

Reflections of the Other: images of women in the Polish business press

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Abstract: After the fall of state communism, the business press in Poland has become an active image designer for people involved in management. Shaping the stereotypes about the market, enterprises and management, it also has an effect on gender related stereotypes and images. A study of a widespread Polish business magazine reveals a pretty flat picture: women managers are typically portrayed in traditional female social roles and the images of men are stripped of feelings and individuality. However, a trend toward the emergence of some variety can be noticed and perhaps the presence of women can contribute to a major change in management?

Keywords: Women managers, Poland, business press, gender in management

After the fall of the Wall

The theme of this paper is the recent development of press images of Polish businesswomen and their possible institutional implications. I regard these implications as relevant at a time of imminent enlargement of the EU, as well as in an age when the importance of co-operation and mutual understanding between West and East Europeans is becoming obvious, and not only to management practitioners and theorists. I have decided to study the Polish business press because of a study I carried out some time ago (Kostera 1996) in which I addressed the issue of identity transfer, locating it in a critical analysis of culture. I studied three popular magazines¹ for a period from over one year to three years. I focused on the image of the enterprise and the managerial role that the papers conveyed.

At the time of my study the Berlin Wall had fallen, the market was ‘freed’ and so was speech and public life. It seemed therefore a legitimate question to ask about the discourse on the role of the woman. Were women allowed to voice their problems and expectations? Was the press opening up to a variety of voices, a diversity of propositions about how future democratic society would look? I thus began to study the role of the woman manager as depicted in the press. One of the magazines studied, *Businessman* (sic!) *Magazine*,² issues of which I have analysed from the period 1991–3, was the most active among the three papers I studied in the depiction of women in management, even though the absence of women generally was the most striking feature. The image of the manager was strongly gendered. Men prevailed among the managers presented. Female managers, if presented at all, came from branches of industry described as ‘female’, and were presented as feminine and, first of all, as dutifully enacting traditional female roles of housewife, wife, grandmother, etc. The journalists asked women

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managers personal questions about their families, children, etc. They were asked whether their work did not ruin their family relationships, whether it detracted them from their domestic duties (the male managers were *never* asked such questions and their personal and family traits were *never* addressed or even mentioned). The women portrayed often explicitly stated that they were against ‘emancipation ideas’, and that feminists were unhappy women who fought for meaningless causes. The interviewing journalists tended not only to ask questions but to make such comments themselves, stating, for example, that professional women ‘made their families suffer’, etc. There were also remarks that ‘sex [gender] is of no relevance in work organizations’, that Polish capitalism is free for everyone who is fit enough to enter the game. The advertisements and pictures were strongly gendered and addressed to male readers (alluring female models or male managers). The life-style represented was definitely attributed to men. The woman manager was not presented with an identity of her own, but with a re-mix of two others: that of the male manager and that of the traditional female social role. As a second step in my study, I asked the MBA students I was teaching to comment upon the images in the press. They received a selection of articles and were to discuss the roles of the people and companies presented there. Most of the students had many critical observations about the images of the companies, a few commented ironically on the role of the (male) manager, none addressed the role of the women. Even when explicitly asked by me, they abstained from commenting on this problem. I thus entitled the section referring to this topic ‘The silence of the women’ (Kostera 1996: 209).

I was wondering whether this picture still holds true. Now, after over ten years of capitalism in Poland, the new economic and social system would have matured and the social institutions are probably better established. I wanted to find out whether a more independent and feminist press image is now available for Polish businesswomen. I thus decided to do a similar study, of only *BM* this time, because it is still the most popular Polish business monthly among graduate students. Before I relate what I found there, I first want to address the more general images of women in Polish press.

In search of the independent woman

Anna Zawadzka (1997) has carried out an extensive study of popular women’s magazines in Poland. Her aim was to map existing images and roles. Among numerous images of women that were emphatically traditional and feminine, oriented towards pleasing others (men and families), only one role was seen differently – that of the businesswoman. The articles about businesswomen were not very numerous, even though this role was shown as proof of the changes after 1989. This was the only image available that emphasized the woman’s independence and ambition. It thus seems relevant to investigate the image of women managers in the business press, directed to businesspeople (men and women).

The practical role of imagery is especially striking when compared to the actual professional activity of men and women in Poland. Growing unemployment is afflicting women more than men (60 per cent of the unemployed are women), but as many as 39 per cent of business owners are women, they tend to be active in social and political organizations, even though they rarely hold important posts they tend to be as well or

better educated than men (66 per cent Polish women hold high school diploma or higher, as compared with only 39 per cent of the Polish men). Anna Zawadzka reminds readers of the role that the mass media play in bringing ideas into fashion, of legitimizing and initiating social discourses. In this sense, the Polish women's media play not even a conservative, but an obscurantist role, because the actual professional and social activity of Polish women is much more intense than it would appear from the press image.

