

Joanna Pawelczyk
Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań

SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION OR ALTERNATIVE FEMININITY? THE (LINGUISTIC) PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SELECTED POLISH ADVERTISEMENTS

Abstract

The year 1989 marks the beginning of sweeping political, economic and social changes in Poland. Since that time an expansion of women into top professional positions can be observed. Data from the last national census (2002) clearly indicate that women in Poland are better educated than their male counterparts, increasingly career-oriented as well as aggressively pursuing managerial occupations. A modern woman is, by popular belief, no longer obliged to conform to the so-called dominant (Coates 1997) or emphasized (Connell 1987) [i.e. hegemonic] form of femininity. There appears to be greater social latitude for her professional development. The paper explores whether print advertisements (playing a crucial role in the construction of social identities) of certain products incorporate new powerful discourse of femininity. The three advertised products and services (cars, telephones, and banking) selected for the analysis have been commonly associated in Poland with the dominant form of masculinity. Consequently, it is interesting to examine whether women function there, and if so, how. The analyzed advertisements have been collected over the period of one year from three magazines addressed to the emerging Polish middle class. Drawing on Goffman's concepts of function ranking and ritualization of subordination as well as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), I will attempt to determine whether the selected print advertisements reflect the new femininity in Poland.

Keywords

Advertisement, gender, femininity, Critical Discourse Analysis.

1. The print advertisement as a socio-cultural discourse

According to Cook (1992), advertising has become one of the most important discourse¹ types in almost all contemporary societies and “because of this prominence, advertising can tell us a good deal about our own society and our own psychology” (1992: 5). Piller (2001) maintains that the discourse of advertising is essential in the construction of consumer identities, which are indexed by the purchase of commodities and goods (2001: 156). Within the consumer culture ideology, the purchase of a particular product (from among a whole range of others) constructs—at least partially—our identity, thus defining what we are. Consequently, at least theoretically, the discourse of advertising should enable us to reflect our different “selves.” This dimension of advertising has been referred to by O’Barr as the secondary discourse of advertising, conveying information about society. Primary discourse (O’Barr 1994), on the other hand, consists of providing the messages about commodities that are expressed in advertising, e.g.: “this car is safer, this drink is more refreshing”. I call this an *explicit function* of an advertisement. O’Barr claims that apart from presenting a certain product, advertisements as well “depict a number of things about society, such as who does the laundry, who prepares breakfast while someone else sits at the table and who drives and who rides as passengers in a car” (1994: 3). This is secondary discourse of advertising. I call this an *implicit function* of an advertisement. According to Williams (1980), these two discourses of advertising are very much co-dependent: “It is clear that we have a cultural pattern in which the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by associations with social and personal meanings” (1980: 185). Since advertisements are our loyal companions throughout our lives they must not remain unchanged. Advertisements—in order to remain attractive to potential customers and thus ensure profitability—should present familiar images that consumers may identify with. Yet, as research bears out, while images presented in some ads may even evoke rather negative feelings, they still attract attention (cf. Fowles 1996: 9). It is widely believed that the “future may know us through advertising and popular culture” (Fowles 1996: XIV) since advertisements constitute a very important reflection of societal values. Ads obviously tend to reflect current trends in such cultural icons as fashion and music, but—most significantly—they reveal societal mores and morals characteristic of a certain period of time.

Advertisements are seen to embody all kinds of changes a given society experiences, be they economic, social or referring to personal or group identity (Cook 1992). A very interesting example of the conceptualization of an

¹ The concept of discourse can be applied in different senses in different disciplines (for a detailed discussion see Litosseliti and Sunderland (eds.) (2002). In this paper, discourse will be referred to as language characteristics of different social situations and as a form of social practice (cf. Fairclough 1992).

advertisement as a socio-cultural mirror is provided by McLaughlin (1999), who explains that the portrayal of African Americans in advertisements constitutes a reflection of the degree to which this group of American society is accepted into mainstream culture. It appears that for an advertisement to be attractive, it must not present some “undefined/unspecified” object/person. Rather, it must be based on some readily recognized archetype. In this way, advertisements condone and bolster certain stereotypes regarding, for example, women or men, endorsing not only the product being marketed, but promoting a whole range of societal assumptions. As a result, it can be claimed that an advertisement may either be considered a reflection of society (the reflection hypothesis, cf. Tuchman 1981; Strinati 1995) or as relying on social stereotyping, thus reinforcing the dominant discourses. Piller (2001) aptly remarks that advertising is “a two-way street” (2001: 156) as “representations of society (in advertising) have their basis in the social order, but at the same time, the social order is constantly being re-created by reference to model discourses such as advertising” (2001: 156).

Although advertising imagery may be relatively free of the categorical impositions of work and class (Fowles 1996: 215), over the course of the 20th century the category of gender endured with its definitional and prescriptive power. Since, as Holmes (1997) asserts, “adverts can be usefully regarded as informative cultural reflexes, and a sociolinguistic analysis can provide illuminating insights into the ways in which a society constructs stereotypical gender identities and reinforces normative models of femininity and masculinity” (1997: 211).

