality» (Foucault, 1988). He became increasingly interested in how humans turn themselves into subjects and sketched out the development of the hermeneutics of the self. Foucault interpreted the Delphic principle as «to take care of yourself» and its transformation from practice to pure knowledge and gnosis. In Ancient Greece the principle «to take care of yourself» was characterized by a certain view, way of behavior and attitudes towards other people; the internal direction of view, the techniques of observing your own thoughts, and a number of actions on the self: modification, purgation, transformation and meditation. Such every day practices served as practices of self-care and their main goal was to develop one's self.

The influence of Foucault's ideas on the sociology of sport was significant and appeared in two ways: first, the indirect influence on British cultural studies and feminist cultural studies, and second, the direct influence on sport sociologists and their studies of the sporting body (Rail, Hail, 1995). Foucault's shift from the theme of discipline and power to the investigation of the subject brought new tools of theorizing sport as a space where technologies of the self play an important role. It should be noted, that the approach of late Foucault goes beyond structuralism to post-structuralism as it enables the individual to change situations through one's efforts.

P. Markula, the author of several books on the sociology of sport, examines what Foucault's concepts can offer feminist sport studies (Markula, 2003) and explores the intersections of Foucault's theory with commercial fitness practices to identify possibilities for the transformation of the dominant discourse of the feminine body (Markula, 2004). Having considered several feminist studies that used the term «the technologies of the self» Markula discovered different interpretations of the technologies of the self. According to Rail and Harvey (Rail, Harvey, 1995), the technologies of the self can be conceptualized as practices that free the individual from the control of disciplinary practices and lead to self-transformation, Johns and Johns (Johns, Johns, 2000) define the technology of power



as a means of domination and by the technology of the self as a means of personal transformation, Chapman (Chapman, 1997) defines the technologies of the self as resulting in a process of subjectification (in contrast to the technologies of power that resulted in a process of objectivization) and as practices of freedom which allow people to make conscious choices about how to relate to themselves. Wesely claims that «the technologies of the self are mechanisms through which individuals create, transform, and understand themselves» (Wesely, 2001, p. 166). Markula criticized these works for the unclear definitions of the technologies of the self and offer her interpretation using the three key concepts: ethical self-care, aesthetic self-stylization and critical self-awareness. Ethical self-care based on self care instead of a moral practice on societal laws, that means that individuals are rather free to interpret the norms of behavior in their own style and could constitute themselves as moral subjects by everyday practices (Markula, 2003, p. 99). Aesthetic self-stylization involves practices through which the individual re-invent and recreate him/herself as a work of art. Critical awareness is the core of the practice of freedom: it is an «individual's ability to question the limits of one's natural identity — to distinguish practices of freedom from the ones that perpetuate the dominant discursive construction of gender» (Markula, 2003, p. 102).

We should remember that these concepts are not mutually exclusive and could act in the same time, still we should define it rather clear, and the key characteristics of the technologies of power and the self are in the table 1.

Table 1

Comparing of the technologies of power and the technologies of the self

The Technologies of power (the Docile Body)	The Technologies of the self
The individual is the object of power and knowledge	The individual is the subject
Physical activity as a technology of domination, normalizing practice, based on societal laws	Practices of freedom from disciplinary, discursive body, a means of personal transformation, ethical self-care
Following the bodily canon, the image of the desirable body	Aesthetic self-stylization and critical self-awareness