The study of the business press continued

Reading texts

I carried out a critical culture analysis of the same kind that I used in my former study of *BM*. The method I used is one connected with cultural studies, and is well suited for exploration of media images. According to Norman Denzin (1992), its aim is to find and describe the unintentional elements of a text and reflect on how they are influencing the living culture created and experienced by people who have not necessarily chosen these symbols of meaning construction themselves. The ideological dimension in the images is of great importance and should be found and revealed. It is usually concealed and its hidden nature obscures the process of the social construction of meaning by which the mass media play a significant role in contemporary society. The critical reading is trying to establish how the text is constructing images and experiences of the people portrayed. Denzin (1997) argues that texts are not only carriers of ideology, but also arenas for political (and cultural) negotiation. In that sense, they play a role in the process of the institutionalization of certain ideas, in the social constructivist sense of the term (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). My reading is ethnographic – I try to see the cultural fabric in the text and, as Denzin (1997) calls for, I adopt a messy, multi-layered analysis, using many focal points and aiming at a narrativization of the findings. I compared articles about male and female managers, interviews with men and women, advertising inserts, pictures, and tried to find out the messages on gender, if any, conveyed by the monthly. In other words, my main concern was to learn about the presence of female voices: do women freely discuss their roles? Do they explore different possibilities in their construction? *BM* is a monthly directed to Polish businesspeople, in existence since 1990. It contains articles about strategy, motivation, marketing, etc., authored by journalists, consultants and, occasionally, academics. The texts use a popular rhetoric, often employing metaphors and platitudes. The magazine also includes sections on hobbies, life-styles, fashion, an English language lesson and, recently, a section on culture, including news on films, art, etc. The monthly is increasingly expensive, printed on paper of high quality, and it contains many pictures. I have read and analysed *BM* for the years 1996–9 and the three first issues of 2000.

In general, the male voice dominates the magazine, quantitatively and qualitatively, just as in my former study. Most of the stories, pictures and articles are about men and/or written from a male perspective – even if not necessarily written by men, as there are quite a number of female journalists working for *BM*. In 1999 there was a change of tone in the magazine; this coincided with a change in the position of editor-in-chief, as a woman took over the journal.³ Possibly the change was a result of a woman taking

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over the editorship and possibly the opposite was true: a woman becoming editor-in-chief was the result of a gradual change of tone. I have chosen 1998 as the symbolic narrative turning point, when the magazine began to change its tone and outlook. I shall first show the more explicit meanings of the written texts, then the more implicit – pictures illustrating the texts. Finally, I shall try to make a reading of how the image encoded in both evolved over the five years.

Interviews with women

Before 1998

Until 2000, each issue of *BM* published one, sometimes two interviews with managers, celebrating their companies and themselves. The managers presented were mostly male, with some exceptions.

In 1996 *BM* presented KK, director of Izabelin Studio, a recording studio.⁴ She is portrayed as a strong person, who, in her own words, ‘likes to win’⁵ and ‘cries seldom, because tears do not carry consolation’.⁶ She is quoted as saying ‘if the media presentation means to sell a part of my privacy, I resign from the interview’.⁷ Nonetheless, the article continues to investigate her as a private person, quoting her friends, who say that she is a very private person, concrete and pragmatic, but also delicate and soft. The article says that the characteristics that people employ to praise her are also sometimes used to criticize her. She is further described as an ‘iron lady’ and the ‘Margaret Thatcher of Polish rock’. The manager herself considers those opinions useful for her style of working. She summarizes them by saying:

I like to win. I know, too, when it is useless to start a fight and then I give up. I know when I can’t say anything more and then I refrain from speaking and withhold my desire to have the last word. But I also have so-called feminine traits. I’m no cyborg.⁸

This statement appears especially striking when compared with Donna Haraway’s idea of the cyborg as the post-gendered ‘illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism’ (1991: 152). Cyborgs share the quality of illegitimate offspring in that their fathers are inessential, and thus they are ‘often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins’ (ibid.: 152). As such, the cyborg myth comes as good news to the feminist-socialist movement, being the result of a reworking of nature and culture. The myth is, for Donna Haraway, ‘about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work’ (ibid.: 155). *BM* is, obviously, not engaging in such explorations. The entire article is entitled ‘I’m no cyborg’. Apart from the discussion of KK’s personality, it contains the story of her company.

Another typical interview, with NK, director of Young & Rubicam Poland, concentrated on her professional career.⁹ Her friends and co-workers were asked their opinion, and they commented on her exceptional professional competence. The article is illustrated by a large picture of the interviewee, in quite a revealing dress, emphasizing her good looks. Some interviews with women managers focus only on problems of the company and professional questions.¹⁰

After 1998

The interviews after 1998 are in general quite similar to those published before that date. In the 'old' interview style, when the manager of a medical equipment company, AJ-R is presented,¹¹ she is depicted as a professional person, but the author of the article also says that she is elegantly dressed, with a dazzling figure.¹² Also, similarly to before 1998, some business-like interviews with women managers were published after 1998 that did not touch on any personal matters.¹³ The last of these interviews was published in 1999.

A different kind of personal story was told in the article 'The girl with a passion' about a female schoolteacher (teaching Catholicism), who started her own firm.¹⁴ The article tells the story of her business and her professionalism, even though it has personal touches, related to her creativity, ideas and courage. She is a passionate pursuer of her business ideas: hence the title of the article.