2. Critical Discourse Analysis and advertisements

As has been underlined above, advertisements constitute an abundant resource from which knowledge about society can be drawn. The analyzed material, however, needs to be approached critically in order to unveil the potential hegemonic social relations as expressed by the concepts of “othering” and marginalization of less powerful individuals and groups. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to critically investigate social inequality as it is expressed, constituted and legitimized by language use and media constitute its favorite site for data collection (Bucholtz 2003: 57). As Vigorito (1998) states, mass media overwhelmingly control interactions as well as define meanings. Critical Discourse Analysis favors the texts that “encourage the acceptance of unequal arrangements of power as natural and inevitable” (Bucholtz 2003: 57). CDA has concerned itself not only with text analysis, but also with broad trends in public communication (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 13). Since contemporary advertising increasingly tends to rely not only on the verbal message but on images (the visual message), CDA offers the tools to “demystify” (Lazar 2002) something which may have

become “naturalized,” it helps to decode hegemonic social relations referring to the “othering” or “marginalization” of less powerful groups and individuals. In the case of advertisements, “naturalization” can apply to an ideologically dominant portrayal of a certain social group, despite the intra-group variation. Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2003) speak of the process of naturalization in which: “a dominant ideology typically owes its success not to brute power and conscious imposition, but to the ability to convince people that it is not in fact a matter of ideology at all, but simply natural, ‘the way things are’” (2003: 43). An image exists entirely within the realm of ideology, and as Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) assert: “pictorial structures do not simply reproduce the structures of ‘reality’” (1996: 45), but rather the produced images are very much linked to the interests of social institutions. Although advertisements may appear to be “ideologically innocent discourses,” light-hearted and amusing as many people would claim, van Leeuwen (1993) is of different opinion. According to him, ideologically innocent discourses do not exist, as even these can still be tremendously powerful in representing and reconstituting areas of social life. And since discourses, including the discourse of advertising, are not only representational (socially constituted), but also socially constitutive, this paper seeks to explore if/how a group of professionally successful young women in Poland is represented in the three types of advertisements. This is a fundamental identity question. As Fowles (1996) maintains: “The creation and maintenance of the self becomes not just a leading personal concern of these times but the paramount one” (1996: 198). In the case of professionally oriented Polish women, the aspect of identity *creation* has been completed by themselves. Advertisements, however, play a significant role in the aspect of identity *maintenance*. Consequently, the issue to be pursued in this paper is whether these Polish women are symbolically annihilated in the selected advertisements or are truly performing their professional image, which—in the Polish context—can be dubbed a new femininity.

3. Symbolic annihilation vs. alternative femininity

Tuchman (1981) asserts that mass media, including advertisements, “symbolically annihilate” women, i.e. women have been eliminated, marginalized, or trivialized, or they have been instrumentalized and presented as commodities themselves. All this is achieved through a traditional depiction of women, one with emphasis on their sexual attractiveness and/or domestic servitude. According to the reflection hypothesis, mass media mirror societal values. Tuchman also declares that whatever or whoever is not presented in a positive light, becomes symbolically annihilated. For the purpose of the current discussion, the dimension of positive light should entail the rejection of the representation of this group of Polish women

in the traditional way, i.e. in the context of gender conservatism (Lazar 2002). In order to maintain their created professional identity, their (advertised) female agency should be maintained. The above-described traditional portrayal of women—as well as men—can be referred to as dominant discourse, which can be characterized by its alleged “naturalness.” Coates (1997: 292) states that: “Dominant discourses appear ‘natural’; they are powerful because they are able to render invisible the fact that they are but one among many different discourses.” It follows that, in the light of dominant discourses, a person’s status will always be interpreted by his or her sex rather than by his/her actual social status as sex is the most salient of social categories (Aries 1996). As Coates further maintains the dominant discourses of femininity: teach women to see themselves in relation to men (1997: 296). The dominant maternal discourse, for example, says that: “children are ‘marvelous’, as part of which all mothers take pride in their children’s achievements” (1997: 294). The concept of dominant discourse of femininity relies on hegemonic masculinity² (Connell 1995), which refers to the legitimization and reproduction of social relationships that generate and maintain male dominance. The concept of alternative femininity—as applied in this paper—underlines the multi-faceted nature of feminine experience, acknowledging the myriad roles a woman plays in contemporary societies, and rejecting stereotypical, uniform conceptualizations of femininity.

4. Gender portrayals in advertisements

No other aspect of advertising draws as much attention as its portrayals of the sexes. Jhally (1990) considers gender the social resource most often exploited by advertisers. Fowles (1996) states that advertising spills over with images of men and women because target audiences “are captivated by gender imagery and seek out those models, performers and performances that *best exemplify* cultural concepts of maleness and femaleness” (1996: 215).

Findings regarding the portrayal of men and women in advertisements tend to be quite uniform throughout western societies. Modelski’s (1986) framework of oppositions aptly illustrates the division into separate spheres of femininity and masculinity in the cultural dimension. In this approach, so-called high culture entails masculinity as well as such concepts as production, work, intellect, being active, and writing. The popular or mass culture, on the other hand, subsumes

² Connell (1995) underlines that, similarly to femininity, masculinity is not a coherent structure. Connell refers to two kinds of masculinities: the physical masculinity of the working class, associated with physical power, and technical masculinity of the upper-middle-class, associated with technical, i.e. scientific, and political power.

femininity, consumption, free time, being passive, emotionality and reading. This framework of opposition places masculinity and a set of its associations in a privileged, more socially desirable or even powerful position. Femininity, as represented by popular culture, is downgraded to consumption and passivity.