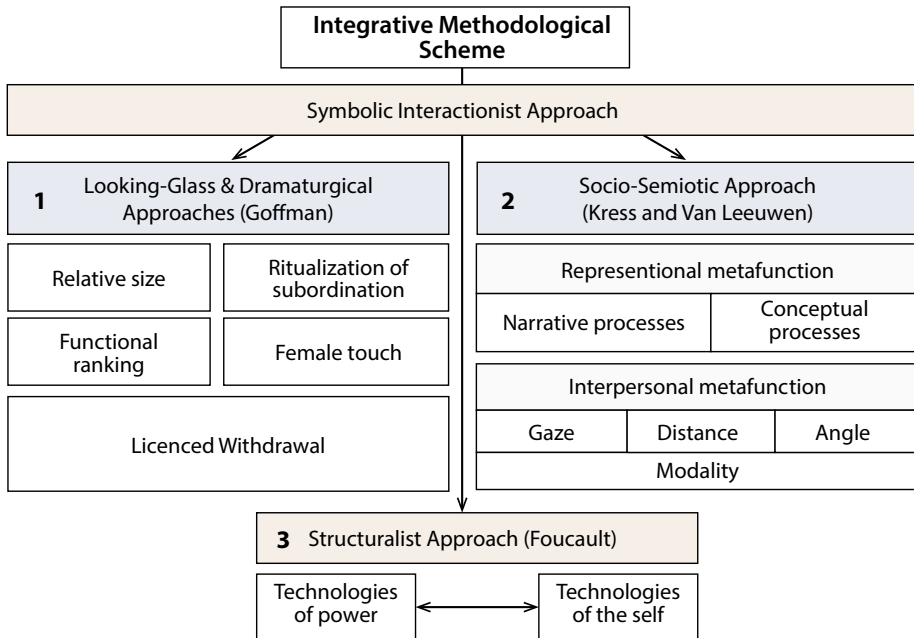
Markula applied the concept of the technologies of the self to the exploration of fitness practices that are collectively defined as mindful fitness (hybrid forms of Pilates, yoga, and Tai Chi with western strength training). Through in-depth interviews with the instructors, she analyzes the potential for mindful fitness to act as a practice of freedom and not to produce a discursive domination of the ideal of the feminine body. She notices that many women struggle to cope with the requirements of the «perfect body shape» in a rather contradictory manner: although women know about its limitations, they neither ignore nor change the ideal. Building a new body in Pilates or yoga classes does not, in itself, serve as a technology of the self; the individual should have a critical view of the ways in which the fit body is constructed, that is why it could be considered as a practice of freedom.

The concept of the technology of the self developed by Foucault is quite popular in manifold studies of the sociology of sport and the sociology of the body and demonstrates its explanatory power.

Integrative methodological approach

Based on the theoretical frameworks discussed above an integrative methodological scheme for the visual study of the female body in the context of modern yoga was built. By combining interactionist and structuralist approaches the enriched methodological tool allows a complex analysis of different aspects and social meanings of the represented female body in visual materials. The symbolic interactionist dimension describes stereotyped impressions and images of «femininity» and «masculinity» by analyzing precise indicators in the gender representation. In addition to Goffman's concept of gender display, we also take into account another purely methodological and empirically oriented approach for the visual analysis of representations proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen, which is situated within the interactionist tradition of socio-semiotics (Kress, van Leeuwen, 1996). The structuralist dimension identifies the semantic orientation of the images, which could maintain an ideological dominance by working as an oppressive mechanism of constructing the bodily canon or resist the main discourse by focusing on the subject and internal state.

As a result, the enhanced methodological tool encompasses three dimensions of analysis which are (1) the looking-glass body concept and dramaturgical approach by Goffman; (2) socio-semiotic approach by Kress and van Leeuwen; (3) structuralist approach by Foucault (see picture 1). The main dimensions of visual analysis will be discussed below.



Picture 1. Integrative methodological scheme

The looking-glass body and dramaturgical approach: gender display and its dimensions

As a whole, there are five general dimensions of gender display taken into account by Goffman and relevant to the current study (Goffman, 1979). Initially, Goffman's analysis shows how American popular culture reflects and shapes normative ideas about gender roles by the means of the symbolic oppression and subordination of women. The explanation of each dimension of gender display along with its examples is provided in the table 2.