Interviews with men

It is interesting to note that male interviewees were *never* asked any personal questions and *almost never* did they discuss the private side of their life or their personality in the interviews.¹⁵ The interviews with male managers focus on the companies they manage. Occasionally, interviewees reveal their hobbies, but just as a brief remark in an otherwise professionally oriented text. So, for example, ZC mentions briefly his childhood interests, related to his current occupation, his interest in philosophy, and alludes to often being in a reflective mood.¹⁶ PB, director of ABB, explains, unasked by the interviewer, that he loves sailing and travels, but this is just a small personal touch in an otherwise very business-like interview.¹⁷ GMG of the National Geographic Society is interrupted in his praises of managing a not-for-profit organization by the journalist asking whether it is not better to manage a commercial firm?¹⁸ GMG answers that he would not like to change his situation. He ends on a philosophical and personal note: on your deathbed it is important what you have experienced, not how much money you have made.

Friends and co-workers of male managers are almost never asked their opinion. The one exception I have found is the article presenting ZC, where the wife states that he is too soft and that it is perhaps his only weakness.¹⁹ Men are never talked about in terms of how good they look: for example, I think that JM is attractive,²⁰ but the article does not say a word about his appearance or charismatic smile.

To each, according to his gender . . .

The principles of gender before 1998

Some articles, published before *BM* was taken over by the female editor-in-chief, address the problem of the woman as a businessperson and femininity in the business world. One such example²¹ is the text 'Career and sex'.²² It assumes the knowing scientific voice and claims that women and men are destined to different types of career: 'The equality of chances for women and men to compete for high posts is an invention of bureaucrats. Psychologists claim that each sex can find their separate path of a satisfying career.'²³

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This statement is emphasized and no names are mentioned for the ‘psychologists’ invoked. The article relates that firms tend to seek employees according to sex and that stereotypes decide on employment. However, ‘[i]n Poland women amount to almost one half of the employees with higher education’.²⁴ A majority of women in an opinion poll did not believe that they had an equal chance of a career and higher income. The article then refers to a sociological report showing pervasive male domination among higher-level managers, officers and specialists. The author adds that the situation is similar in Great Britain, where very few women hold important positions in business and public life. This does not change, despite the rigorous equality laws in that country. According to the article, most people tend to believe that actual inequality is a reflection of the natural order. The article also explains that hormonal differences between men and women make it easier for men to concentrate. A controversial book, *The Sex of the Brain*, is presented as a best-seller (the author fails to say that it is a best-seller in Poland and definitely not in West European countries or that it is plainly sexist) and is invoked as support for this thesis.²⁵ The text says that girls achieve results inferior to boys on math tests, and their brains are differently constructed. The article says nothing of other well-known sources, claiming that such comparisons are meaningless or extremely difficult, such as, for example, the classical book by Maccoby and Jacklin (1978), where twenty-five differences were reviewed and only four found relevant. Even of those four it was hard to say whether the difference was ‘born’ or brought about by socialization. Instead, the article says the following:

In his work, the man is interested in concrete things, measurable phenomena. His attention is focused on things, and his actions are systematic – explains Piotr Fijewski, psychologist from the Professional Effectiveness Training Center Intra. Women are better at learning less concrete contents, perceive more details, they are also more capable in communication. They are oriented towards human relations, towards co-operation.²⁶

Grazyna Kranas, another psychologist, is quoted as opposing this claim. She says that the world is constructed in such a way that traits ascribed to men are valued more than those ascribed to women. The article does not elaborate on this statement. Instead, it describes the differing expectations of men and women towards their careers. Men are more dependent on career, because if they fail to have one, their life loses its meaning. Women’s does not. Women tend to value human relations more, and are less likely to change jobs. Furthermore, 71 per cent of women in Poland would not like to have a managerial position, because it only creates problems and conflicts. ‘Professional advancement is not a test of femininity – the psychologist Piotr Fijewski emphasizes. However, it is not true that women only want to earn money in order to buy cosmetics.’²⁷

Yet, indeed, the article acknowledges that they are paid less. ‘Some managers of western firms feel that they have come to a “liberal” country, that here is a country where they can show an unfair preference for men with no negative consequences following [from actions of discrimination against women].’²⁸

Affirmative actions and equality laws are inefficient because women have a predilection for companies where they can work with people, such as service companies, or they tend to prefer certain functions, such as personnel, where ‘it is an advantage to be sensitive, intuitive, to see the complexity of the problem’.²⁹ Male and female

managers are quoted, commenting on the equality of men and women in work. They agree that equality is OK, but some have reservations: a secretary should not be male, two women managers say, and one woman does not see how women could hold certain positions.

A curious article³⁰ takes up businessmen's sexual problems. They are said to be very busy and tired and thus in a need of relaxation. Another article in the same issue³¹ states that men aspiring to a managerial career see sex as a symbol of success and can be good lovers. An article that follows, entitled 'In bed with the boss',³² continues to elaborate on the same theme. It points out that many men 'desire career more than their wives'³³ and that many women agree to playing the role of a geisha. 'To a man, sexual performance is one of the more important ingredients of the positive self-image.'³⁴ The wives should grow up and rebel, the article notes. Nothing is said about the sexual dilemmas of the businesswoman.