Not surprisingly then women tend to be depicted as homemakers, dependent on men, or sex objects. Such a depiction sanctions the so-called emphasized (Connell 1987), hegemonic or prevailing form of femininity (cf. Coates 1997). In this dominant discourse of femininity, women are denied alternative, i.e. competing, versions of “being a woman” in which they subvert the traditional discourse of femininity. Men, on the other hand, are depicted as dominant, authoritative (Das 2000), an image again reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. Their access to alternative forms of masculinity is also limited. Furthermore, both sexes occupy different roles in different settings as well as feature different types of products (e.g. Goffman 1976). As Das (2000) maintains, the nature of the product advertised heavily influences the images of men and women in advertisements. Women prevail in ads for home products, baby items, cosmetics, food items while men dominate in ads for such products as automobiles, alcohol, insurance, financial services, and business products (cf. Craig 1992; Fowles 1996). This division clearly indicates two gendered spheres of activities supposedly better performed by one or the other of the sexes. Furthermore, products such as automobiles, liquor, financial investments, and insurance are identified as masculine and are thus husband-dominant while food, appliances, cosmetics and jewelry are identified as feminine and are thus wife-dominant. Yet, as Das has noted (2000), the stereotypical portrayal of women does not hold when women appear in ads for such “masculine” products as tobacco, travel, food and financial services. Consequently, it can be claimed that females are depicted less stereotypically in non-feminine ads.

Tuchmann (1981) believes that mass media—including advertisements—“symbolically annihilate” women. In her view, whatever or whoever is not presented in a reaffirming, positive light becomes symbolically annihilated. Regarding the portrayal of American women in advertisements, Tuchmann (1981) noticed that although females constituted 51% of the population and over 40% of the workforce, not many of them were depicted in that way. She further observed that working women not only suffered disproportionate representation, but were even condemned; non-working women were trivialized since they were portrayed as mere toys or with their devotion and functionality relegated strictly to hearth and home.

Tuchmann’s views, to a great extent, overlap with Goffman’s findings, where the status of women in comparison to men is shown as relatively enfeebled. A classic study by Goffman (1976) revealed that the sexes in American print advertisements were presented in a narrow and repetitive way. Goffman (1976)

found that when both sexes were depicted together men were often portrayed as dominant. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the advertisements conveyed some insidious messages concerning power relationships between men and women.

The frame analysis enabled Goffman to identify six representational markers of gender:

1. **RELATIVE SIZE** – concerns the differences in the height of the portrayed parties, one person being taller and one shorter. Goffman found that females were usually presented as shorter than males, thus consequently less authoritative.
2. **FEMININE TOUCH** – under this rubric, one person is depicted as using their fingers to caress or cradle an object. The act of caressing points to the person's body as being delicate. Goffman found that women were apt to be touching or caressing objects, while men grasped or clutched objects.
3. **FUNCTION RANKING** – here one person is depicted as playing a managerial role in relation to another person. This particular category carries information regarding the social status of the participants. Goffman found that the tasks females were shown performing tended to be of less import both to themselves and to society.
4. **RITUALIZATION OF SUBORDINATION** – refers to the submissive posture in which one person is portrayed in relation to others in the frame or to the viewer. According to Goffman, this modality conveys information about power in gender relationships. In this category, females were likely to be presented as physically subordinate.
5. **LICENSED WITHDRAWAL** – “occurs when a person in an ad seems to be psychologically removed from the present situation, thus leaving them helpless and dependent on others for protection” (McLaughlin 1999). Goffman found that the persons thus depicted are more often women than men.
6. **THE FAMILY** – this category transmits information about cultural beliefs about the family unit. Goffman pointed out that the female roles were, albeit unsurprisingly, clearly exposed in family portrayals.

Goffman's analysis revealed a narrow, systematic depiction of the sexes in American print advertisements of the 1970s.

Belknap and Leonard (1991) demonstrate that, despite numerous positive social changes to the advantage of women, both feminine touch and ritualization of subordination continue to prevail in the advertisements of popular publications (McLaughlin 1999). This finding strongly indicates that current advertisements to a

great extent fail to reflect the social changes or at least lag behind them. While Vigorito (1998) acknowledges that societal gendered structures are in a constant state of flux, he calls into question the ability of gender identities to evolve as rapidly. As a result, the media are capable of neglecting this process of transformation and dispensing disinformation as to the existing, thus available, discourses of femininity and masculinity. Consequently, rather than contribute to the debunking of deep-rooted gender-based stereotypes, media-promoted discourses actually continue to reinforce even those stereotypes that are well advanced in the process of demystification. This can be referred to as discourse being both representational and constitutive. Piller (2001), in her study on bilingual advertisements in Germany, determined that for these types of ads the target audience is male due to three main factors: firstly, only men are presented, or, on those occasions where women are featured, they are significantly outnumbered and/or outranked by men, and finally, the use of advertised products is gendered. What Piller underlines is that while such “valued linguistic practice” (2001: 173) as bilingualism is not an exclusively masculine domain, it is “associated with the professional sphere to which men happen to have predominant access” (2001: 173). Lazar (2002), in her research on the construction of feminine identity in a Singaporean national advertising campaign, concludes that there are two discourses of gender depiction: conservative and egalitarian. According to Lazar (2002), however, the conservative one prevails. What she stresses is the fact that the conservative discourse adopts elements of the egalitarian one by “keeping women singularly focused and emotionally dependent on personal relationships with men and children” (2002: 112). Fowles (1996) in his brief overview of the changes in gender depiction in advertisements states that in prime-time commercials women are still portrayed as “not employed, in domestic settings, and using products” (1996: 211).

Similar views on the division into feminine communality and masculine agency (cf. Carli 1990) seem to prevail in the field of marketing (Hupfer 2002). Surprisingly, the social category of gender (referred to as “segmentation variable”) “has become of greater rather than lesser importance as male and female roles continue to shift” (2002: 1). The selectivity hypothesis (Meyers-Levy 1988, 1989), traditionally exploited in the field of marketing, rests on the idea that the male agentic role is characterized by “concern for self,” while the female communality entails “concern for both the self and others” (Hupfer 2002: 4). Despite the fact that women have long been assuming roles previously reserved for men, Meyers-Levy (1989) states that the differences proposed by the selectivity hypothesis will persist as this assumption is “another manifestation of females’ tendency to be communal and comprehensive as they more actively share in issues and views that previously were in a domain of concern to others” (1989: 255).