Table 2

Gender display dimension

Nº	Gender Display Dimension	General Explanation	Example
1.	Relative size	Reflects the social weight of a person in the picture	The tendency to picture women smaller than men
2.	Female touch	Ritualistic touching and caressing	Women caress themselves or an object as an opposite to utilitarian gripping and manipulating by men
3.	Functional Ranking	The translation of the hierarchy related to gendered functions	Women are often presented performing a secondary role, while men — the primary one, with the only exception concerning the household duties and baby-carrying where the woman is leading
4.	Ritualization of Subordination	Expressed through the body location and position	Women are physically subordinated to men by their position in the space, postures or facial expression
5.	Licensed Withdrawal	The representation of the removal of the subject from the social situation in a general meaning	Women are pictured as withdrawn by hiding behind objects or covering their face with their hands

Socio-semiotic approach: representational and interpersonal metafunctions

As Kress and van Leeuwen claim, socio-semiotics provides the opportunity to study visual material systematically and critically (Kress, van Leeuwen, 1996). The authors' own method consists of specific practical tools for the analysis of the depicted elements and visual statements some of which we consider to be relevant while applied to the study of the female body in the context of modern yoga. This methodological approach is built on two major metafunctions: a representational metafunction and interpersonal one.

The representational metafunction is related to the visual representation of interaction and relationships between the characters, and between characters and objects. As Kress and van Leeuwen claim, those interactions can be analyzed via the use of geometric vectors. From this point of view, the participants of the representation can be in an active relation with each other (engaging in an activity together, mutually exchanging energies), which can be empirically recorded by the directions of eye-lines, arms, the general position of the body, gestures. This dimension is called narrative processes. On the contrary, conceptual processes show the participants of the representation in a stable, non-active position.

The interpersonal metafunction describes the relation between a spectator and the participants of the representation. From this point of view, Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish such elements as the gaze (directly looking at viewer or being exposed to the gaze of viewer), the distance (psychological use of space: intimacy or impersonality), and the angle from which viewers can observe the participants of the picture (dimensions of involvement and power). On this point Kress and van Leeuwen also suggest taking into account the degree of the modality of the visual representation in the context of the credibility of images (color, depth, tonal shades).

Structuralist approach: technologies of power and the self

Foucault's concepts of the technologies of power and the self along with Markula's application of his ideas extend the analysis of the representation of the female body in visual material (Foucault, 1988; Markula, 2004). We consider yoga as the technology of power, a disciplinary method of controlling, training and manipulating the docile body that is apparent in the visual images. On the other hand, yoga may serve as the technology of the self which leaves space for the practice of freedom, the possibilities of transformation and a critical view of the oppressive bodily canon.

The technologies of power demonstrate how modern yoga deals with the body for the purpose of transforming and improving it. Yoga manipulates, shapes and trains docile bodies to make them more skillful, stronger and healthier. Instructors are perceived as experts of the truly healthy and beautiful body who know even the secrets of perpetual youth. In such a way, yoga practice is the instrument of biopower and discipline for those who want to comply with bodily standards: it teaches people what to do, what to eat and how to treat their bodies. Images related to the process of teaching, classes, and different situations when the instructors show what to do and correct the participants maintain the technology of power, reinforce the discipline of the real practices, and form the bodily canon. The images of the feminine body are involved in different discourses that practice control over the individual.

In contrast, the technologies of the self are related to self-care, self stylization and a critical awareness of the dominant construction of gender and femininity. Building a new, improved body does not, in itself, serve as the technology of the self, unless a woman practices the ethics of self-care and has a critical view on the ways how her body is constructed or manipulated. The internal state and thoughts of the people in the pictures are unavailable for us, nevertheless, the images that do not contain the oppressive body are closer to the practice of freedom. Moreover, the visual representation of the variety of body shapes and individual characteristics such as gender, age and physical abilities are also destabilized the dominant discourse and opens the opportunity for the realization of the technologies of the self.

**The representation of the female body:
exploring the Russian yoga schools web sites**

The designed integrative methodological scheme for the visual analysis of the female body was tested on typical representations from websites of popular yoga schools in Moscow.³ It is worth noting that the objective of the present empirical analysis is not to achieve a representative sample, but to provide with some illustrative materials for the application of the methodological tool. For this purpose we limit our research subject and focus mainly on the staged photography, while the photos shot during yoga sessions or tours could be regarded as a relevant subject for future research⁴.