Gender discourse after 1998

One issue of *BM*³⁵ is dedicated to women in the Polish economy. It is representative of the way gender is treated after 1998. The cover of this issue features famous women managers. After the regular interview with a male manager, there is a ranking of Poland's most influential women.³⁶ The winners are introduced as 'not suffering from an inferiority complex, because they are extremely professional in what they do'.³⁷ The ranking was prepared by *BM* journalists, who voted for the most influential women according to how they evaluated the size and influence of their organizations and the power of their personalities. The editor-in-chief (male) proposed that they vote on manager's wives, too, because 'it is they who pull the strings'.³⁸ The women presented talk about their organizations, their work and experiences. One comments more extensively upon the 'feminine style of management', supposedly being more humane (HG-W, director of the National Bank of Poland). They also talk about their marital status and children (HG-W, HB, director of Nicom, AK, Vice-Minister of Finance, AM, director of Pioneer Investment Group, DZ-W, director of Radio Zet). AK, Vice-Minister of Finance, says that women have to work twice as hard as men in order to get noticed. She is the only woman in her organization, and she claims to have grown used to it. However, she claims it is not important being a man or a woman – it is important being a good employee. HL and WR (leading figures of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the biggest Polish daily) talk only business, but opinions of their co-workers are quoted, describing their personal traits. AM, director of Pioneer Investment Group, claims that being a woman was of no importance to her career. Nonetheless, she is aware of earning less than male colleagues with similar posts. WE-P, director of a Polish consulting company, says that she had had problems with being accepted as a woman and business partner. She mentions that she considers the family status of the people she hires important: she has declined to hire two young women who were seeking employment at the firm because 'they would not have managed to work and to be the mothers to young children'.³⁹ DZ-W, director of one of the biggest private radio stations in Poland claims that being a woman does not interfere with leading a business. Professionalism is the most important thing – and 'it is sexless'.⁴⁰ MW, director of the Polish bank, Pekao SA, is described as a leader and outstanding banker. She must have refused to discuss her personal affairs, for the article says the following about her:

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[MW] proved to be our most difficult interlocutor of the 10 top women of our ranking. When we ask her about the bank, its strategy, the privatization conflict with Bank Handlowy, she answers with brightness and fluency of speech: she has a vision of the future and the talent of persuading people to believe that vision. To more personal questions she answers briefly and rather shortly, with evident reluctance.⁴¹

It is interesting to note that very little is related of what MW had to say about the bank, its strategy, the privatization conflict with Bank Handlowy, her vision of the future or the people of the bank. One woman who did succeed in being quoted on only business matters is BL, a US citizen, the director of Enterprise Investors.

An article about the 'feminine style of management' entitled 'Strong rules of the weak hand'⁴² introduced three well-known women top managers of big companies. However, it hastens to assert that men need not worry about 'the flood of feminism'⁴³ because there is no such thing as female solidarity. Only competence is important to women managers, and the adoption of a gender-based quota only makes the problem worse, the article concludes.

Photo, photo on the wall . . .

Business life and faces of business

I have presented how texts construct gender in business. The picture would be incomplete, however, without the non-textual representations that are abundant in *BM*. Photos not only illustrate but frame texts – they often serve as an additional rhetorical device, a metaphor or metonymy for the text. Events pictured in *BM* during the entire period studied feature almost exclusively men: they receive awards,⁴⁴ they win a contest on investment.⁴⁵ Among the managers of the top nineteen of the 100 biggest firms, one woman is presented.⁴⁶ Of the best fifteen firms depicted in 1998,⁴⁷ only one is represented by a woman manager. An occasion for women being present in photos of events is the 'business lady contest'.⁴⁸ The article relates the event and includes a note saying that 'man has a hunting instinct'. The text is entitled 'Struggle of the sexes' (!). Indeed, the 'young wolves' who have won a contest under that name as related in another article are exclusively male.⁴⁹ The old and famous are exclusively men, too. Among the 'managers of the 20th century' named by *BM* in the first 2000 issue,⁵⁰ there is not a single woman.

Men are omnipresent in photos; even the embryo in a picture is male.⁵¹ Occasionally men work together with women.⁵² Cover pictures are either famous men or funny collages (a man with money coming out of his head) or, more recently, computer art. Women on the cover are very rare.

Advertisements before 1998

Most ads picture macho men: in big cars, in formal suits, with leather briefcases. Men appear on advertisements for vodka⁵³ and beer is promoted by a picture of a guy, too.⁵⁴ A man advertises insurance⁵⁵ and office materials are advertised by a picture of a man.⁵⁶ Men were not shown naked or half-naked in *BM* until 1998. Women in the ads tended to be young, alluring, seductive and not infrequently nude, e.g. shoes for men are advertised by a picture of a naked woman holding shoes in her hand.⁵⁷ Sometimes there are women, fully dressed, in ads, but then, typically, in advertisements concerning 'female domains', e.g. a kitchen is promoted by a grown-up woman and a girl.⁵⁸