Opinions are yet divided since other research indicates that women's increased involvement in the workforce enables them to become potential clients of such products as automobiles, insurance, and financial services, which are advertised with women in mind (Das 2000).

5. Gender in Polish advertising

One of the important elements of advertisements is the traditional division of social roles into what is typically feminine and typically masculine (cf. Fowles 1996). This division has been extensively employed in the majority of Polish advertisements. A Polish advertisement, mostly following the European pattern, relies heavily on just two symbolic pictures of women: a classical image mostly drawing on stereotypical perceptions of women, and a modern image based on features regarded as particularly hip at a certain period, for example, liberation and independence (Twardowska and Olczyk 2003). The classical image, however, has an important reflection in Polish social history. There exists a very powerful concept of Mother, whose primary calling in life is to be a model homemaker and provide *emotionally* for the family. Polish culture adamantly professes that there is absolutely no alternative to this powerful icon, cementing it as one of the most difficult to break. The very notion of Mother resides in the image of a traditional, patriarchal familial ideal: the model mother, the bread-winning father, and the children (preferably two) (cf. Kwiatkowska 1999; Grabowska 2002). This pattern, though already a far cry from the reality on the ground, is deployed with consistency in the typical Polish advertisement (Twardowska and Olczyk 2003).

Polish advertisements clearly differentiate "being feminine" and "being masculine." The first very important difference constitutes the placement of men and women. A woman tends to occupy such haunts as the kitchen or children's room, or she is depicted as the ideal consumer in a shop, while men more often appear in the great outdoors or on duty at their workplaces (Twardowska and Olczyk 2003). A second difference is the divergent relationships women and men depicted in advertisements have with other people (Twardowska and Olczyk 2003). A woman can be described as a person embodying a set of communal features (cf. Carli 1990). She must be emotional, friendly, open to others, understanding, supportive, gentle, and more expressive, thus fulfilling the (dominant) female communal role. On the other hand, so-called "agentive features" (Carli 1990) best describe the character of the adult male. This male agentive role includes such qualities as being assertive, intellectual, analytical, and able to think abstractly in order to solve problems. Moreover, there is a marked tendency in Polish advertising to depict men and women as being surrounded and enjoying the company of their own gender only. Women tend to get together with other women

(cooking), while men spend their free time with other men (drinking beer). A third, yet essential, difference lies in the presentation of men and women in professional spheres (Twardowska and Olczyk 2003). Unfortunately, rarely are women privileged to play the role of expert in advertisements. This realm of activity is disproportionately reserved for men, betraying a lapse in advertising's ability to reflect social change currently well underway in Polish society.

As statistics indicate, every third boss in Poland is a woman (Census 2002). This fact can also be linked to the global recognition of the desirability of the female communal features in the field of business (Eagly 2002). The changing model of the Polish family does not seem to be extensively reflected in advertisements either. In 2001, only 36% of men and 24% of women advocated the traditional (patriarchal) division of household duties (Środa 2001). What also needs to be underlined is the fact that in the realm of Polish culture, the same job performed by a man or a woman is not equally prestigious in popular consciousness. A socially underestimated job usually done by a woman when undertaken by a man takes on substantial prestige and social recognition (cf. Środa 2001). This is perfectly evident in Polish advertisements where the man who is able to cook is not pictured in the home kitchen, surrounded by demanding family members, but rather as a professional running his own business or the chef of a posh restaurant, admired by appreciative and respectful clients (Twardowska and Olczyk 2003).

5.1. New femininity

It needs to be stressed, however, that a body of advertisements portraying men and women non-stereotypically—thus blurring role distinctions—has indeed begun to appear. In the Polish context, this blurring of role distinctions may be emerging in response to a new type of femininity encouraged by recent socio-economic changes. As Lazar (2002) remarked, in so-called gender conservatism in advertisements there co-exists a discourse of egalitarian gender relations, which “appears to support women’s agency in areas of personal and career choices” (2002: 112). In the Polish context, this new portrayal is evident in advertisements of products commonly linked to the professional sphere.

Simultaneously, a significant shift in the status of women is observable in decreasing respect attributed to the traditional role of a housewife. Though still a majority, a steadily dwindling number of Poles (both male and female) support the established patriarchal model of family in which the wife is a homemaker and the husband a breadwinner (Siemieńska 1999). Adherents of this conventional division of labor have declined from 85% in 1992 to 74% in 1997 (Siemieńska 1999: 213). Likewise, Poles are steadily rejecting the supposition that a woman’s career is less

important than her husband's and that a wife should restrict herself to supporting her husband in the pursuit of his professional development. Here the percentage rose from 44% in 1992 to 53% in 1995 to 57% in 1997 (1999: 214).

For an increasing number of women, a professional career is a source of social recognition and promotion. This particular transformation has been to a large extent a consequence of socio-economic developments in Poland since 1989. As Siemieńska (1999) asserts, the conversion of political and economic systems, the gradual disappearance of state subsidies, as well as fierce competition on the job market, all facilitate new conceptualizations of the social roles of men and women. A Polish woman's increasing participation in social and political life is interpreted by Siemieńska (1999) as a form of adaptation into this markedly new existence. According to the most recent census, Polish women are very interested in pursuing a college education and then professional careers. This relatively new phenomenon is reflected in the number of Polish women with college degrees. The period between 1998 and 2002 reflects a significant rise in the number of women with at least a high school education. In 2002, 10.4% of university graduates were female, an increase of 4.5% compared to 1998. Among males, there was 2.1% rise, with 9.3% of men completing a degree program. The 2002 national census indicates that women outnumber men as far as university and high school education is concerned. Another important change in the social structure regards the number of men and women who are professionally active. Although it needs to be recognized that men are still disproportionately favored in this sphere, there has been a marked change between 1998 and 2002. In 1998, this difference constituted 17.3% while in 2002 it decreased to 13.1%.