Picture 2⁵ represents the modern female yogi while picture 3⁶ shows the stereotyped image of a «perfect woman» in the contemporary mass media. Picture 4⁷ presents a neutral (without

³ The visual material was taken from the most popular yoga schools and studios in Moscow based on the ratings Gorod Afisha and Forbes (For more information see the links: URL: <http://gorod.afisha.ru/entertainment/10-luchshih-mest-dlya-yogi-v-moskve/>; <http://m.forbes.ru/article.php?id=63094> (accessed: 6.05.2015).

⁴ Due to the fact, that the focus of the current empirical research is mainly studio photos explicitly orientated on the individual practice (the woman is the only person represented on the picture), empirical indicators which take into account relation between different characters are excluded from the analysis (e.g. relative size, functional ranking).

⁵ Source: URL: [Satnam.ru](http://satnam.ru) (accessed: 6.05.2015).

⁶ Source: URL: http://creativestudio.ru/articles/foto_krasivyh_devushek/ (accessed: 6.05.2015).

⁷ Source: URL: <http://blog-yoga.com/muzyka-dlya-jogi> (accessed: 6.05.2015).



Picture 2. New femininity in modern yoga



Picture 3. Stereotyped femininity in mass media



Picture 4. Neutral image of the body in yoga practice

explicit gender references) image of yoga practice within a natural context. In order to describe the new femininity ideal in modern yoga we start with a comparison of the first two photos and then proceed to the third to show the hidden meaning of its non-oppressive character.

The modern yoga portrays women in new light as independent actors and active subjects of action (picture 2), while the contemporary mass media still present her as a sexualized and eroticized passive object oppressed and subordinated (picture 3). How did we come to this conclusion? First of all, we use body location and position which reflect such parameters as *the ritualization of subordination* and *licensed withdrawal*. In picture 1, the position of the modern yogi is actively directed to perform a meaningful and functional exercise; she is consciously involved in the context, showing control over her body and the situation. On the contrary, the woman in picture 2 is shown as withdrawn due to her relaxed position and half open mouth. She performs an accessorizing and passive role. Her body language and posture are sexualized: she does not aim at an active transformation of the reality but strives to create an erotic image for the purpose of seduction. The image of women in modern mass media is completed by ritualistic self-touching and caressing (*female touch*), while the modern yogi manipulates her body in a functional manner.

Some more interesting observations can be made by describing the relationship between the represented woman and the viewer (*interpersonal metafunction*). In picture 1 the woman is not simply exposed to the *gaze* of the viewer, but actively builds an original relation with them. She escapes the objectifying gaze of the viewer using direct eye contact on an equal footing. In such a way, the modern feminine yogi makes a demand towards the viewer, who immediately feels included into this communication. In spite of the fact that the woman in

picture 2 also looks at the spectator, her glance is directed upwards (*angle*), therefore, creating a passive and oppressed impression. As for the *distance* established between the viewer and the women, the woman in picture 2 is represented neither under nor above the viewer creating a certain equality in their relation, as two persons face to face. As for the woman represented in picture 3, the viewer feels superiority and the capacity to watch her from above without any moral obligation. It is important that in the modern yoga representation we cannot find a complete intimacy as seen in the case of the mass media image where the spectator is permitted to observe the most private parts of personal life (the bed) including different parts of seminude body with a real set of colors and tonalities which contribute to the high level of credibility (*modality*).

Although yoga offers an alternative representation of femininity, it is possible to see a certain image of a young, slim, flexible woman, which could be oppressive for those who do not meet the standards because of age or body parameters. However, does visuality shape the image of the female body by imposing restrictions on the female body (*technologies of power*) or leave a space for the self-care, self-stylization and critical awareness (*technologies of the self*)? From the structuralist perspective, both images could be considered as oppressive images that serve to make socially productive docile bodies, but picture 2 still could be interpreted as an example of personal transformation and self-stylization. In such a way, this picture could be used to maintain the image of individual development without discursive domination.