An article on advertisements published during this period⁵⁹ was mildly critical towards the tendency to present not women but depersonalized functions of women in the ads (such as the symbol of the kitchen). Employees of advertising agencies were interviewed, and they explained that the ads are addressed to women, and that the women in them were treated as heroines. The article says nothing of the advertisements published in *BM*. Another article about advertising⁶⁰ takes up the stereotypes of women used in advertising in Poland. These are first listed (vamp, addition to man, etc.) and then the article states that women in Poland treat their advertising image as their natural portrait. The article claims that the 'beautiful woman, the object of male desire can look forward to a long life in the ads'.⁶¹ It praises the use of stereotypes in advertising, claiming that 'the stereotype will tell you the truth'⁶² because it is rooted in human expectations, and to expect ads to fight against stereotyping is 'a misunderstanding'. Tables in the margins quote statistics saying that Polish men agree with the stereotypes in the ads, and many of them would like their partners to be like the heroines of TV ads. Only 3 per cent think that the image of women in ads is grotesque. Well, who dares to argue with statistics? The article ends: 'Indeed, the Polish woman could be proud that she has at least in one aspect outdone the man. She is used in so many roles in advertising, whose role is there to help to sell the product, and it proves what considerable power she hides within her.'⁶³

Life-styles before 1998

The life-styles presented in the first issues of *BM* I studied are predominantly male. Men are visible on the pictures and they engage in activities presented as male, such as aviation,⁶⁴ drinking vermouth,⁶⁵ surfing,⁶⁶ fishing,⁶⁷ enjoying cognac.⁶⁸ Fitness seems to be for both genders, though,⁶⁹ and so is skiing.⁷⁰ Hobbies traditionally considered female, such as sewing or child care, are not presented in *BM*. However, in 1997, *BM* introduced cooking as a hobby and the picture shows a male cook holding up a dish.⁷¹ Sometimes the heroes go to a conference (a new kind of hobby?), where one can expect naked females present (at least judging from a photo accompanying an article published in 1996).⁷²

Fashion is, during the first years of *BM* analysed, predominantly male. Traditional and conventional images are presented, mainly of suits, briefcases, etc. Ties are said to be the man's only adornment.⁷³ Pictures show male haircuts – only short hair.⁷⁴

Naked women tend to appear more or less randomly on pictures illustrating articles, e.g. a photo accompanying an article about advertisement.⁷⁵ The shower is the only

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context where a naked man can appear,⁷⁶ there are two such pictures in the analysed material: one picture illustrating an article about health and the second is a curiosity: an article about strategic alliances is illustrated by a photo of a naked (heterosexual) couple embracing in the shower.⁷⁷

Advertisements after 1989

In 1998⁷⁸ a naked man was pictured on an advertisement as a symbol of Gucci Envy for men. Another novelty appeared in the same year:⁷⁹ a cell-phone system is advertised by a man holding a child. He looks lovingly at the kid, while holding a cell-phone in his hand. *BM* also introduced an unusual car advertisement:⁸⁰ men, dressed in suits, feed small children from bottles. An article about publicity published in 1999⁸¹ explains their own change of attitude, claiming that ‘the macho changes skin’: the man in the Polish ads is increasingly emotional and sensitive. No concrete references are given, though.

New life-styles: after 1998

Fashion for women makes its way to *BM* starting with an issue published in 1998,⁸² where an article entitled ‘A new type of femininity’ introduces fashion for working women and pictures show women dressed in a business-like fashion in no-nonsense skirts and trouser suits. Since a woman took over the post of editor-in-chief in 1999, fashion for women has become a standard addition to the regular male fashion and style section, including dress and make-up.⁸³

Men are still pictured in suits; with standard short haircuts, the managers interviewed, as well as the men in illustrations and ads, with a few exceptions, did not impress me as either colourful or attractive. There are a few exceptions. One interesting male representation is of a German manager, conservatively dressed, but standing out from the standard male portraits thanks to his informal pose.⁸⁴ Another Western (Danish) interviewee looks nice and non-conformist (compared with other pictures in *BM*) smiling warmly, dressed in a colourful sweater.⁸⁵ Women are often portrayed in ‘sexy’ poses, the female managers interviewed tend to be dressed in a way that emphasizes their bodies, with wide low-cut necks, short skirts or at least the camera gaze accenting the neck. The women in ads and illustrations are often scarcely dressed, alluring or even provocative. They rarely look original and their portraits typically lack personal touches. The first woman with a non-standard hairdo I found was in a photo published in 1999⁸⁶ (JB, specialist on marketing). Women in the pictures of *BM* tend to have complete and visible make-up, and never wear naturally grey hair.

A 1999 issue⁸⁷ presents pictures of ‘most’ and ‘least’ stylish businesspeople in Poland. Of the thirteen people praised for their style, one is a woman. Nobody is wearing anything more exciting than rather standard variations on the business suit. Of the eight people criticized for their poor style, two are women. They look pretty similar to the ones praised.

New millennium, new voice?

In the 1999 and 2000 issues fashion for women became a regular theme, alongside fashion for men. Also, a regular new section appeared dedicated to cultural events. The

most outrageous absurdities about women and gender disappeared, but so did any discourse on gender and women. Pictures of women managers were as rare as before. However, the photos of naked women and seductive models serving as illustrations to management texts disappeared. An especially positive change was the appearance of one article: 'The girl with a passion'⁸⁸ (see above) about a female entrepreneur was a new kind of personal story, celebrating the ingenuity and creativity of the heroine and discussing her traditional social role as a woman in Poland, not mentioning her marital status nor whether she had any children or not.