As the data indicate, a fresh image has emerged of the successful Polish woman attempting to avail herself of new opportunities following 1989. This image predominately applies to women with college degrees but also includes those who have completed a high school education. This new Polish female is well educated, professionally active, fulfilling her career ambitions and, with increasing frequency, rejecting the deep-rooted and powerful maternal discourse. New career-oriented femininity has also been validated in Kwiatkowska's (1999) study on gender stereotypes in Poland. She has noted that among the images of a Polish woman that female respondents identified repeatedly was the so-called "ambitious" one, the type of woman for whom professional fulfillment constitutes the top priority. Male respondents, however, failed to propose such an image. This finding supports research results from other countries, i.e. an enduring maintenance of the traditional role of a woman among even the top educated and most powerful men. One reason for this could be the relatively few positions requiring top professional skills and quality education; thus, well-educated women only sharpen the competition for job vacancies. This explanation can also be applied to the interpretation of the research that has been repeatedly carried out in Poland since

1992. The findings of the research indicate that there is a gradually decreasing number of women, but a steadily increasing number of men, who declare that there is no place for females in the worlds of business and politics (Siemieńska 1999).

In the analysis to follow I would like to investigate whether the new alternative (powerful) discourse of femininity (cf. Coates 1997) is also evident in advertisements of products associated with realms traditionally recognized as exclusively masculine (cf. Barthel 1988: 121).

6. Method

6.1. Magazines and inclusion criteria

Advertisements for three products—cars, banking services and phone services—constitute the data for this study. The motivation behind the selection of these goods and services is that they are among those commonly associated in Poland with the so-called dominant masculinity sphere.

In view of the emerging new Polish femininity, it is worth examining whether women feature in these advertisements and, if so, whether this portrayal adheres to the norms of hegemonic femininity (featuring conservative gender relations), or is in line with the social and economic changes Polish women are adapting to, i.e. the new, powerful femininity.

The advertisements for this project were collected between 2003 and 2004 from three leading Polish magazines addressed to the Polish middle-class: *Polityka*, *Wprost*, and *Newsweek*. The data at my disposal is comprised of 85 print advertisements.

Prior to assembling the advertisements, I set specific criteria for their inclusion in the study. The selected advertisements had to satisfy the following conditions:

1. They had to advertise one of the above-discussed products.
2. They had to portray a man, a woman, or both; or they should feature some other indication of the “gendered” nature of the advertised product, be it visual or verbal.

Advertisements for cars, banking services, or phone services that failed to meet the second criterion were excluded. This is not to suggest that the existence of such “gender-neutral” advertisements is insignificant.

6.2. Classification

Once ads conforming to the above-presented criteria were selected, they were further classified in accordance with their gendered aspect(s). The gendered aspect was manifested in the analyzed advertisements through:

1. **The visual message:** the presence or its lack of the female or male protagonist(s) as well as the physical positioning of the portrayed parties. Here the claims of Goffman's (1976) frame analysis have been applied. The frame analysis as employed by Goffman revealed that "through the positioning of the hands, the cant of the neck, or through the relative sizes of models in the advertisement, the viewer is exposed to insidious messages regarding power relationships between men and women" (McLaughlin 1999). The current analysis aims at unveiling potentially "insidious messages" with the insights of Critical Discourse Analysis.
2. **The verbal message:** here the gendered voice was spotted in the grammatically masculine or feminine choice of inflectional forms of verbs and adjectives as well as grammatically masculine or feminine forms of nouns when referring to the recipient of the message. Furthermore, the choice of lexical items (adjectives, nouns) was considered as used in the descriptions of the qualities of the product or the qualities of the product's addressee. These adjectives and nouns tend to point to the agentive or communal aspects of the advertised product or the product's recipient. Agentive and communal features tend to be commonly associated, in turn, with hegemonic masculinity and dominant femininity respectively (cf. Carli 1990; Coates 1997; Connel 1987).

The classification of the advertisements due to their gendered aspects resulted in the distinction of 6 types of car advertisements, and 3 types of banking services advertisements; the telephone advertisements have been divided into business (3 subtypes) and non-business (2 subtypes). Once classified, the advertisements were analyzed applying such concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis as, e.g. marginalization of the "other," legitimization and subordination, power relations and ideology (cf. Wodak 2001). These concepts were to unveil how the potentially innocuous visual and verbal messages contribute to the reproduction and reinforcement of (unequal) social relationships and, in consequence, reveal whether the selected advertisements promote symbolic annihilation of Polish women, or on the contrary, they advance the new (alternative) femininity.