We consider yoga as a disciplinary method of controlling, training and manipulating the docile body; from the other hand, we could find in yoga the elements of the technology of the self that are oriented towards the subjected human body. From this point of view the least oppressive images accent on gender neutral parts of body (eyes or hands) or do not contain the pictures of the desirable body and «perfect» shape at all. For instance, in picture 4 we see hands fixed in mudra (a certain fingers posture that helps to concentrate in yoga) on crossed legs in the foreground and the sea in the background. The portrayal is not very readable and we cannot even say for sure whether it is a man or a woman. This photo demonstrates the practice of contemplation and expresses the mental state of calmness.

Yoga is also a regular practice that helps to transform the body and mind through meditation, the internal observation of thoughts and breathing which are very close to the definition of the technology of the self. The focus on the internal and mental practice may lead to avoiding the images of the body, thus women have the possibility of critical awareness of what they do during the practice and what they need for the self-care. In this case, hands represent non-sexualized parts of body in contrast with lips, breasts and buttocks widely used in contemporary advertising products for women.

The sea in the background could be interpreted as a «living environment» with whom the person is connected and with whom he or she interacts. In such a way, we can speak about *narrative process* in relation to nature as the context and place. Generally speaking, nature plays a key role in modern yoga: the idea to be fully integrated to the natural environment in order to succeed in yoga practices is translated very often with the help of visual support. Concerning the *interpersonal metafunction*, the *angle* from which viewers can observe the participant of the presentation evidence the relations on an equal footing.

In such a way, we suppose that the main features identified here create the new femininity in modern yoga as opposed to the «perfect» stereotyped femininity of mass media. This new type of femininity is characterized by an independent and active position, natural beauty with some imperfections, casual appearance and no explicit sexuality. It is quite possible that a particular accent on female health, mindfulness, naturalness, self-care and practice of freedom is a reflection of broader contemporary social requirements and trends developing in contemporary society.



Conclusion

In the context of the significant rise in the popularity of yoga practice in Western countries and the transformation of its gender orientation from a masculine privilege to a mass feminine activity, the study of the special meaning of the representation of the female body as a gendered body seems to be promising for the identification of the particular position of contemporary gender reality.

The first part of this article was devoted to the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism and the framework of commercial realism by Goffman who argued that the body is constantly produced and reproduced in social interactions and plays a key role in the construction of one's identity. The term «gender display» was used to show that the images of «femininity» and «masculinity» diffused through mass media are constructed in order to affirm basic social norms regulating the relationship between men and women according to traditional gender roles.

In the second part we considered the structuralist tradition that placed the body in the context of the complex relations of power and knowledge. The concept of the docile body seems to be fruitful for interpreting the body as shaped by multiple discourses, disciplinary processes and technologies of power that control the body and soul. We took Foucault's concept of the technologies of the self in order to focus on how humans turn themselves into subjects and transform themselves during the practice of freedom.

The third part built an integrative methodological scheme based on theoretical approaches of symbolic interactionism by Goffman, structuralism (and poststructuralism) by Foucault and methods of visual analysis by Kress and van Leeuwen. The developed methodological apparatus consists of three dimensions with a number of empirical indicators for each branch: (1) looking-glass and dramaturgical approaches (Goffman), (2) socio-semiotic approach Kress and van Leeuwen, and (3) structuralist approach (Foucault).

Finally, the developed methodological tool was successfully applied to the analysis of some typical images of the female body in yoga taken from the web sites of popular yoga schools in Moscow. The combination of the interactionist and structuralist approaches allows us to analyze the visual material not only by the form, but also by the message that the images transmit.

Based on the illustrative analysis of the images we assume the rise of a new femininity, which is opposed to the stereotyped image of women in the mass media. The image of the female body in modern yoga can be considered as both an oppressive one, and as the practice of transforming the self, since it depends on the existence of a critical awareness of a particular individual. Nevertheless, the image that accents on gender neutral parts of body or does not contain the portrayal of «perfect» shape may serve as the technology of the self to the greatest degree.

We consider the issue of gendered representation through the lens of modern yoga to be a promising path for further research. Moreover, the developed methodological tool could be successfully applied to visual analysis of yoga practice as well as different areas of female physical activities such as fitness practices and strength training. At last, the developed methodological integrative schema can be tested more deeply by conducting research on female corporality in modern yoga using a broader qualitative methodology (interviews and participant observation).

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