Starting from the second issue of 2000,⁸⁹ a new editor-in-chief, a man, was appointed. The magazine now changed its appearance: a CD-ROM was added and more abstract illustrations replaced the traditional pictures of people. Since I have studied only two issues of *BM* after the change, I cannot say in which direction it now seems to head in relation to gender issues. In the two issues, however, there were almost no women at all, all ads pictured men, all interviewees and experts were men.

Women managers – smugglers of new meanings?

Compared to what was found in my former study (Kostera, 1996), the anti-feminism of the Polish business press seems to have somewhat subsided. The interviewers adopted, however, the same inquisitive strategy, concentrating equally and sometimes more on the traditional social role of the woman manager interviewed than on her professional position. The questions asked by the interviewer were not always explicitly shown in the articles (they were in the issues I have studied in my former analysis). It is thus hard to say whether the interviewee chose to take up certain themes her- or himself or whether they were answering a question of the journalist. However, I have concluded from the context that in many interviews the latter seemed to be the case: themes were chosen by the journalists. A new voice appeared modestly: one interviewee repeatedly (in 1996 and 1999) expressed a feminist standpoint (HB). The themes emphasized seemed to be less aggressively patronizing towards the women managers than during 1991–3. The explicit anti-feminist statements were now absent, the openly biased interviews more rare. The articles about 'gender problems' tended to be as male biased as in my former study material. However, they occasionally contained more liberal, or even feminist, statements. These were never discussed or elaborated, rather 'thrown into' texts that otherwise adopted a traditionally male perspective. This type of article tended to disappear in 1999. In all the material analysed there was a certain tendency: from openly anti-feminist (in my former study), through overt and then covert moralizing (1996–9), to an absence of women (end of 1999–2000).

1998, the year preceding the appointment of the first female editor-in-chief of *BM*, was something of a turning point in gender presentation: the magazine started to present fashion for women, pictures of women as sex objects disappeared *and*, finally, women as a theme disappeared, too. The magazine became more 'businesslike', 'professional' – a trait that I, together with my co-authors, have found in interviews with professional women (Kostera *et al.* 1994). The women invoked 'professionalism' as a shield to protect them from the societal gaze. They explicitly distanced themselves from 'the women'. Through the holding up of their professional role to deflect the expectations society posed on women, they were able to construct a viable

presentation of the self. Women in Poland are currently living under the stress of being exposed to stigmatization (Goffman's classic study (1963) discusses strategies for the management of identity of stigmatized individuals, and points to, among others, the avoidance of identification with the stigmatized group). Thus, they try to distance themselves from the stigma, e.g. by declaring that gender lacked importance for them in particular or in working life in general. As one of the women interviewed in the issues *BM* I have analysed put it, 'business is sexless'. This could possibly be the story behind the disappearance of women since *BM* was taken over by the woman editor-in-chief.

The more noteworthy is the sole and unrepresentative article I have praised twice in this paper as a valuable innovation: picturing a woman manager as a charismatic heroine and not discussing her femininity or family situation. A few of the articles about male managers were close to such a presentation, but never quite so: men in *BM* are almost never individuals with charisma, feelings or humour. They are rather distant 'business figures', only occasionally flavouring their stories with brief remarks of a more personal nature. Women who invoke 'professionalism' strive, probably, for a narrative status similar to that of the men: to be able to disappear behind the protective shield of business, in order to cease being problematized as women and thus gendered. Business and their professional attitude towards it might erase or neutralize their gendered status. But their status is problematized in the media just because they are women, while the status of men is assumed to be 'the standard'. Business, as pictured in *BM*, is thus not genderless but male, or rather macho: rationality, matter-of-factness, no humour, no feelings, nothing that would 'feminize' the actors. Masculinity is neither problematized nor allowed variation. Management *is* this uniform masculinity. 'Gender' means women, they carry 'gender problems' with them into organizations. Similarly, in my earlier study, it was just Polish companies that were problematized. The Western companies never were; they were presented as synonymous with ideally good management, the model to imitate. Management was, then, the uniform idea of 'the Western company'.

From my interviewees in a field study I am currently pursuing of a Polish gay and lesbian social and cultural organization, I have learned that there is a rapidly growing efflorescence of gay and lesbian entrepreneurship in Poland: gay and lesbian restaurants, publishing houses, hair-dressing studios ran by gays and lesbians, small manufacturing firms, etc. These firms do not exist in the reality constructed by *BM*, and nor do the gay and lesbian managers of other companies. The press presented image does not correspond to the actual activities of people in Poland or to many people's experience. Neither the gay and lesbian entrepreneurs and managers⁹⁰ nor the actually very numerous, for European standards, women managers, professionals and entrepreneurs are allowed to participate in the construction of images of businesspeople in Poland. These groups are too ambiguous to be invited to image construction in *BM* – a threat to the ruling idea of business as a macho occupation.

So, gender diversity does not exist as a press image and women are socially defined as a group on an essentialist basis and the individuals have a very limited choice of possible images and identities. These are defined for them from the outside. Why is it so? And why in business?