7. Analysis

7.1. Car advertisements

In the process of classification of the “gendered” aspect of car advertisements (involving both verbal and visual representations), 6 types of portrayals have been distinguished. There are female protagonists in 3 of them:

1. The first type features a male protagonist only; there is no presence of a female one. The visual representation is underscored verbally and both the visual and verbal representations indicate emotional attachment between the product and the protagonist(s). In this category the verbal message is clearly directed to a male customer as all the verbs have masculine inflectional forms (e.g. *zagiądałeś*—(you) looked into). This type belongs to a well-represented genre of advertisements in my corpus in which the car is personified to represent an attractive, beautiful, and reliable person (presumably a woman), who “sweeps you off your feet,” “by being reliable, it becomes even more beautiful”. There is an implicit ideological assumption that women tend not to be reliable. In one such ad the headline goes: “*gwiazda i jej fani*”—“the star and **her** fans,” underlining the feminine nature of the car. The slogan, on the other hand, “*możesz być dumny*”—“you can be **proud**,” relying on the masculine adjectival inflectional form reiterates the male addressee of the message.
2. In the second type, there is a clear visual implication of a male protagonist, yet still no presence of a female one. The verbal message is male-addressed and both the visual and verbal messages underline the agentic features of the car driver, as well as the agentic-like experience the car provides. Here the headline does not indicate the natural perspective, e.g. “*wyłącznie dla kierowców*”—“exclusively for **drivers**,” as the highlighted plural form of the noun refers to male drivers (this form is pseudo-generic and the male referent is preferred). The visual message unequivocally defines the driver, and the verbal one draws on the discourse of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995), thus legitimizing and naturalizing the interests of powerful men while subordinating the interests of women. This is achieved by the use of the masculine inflectional form of the verb, e.g. “*będziesz mógł się zmierzyć*”—“you will be able to face,” assuring that the potential driver will be able to exercise his agentic features. The final clause of the verbal message states that the car is for “real drivers.”
3. In the third type of car advertisements, neither male nor female protagonists are present. Yet the addressee (target audience) of the product description (verbal message) is clearly a man, as there are obvious references to a non-present male protagonist. In one of the advertisements that belong to this category, although the visual message does not feature any protagonist, the verbal message constructs the driver as a person of agentic features. This construction is based on the following elements: all the verbs have masculine inflectional forms (e.g. “*zastanawiałeś się?*”—“have you ever wondered?”). The addressed driver, according to the verbal message, should display authority, self-confidence and

the ability to handle the most difficult situations. By using the car the driver savors power. One of the final clauses in this particular ad provides the icing on the cake by encouraging the recipient: "*podejmij męska decyzję*"—"make a man's/manly decision."

4. In the fourth type, male and female protagonists are depicted in gender asymmetrical (i.e. stereotypical) roles while the product description (the verbal message) is presented from the perspective of a male protagonist, consistent with Goffman's (1976) concept of "ritualization of subordination", i.e. the submissive posture in which the way one person is portrayed in relation to others in the frame or to the viewer betrays power relations. In one such ad the male protagonist strikes a very active pose while the passive woman attentively watches the scene, sitting. The headline emphasizes that the car is "*luksus dla aktywnych*"—"a luxury for the active"; the female is not positioned as active. The verbal message is also constructed around the ideology of dominant masculinity. Similarly to the already discussed advertisements, the verbs have masculine inflectional forms (e.g. *rezygnował*—(he) gave up). The active lifestyle is again highlighted in the message as a clear indication that the intended recipient (target audience) of the message is a man.
5. In this type the female protagonist is present or her presence is indicated; no male protagonist is present. Both visual and verbal messages clearly draw on the dominant discourses of femininity. In this type, both the verbal and visual messages unmistakably address the female protagonist via the use of feminine inflectional forms of the verb (e.g. *znalazłam*—I found). Some aspects of the dominant femininity include the following: "...somebody thought about me," "I rely on intuition," "I am looking for my ideal," "[I am looking for someone] who will think about all my needs, someone with whom I will feel secure."
6. The last type denotes aspects of new femininity as it features a woman as a protagonist, yet combining both agentive and communal features. The advertisements within this category approach the concept of new femininity. Such an ad presents a female protagonist emphasizing different roles the woman nowadays performs. The headline states that her life is full of passion, thus indicating her agency. The verbal message highlights that the car "will fit each of your personalities." Numerous phrases stress that she is the driver and "can enjoy driving as well as the company of the passengers." The visual message (a woman and a baby) clearly signifies that maternity is still one of the roles she needs to perform.

7.2. Bank services

The selected banking advertisements have been divided into 3 types, 2 of which feature women.

1. In the first type, the visual message presents a male protagonist, usually positioned as an expert. His agentive features are underscored by the verbal message. In one of the ads representing this type, the verbal message evokes the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, the hard-working man deserves a bank where his money should be “working hard” as well, i.e. earning high interest. Also, both adjectival and verbal inflectional forms have masculine forms (e.g. “*zmęczony*”–“tired” [masc.], “*chciałbyś*” [masc.]–“you would like”). Consequently, the sales pitch is evidently addressed to a man.
2. The second type features the female protagonist in the visual message. Yet, while the verbal representation does grant her professional expertise, this is combined with an irrefutable set of communal features. One of the advertisements features a product (wealth management) that purports to target “the wealthiest and most demanding clients.” All the verb forms in the verbal message have feminine inflectional forms (e.g. “*podjął*” [fem.]–“undertook”). However, the verbal message also heavily draws on the discourse of “other-centeredness” (cf. Lazar 2002). The addressed product recipient (a woman) has always been involved in motivating, helping and encouraging others. She knows well the importance of investing in others and, thus, invests her money wisely.
3. In the last type, both female and male protagonists are present in the visual portrayal, yet ritualization of subordination is perceptible in visual positioning. In this type of advertisement the privileging role of the center in visual images (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996 after Arnheim 1982) is invariably occupied by the male protagonist. This is a very salient positioning “for something to be presented at center means that it is presented as the nucleus of the information on which all the other elements are in some sense subservient” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 206). At the same time a depicted female is marginalized.

7.3. Telephone advertisements

The selected telephone advertisements have been divided into “business” and “non-business”-oriented commercials. Within the “business-oriented” ones, salient to the study, 3 subtypes have been distinguished due to their gendered character. In the “non-business” category there are 2 subtypes:

a) “Business”-oriented advertisements

1. In this type, the male protagonist(s) is/are portrayed in very dynamic (on-the-go) positions. The female protagonist is not featured in this type. The verbal message markedly underlines the very agentive characteristics of the message recipient. As far as grammatical forms are concerned, the message tends to be gender-neutral, i.e. there is no gender-specific language reference to either a

female or male addressee. This category includes the highest number of representations and constitutes a typical “business phone” advertisement as “doing business” is still staked off as male territory.

2. This type features both male and female protagonists in the visual portrayal. An active male (standing, on the go) occupies the center of the picture while the female is in a passive/recipient position. Consequently, there is a clear expression of power relations (cf. Goffman’s functional ranking) where one person plays a managerial role over the other, thus defining the relative social importance of the protagonists. Even though the verbal message lacks grammatical gender reference, the fact that it is highly “business-oriented” clearly points to the male as the message addressee. In another such advertisement, the headline informs the reader about “cheap rates with the stationary number.” The slogan, on the other hand, states that this particular type of mobile phone rate “has been created for business people.” The male protagonist occupies the central position in a very active pose talking on the business phone. The female protagonist’s position is not only very passive (she is supposedly in the office, answering the phone) but also finds her occupying the bottom position in the picture (cf. the concept of marginalization).
3. In the last subtype, the female protagonist is presented as a businessperson. The verbal message, however, highlights the importance of combining her career with a successful family life, being active and enjoying leisure. The visual message focuses on the leisure aspect. I label this subcategory: “new femininity misconstrued.” One of the advertisements portrays a businesswoman. Yet contrary to the businessmen, she is not positioned in an active, go-getting position. Just the contrary: the only visual element signifying her business status is the computer. The headline rhetorically inquires: “What does a **fashionable** businesswoman need?” This message draws on the hegemonic discourse of femininity underlining the aspect of fashion. It also presupposes that there is something that completes this image. The verbal message constructing the identity of the addressee (the female business person) stresses the fact that not only is an active lifestyle important to her, but of equal importance is being in close touch with family and friends. Clearly then, a successful businesswoman needs to combine agentic (active lifestyle) and communal features (being with family and friends).

b) “Non-business”-oriented advertisements

1. In the first type, the male protagonist in the visual message is presented as an expert, occupying the central position in the picture. He is also looked up to as an expert.
2. In the second type, the female protagonist in the visual representation is portrayed as performing dominant femininity, with traditional femininity underscored with verbal clauses. In one of the advertisements representing this

category, the female does not play the role of an expert but, on the contrary, she receives instruction (cf. Goffman's functional ranking). Another advertisement features the slogan: "Do you know that your time is worth more?" The verbal message is gender neutral, i.e. there is no information as to the sex of the target audience. Yet the content of the message, accompanied by the visual aspect, points to a female addressee. The verbal message states that there is no need to waste time on buses or battling rush-hour traffic as now everything can be arranged by phone (from home). The visual aspect significantly contributes to the construction of hegemonic femininity: the female protagonist is in the children's room.

8. Conclusion

Cook (1992) states that advertisements tend to reflect all manner of societal change, be it economic, social or referring to personal or group identity. However, analysis of three types of Polish print advertisements for the presence and representation of the new image of femininity in Poland belies Cook's view. Despite their improved status—Polish women are documented (Census 2002) as better-educated than their male counterparts, more career-oriented than in the past and, increasingly, occupying top professional positions—this new, emerging group continues to be symbolically annihilated in advertisements of such products as cars, telephones, and banking services, which tend, in Polish society, to be associated with the dominant form of masculinity. "New femininity," as reflected in the analyzed advertisements, is underrepresented, misinterpreted, and often omitted altogether; women are not featured, or the verbal message includes grammatically masculine forms, thus addressing men. If women are present they are positioned in the hegemonic discourse of femininity, thus as "other-centered" (cf. Lazar 2002), in terms of their "physical appearance" (cf. Guendouzi 2001) and characterized by a set of communal features. Moreover, on those occasions in the analyzed advertisements when "new femininity" is not neglected, it emerges as a misinterpretation, failing to accurately reflect the professional image of Polish women, instead fusing it with traditional feminine communality and/or maternity. Notwithstanding the remarkable and readily observable advancements of Polish women in education and the professional fields, the discourse of advertisements comprises the new image, minimizing its vitality by undermining its legitimacy. Giddens (1991) states that a person's identity "must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self in order to keep a particular narrative going" (1991: 54). As the analysis indicates, a group of educated, career-oriented Polish women do not really see a reflection of this aspect of their professional narrative in current car, telephone and banking advertising. Such a portrayal may turn out to be detrimental to this new

group of Polish women as symbolic annihilation jeopardizes further development by contributing to the process of the marginalization of this emerging social group. Since discourse is not only representational (constituted) but also socially constitutive, such marginalized portrayals serve to perpetuate and reinforce gender dichotomy and stereotypes.