The development of the images of business and businesspeople in *BM* can be seen as a reflection of the institutionalization process (by institutionalization process,

I here mean roles and patterns gradually becoming taken for granted – see Berger and Luckmann (1966); Erlingsdóttir (1999)) and of the post-1989 social role of the woman in Poland (see Czarniawska-Joerges (1994) and Kostera *et al.* (1994) on the recent history of women's social role in Poland). Simultaneously, it reflects the attempt to deinstitutionalize the role of the working woman from before 1989. These processes were accompanied by imitation: Poland is imitating the image of capitalism since 1989. To begin with, this image was dated from before World War II, when Poland was a capitalist state (Czarniawska 2000). As time passes, the images are replaced by ideas about Western capitalism. In the years 1989–2000, we passed through a history of capitalism on fast-forward: from capitalism of the 1950s, through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, to the 1990s. Imitation embraces the recognizable images: the woman as a vamp, the woman in the kitchen. Now, finally, some more recent images can make their way into the press: the sensitive man, the eccentric female marketing specialist.

However, new images of women do not abound in *BM*. The current silence can be seen either as a sign of successful institutionalization (so there is no need for further persuasion), a pause in the process of imitation (perhaps a hesitation to embrace new unconventional images), possibly a blank signalling the introduction of ambivalence into management itself. Women may thus have smuggled in something more than 'gender problems' into business. Women are the immigrants in the organizational world, as Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) put it, they are allowed to bring in some 'folklore', but they are expected to adapt, to espouse an identity prepared for them by the male 'hosts', to act as men to prove that they 'are as good as any man' while they also have to display some trivial difference, such as a feminine style of management, to prove that they are not a threat to the men. They are not entitled to their own voice, and thus to a co-authorial dignity. Women co-authors would disrupt the obsessive orderliness of male organizations, obstruct the construction of a space of regulation – they bring in ambivalence and therefore they have to be tamed so that they do not destroy the male rhetorical order of management (Höpfl 2000). The story of the images of women managers in *BM* until 1998 was a pretty straightforward story of taming the Other. The subsequent absence of women is an absence of representation, not of women in Polish business: women have not decided to stay at home and the leave the organizations they manage. The silence may show a leak, a crevice in the role of the manager itself. If that is the case, we may use this as an opportunity to engage in a common debate, Eastern and Western management theorists and practitioners together, to develop creative new readings and reconstructions of management and business ideas. Looking for other suggestive blanks can help us to see what kind of topics this debate might include. I would, then, like to address the missing voices and images in the Polish business press.

Conclusion: the blanks

To explain what I believe is missing in the Polish press image of gender in management, I have to first say a few words about my own standpoint. My perspective is feminist and non-essentialist. I believe that individual differences among people are more important than gender-related ones, and I do not believe that biological factors should

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determine the identity of a person (for similar feminist perspectives, see, e.g., Davies 1989; Johansson 1997). Furthermore, I believe that there are more than two genders.⁹¹ I oppose the strict categorization that the Polish business press imposes on the individuals presented. These individuals are not just misrepresented people but distorted role models for Polish businesspersons. Showing a rigid picture of gender identity means, in practice, excluding other possibilities as non-legitimate presentations of the businessperson's identity. I wish for a variety of represented identities, many roles and images displayed and discussed.

I also miss a problematization of masculinity. The lack thereof is due to the strict categorization of genders, but also to the domination of the traditionally male perspective in the business press. The male position is the default – the ‘norm’ – and needs no explanation. Indeed, it cannot be explained, because the explanation would undermine its taken-for-grantedness. For example, the word ‘heterosexual’ was not used in the Polish press until the gay and lesbian movement began to form and speak up (in the late 1980s). The heterosexual identity was until then the obvious, the default identity, and only deviations from it needed explanations or names. The very moment when heterosexuality was named, it lost its position of obviousness. The image of the manager as essentially male is similar to the image of people as essentially heterosexual before the late 1980s. Yet gays, lesbians and bisexuals existed before 1986. So do women in business. Their visibility to people in general can make the image presented questionable as such (‘the picture does not reflect reality as I see it’). The first step on the way to problematizing the images of masculinity could be the introduction of images of women as businesspeople with their own voice: if ‘woman’ is a legitimate gender identity in business, then ‘man’ does not need to be so blandly stereotypical either. Both the above issues are important for Polish women managers, and call for solidarity and understanding from their Western partners. In a united Europe, of which Poland will soon become a part, we have to be aware of each other's unique problems in order to be able to offer constructive help. Management education packages offered by Western partners should, in my opinion, definitely include discussion and problematization of gender roles in management.

I wish for a business press that would present not only gender in a variety of ways, but also the identities of companies and the roles of managers. More personal stories, perhaps side by side with rational and purely matter-of-fact ones would enrich the discourse. Feelings, impressions *and* rational thinking together could be a fuller way to talk about management of companies. Such a humanistic development of so-called human resources is as important in Poland as in other countries. I think that all kinds of educational programmes for managers could benefit from the problematization of gender roles and the Polish press images, due to their clarity, can be used as a good teaching material. Nothing develops if it is never questioned, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) have already suggestively demonstrated. It would be beneficial for all, not just Polish women, if managers could actively learn from gender diversity how to creatively redefine the idea of management.