References

- Aries, Elizabeth. *Men and Women in Interaction. Reconsidering the Differences*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Arnheim, Rudolf. *The Power of the Center*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982.
- Barthel, Roland. *Putting on Appearances: Gender and Advertising*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.
- Belknap, Penny and Leonard Wilbert. "A conceptual replication and extension of Erving Goffman's study of gender advertisements." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 23 (1991): 101-135, doi: 10.1007/BF00289848.
- Bucholtz, Mary. "Theories of discourse as theories of gender: discourse analysis in language and gender studies." In *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, edited by Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff, 43-68. London: Blackwell, 2003, doi: 10.1002/9780470756942.ch2.
- Carli, Linda. "Gender, language, and influence." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59/5 (1990): 941-951, doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.59.5.941.
- Census 2002. <http://www.ceo.org.pl/mojapolska/przeczytane/spis-2002>.
- Coates, Jennifer. "Competing discourses of femininity." In *Communicating Gender in Context*, edited by Helga Kotthoff and Ruth Wodak, 285-314. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997.
- Connell Robert. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- . *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Cook, Guy. *The Discourse of Advertising*. London/New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Craig, Stephen R. "The effects of television day part on gender portrayal in television commercials." *Sex Roles: Journal of Research* 26 (1992): 197-211, doi: 10.1007/BF00289707.
- Das, Mallika. "Men and women in Indian magazine advertisements: A preliminary report." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* (2000). http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_2000_Nov/ai_75959822?tag=content;coll(accessed November 2003).

- Eagly, Elizabeth. "More women at the top: The impact of gender roles and leadership style." Paper given at 6th Interdisciplinary and International Symposium on Gender Research at Kiel University, 2002.
- Eckert, Penelope and Sally McConnell-Ginet. *Language and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- Fowles, Jib. *Advertising and Popular Culture*. London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- Goffman, Erving. *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
- Guendozi, Jackie. "'You'll think we're always bitching': The functions of cooperativity and competition in women's gossip." *Discourse Studies* 3.1 (2001): 29-51, doi: 10.1177/1461445601003001002.
- Grabowska, Magda. "Nowy kontrakt płci w Polsce." In *W drodze do Unii Europejskiej*, 15-17. Warszawa: Fundacja im. Heinricha Bolla, 2002.
- Holmes, Jennifer. "Women, language and identity." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 1.2 (1997): 195-223, doi: 10.1111/1467-9481.00012.
- Hupfer, Maureen. "Communicating with the agentic woman and the communal man: Are stereotypic advertising appeals still relevant?" *Academy for Marketing Science Review*. <http://www.amsreview.org/articles/hupfer03-2002.pdf> (accessed December 2003).
- Jhally, Sut. *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Kress, Gunther and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design*. London/New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Kwiatkowska, Anna. "Siła tradycji i pokusa zmian, czyli o stereotypach płciowych." In *Męskość-Kobiecość w Perspektywie Indywidualnej i Kulturowej*, edited by Jolanta Miluska and Paweł Boski, 143-172. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Psychologii PAN, 1999.
- Lazar, Michelle. "Consuming personal relationships: The achievement of feminine self-identity through other-centeredness." In *Gender, Identity and Discourse Analysis*, edited by Lia Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland, 111-128. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2002.
- Litosseliti, Lia and Jane Sunderland. *Gender, Identity and Discourse Analysis*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2002.
- Meyers-Levy, Joan. "The influence of sex roles on judgment." *Journal of Consumer Research* 14 (1988): 522-530, doi: 10.1086/209133.

- . "Gender differences in information processing: A selectivity interpretation." In *Cognitive and Affective Responses to Advertising*, edited by Patricia Cafferata and Alice Tybout, 219-260. Lexington and Toronto: Lexington Books, 1989.
- McLaughlin, Tara. "Gender advertisements in magazines aimed at African Americans: A comparison to their occurrence in magazines aimed at Caucasians." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* (1999). http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_1_40/ai_54250819?tag=content;coll (accessed November 2003).
- Modelska, Tania. "Femininity as mas(s)querade: A feminist approach to mass culture." In *High Theory/Low Culture*, edited by Colin MacCabe, 37-52. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.
- O'Barr, William M. *Culture and the Ad: Exploring Otherness in the World of Advertising*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994.
- Piller, Ingrid. "Identity constructions in multilingual advertising." *Language in Society* 30.2 (2001): 153-186.
- Siemieńska, Renata. "Rola rodziny w sferze życia prywatnego i publicznego. Akceptowane modele i czynniki je kształtujące." In *Męskość-kobiecość w perspektywie indywidualnej i kulturowej*, edited by Jolanta Miluska and Paweł Boski, 208-222. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Psychologii PAN, 1999.
- Strinati, Dominic. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. London/New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Środa, Magdalena. "Być kobietą w Polsce. Kobieta domowa." *Wysokie Obcasy* 16 czerwca (2001): 30-34.
- Tuchman, Gaye. "The symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media." In *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance, and the Mass Media*, edited by Stanely Cohen and Jock Young, 169-185. London: Constable, 1981.
- Twardowska, Anna and Eliza Olczyk. "Kobiety w Polsce w latach 90-tych. Kobiety w mediach." (2003). <http://free.ngo.pl/temida/rapmedia.htm> (accessed August 2003).
- Williams, Raymond. "Advertising: The magic system." In *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*, edited by Raymond Williams, 170-195. London: Verso, 1980.
- Wodak, Ruth. "Preface to Critical Discourse Analysis in postmodern societies." *Folia Linguistica* XXXV (2001): 1-10.
- van Leeuwen, Theo. "Genre and field in Critical Discourse Analysis: A synopsis." *Discourse & Society* 4 (1993): 193-225.
- Vigorito, Anthony, J. and Timothy J. Curry. "Marketing masculinity: Gender identity and popular magazines." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* (1998). http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_n1-2_v39/ai_21136466?tag=content;coll (accessed November 2003).

About the author

Joanna Pawelczyk holds a Ph.D. in English linguistics. She is currently a lecturer in sociolinguistics at the School of English, Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland. Her research interests focus on language and gender studies, discourse of psychotherapy, media talk, and discourse analysis.