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Notes

- 1 *Businessman Magazine* (monthly), *Wprost* (weekly) and *Gazeta Wyborcza* (daily).
- 2 I shall refer to *Businessman Magazine* from now on as *BM*.
- 3 Anna Bialkowska-Guzynska was editor-in-chief of *BM* from the third issue of 1999 till the second issue of 2000.
- 4 *BM* (1996) 58(1): 44–5 (all references to the studied *BM* text will be quoted in footnotes).
- 5 *Ibid.*: 44.
- 6 *Ibid.*: 44.
- 7 *Ibid.*: 44.
- 8 *Ibid.*: 45.
- 9 *BM* (1996) 59(2): 40–2.
- 10 For example, HP in *BM* (1996) 59(2), AD in *BM* (1996) 60(3): 42–3, HB in *BM* (1996) 66(9): 12–14, JN in *BM* (1996) 68(11): 136–7, FH in *BM* (1997) 80(11): 40–1. These interviews do not make up the complete list of the professional interview type, but they are not much more numerous. As compared with the number of interviews with men, they are relatively very rare.
- 11 *BM* (1998) 82(1): 64–6.
- 12 *Ibid.*: 66.
- 13 For example, GM in *BM* (1998) 90(9): 12–14, MW in *BM* (1999) 95(2): 46–7, HB in *BM* (1999) 105(12): 12–18.
- 14 *BM* (1999) 105(12): 56–8.
- 15 For example, PG in *BM* (1996) 60(3): 12–14, ZN in *BM* (1996) 61(4): 12–14, LB in *BM* (1996) 64(7): 12–14, AW in *BM* (1997) 70(1): 12–14, KW in *BM* (1997) 78(9): 14–17, RW in *BM* (1998) 82(1): 14–17, JM in *BM* (1998) 98(8): 12–15, MB in *BM* (1999) 100(7): 18, RG in *BM* (1999) 103(10): 12–14, MK in *BM* (2000) 108(3): 28–30, to quote a few typical examples among a multitude of structurally similar interviews with men.
- 16 *BM* (1996) 60(3): 16–18.
- 17 *BM* (1999) 99(6): 16–30.
- 18 *BM* (1999) 100(7): 94–5.
- 19 *BM* (1996) 60(3): 16–18.

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- 20 *BM* (1998) 98(8): 12–15.
- 21 *BM* (1996) 59(2): 86–8.
- 22 The biological term ‘sex’ (*‘plec’*) is in standard use in *BM*, the term ‘gender’ (*‘rodzaj’*, *‘plec społeczna/kulturowa’*) did not occur at all.
- 23 *Ibid.*: 86.
- 24 *Ibid.*: 86.
- 25 The Polish feminist Kinga Dunin (1996) is as baffled by the popularity of this book as I am.
- 26 *Ibid.*: 87.
- 27 *Ibid.*: 88.
- 28 *Ibid.*: 88.
- 29 *Ibid.*: 88.
- 30 *BM* (1997) 73(4): 102–3.
- 31 *Ibid.*: 104.
- 32 *Ibid.*: 106.
- 33 *Ibid.*: 106.
- 34 *Ibid.*: 106.
- 35 *BM* (1999) 94(1).
- 36 *Ibid.*: 16–25.
- 37 *Ibid.*: 16.
- 38 *Ibid.*: 16.
- 39 *Ibid.*: 23.
- 40 *Ibid.*: 13.
- 41 *Ibid.*: 22.
- 42 *BM* (1998) 82(1): 90–2.
- 43 *Ibid.*: 91.
- 44 *BM* (1996) 60(3): 34–5.
- 45 *BM* (1996) 61(4): 62–4.
- 46 *BM* (1997) 76(7).
- 47 *BM* (1998) 88(7).
- 48 *BM* (1999) 96(3): 52.
- 49 *BM* (1999) 103(10): 26–34.
- 50 *BM* (2000) 106(1).
- 51 *BM* (1997) 79(10): 53.
- 52 *BM* (1997) 72(3): 70.
- 53 *BM* (1996) 66(9): 87.
- 54 *BM* (1998) 86(5): 43.
- 55 *BM* ((1998) 83(2): 103.
- 56 *BM* (1996) 66(9): 95, 97.
- 57 *BM* (1996) 61(4).
- 58 *BM* (1996) 62(5): 101.
- 59 *BM* (1996) 59(2).
- 60 *BM* (1997) 73(4): 76–8.
- 61 *Ibid.*: 71.
- 62 *Ibid.*: 71.
- 63 *Ibid.*: 78.
- 64 *BM* (1996) 59(2) and (1998) 88(7): 130.
- 65 *BM* (1996) 61(4).
- 66 *BM* (1997) 75(6).
- 67 *BM* (1997) 76(7).
- 68 *BM* (1997) 75(6).
- 69 *BM* (1997) 79(10).
- 70 *BM* (1997) 80(11).

- 71 *BM* (1997) 81(12): 174; male cook also in *BM* (1999) 101(8): 118.
- 72 *BM* (1996) 60(3): 126–7.
- 73 *BM* (1996) 61(4): 124.
- 74 *BM* (1996) 62(50): 134.
- 75 *BM* (1996) 61(4): 98.
- 76 Except for an advertisement published in 1998.
- 77 *BM* (1996) 66(90): 62.
- 78 *BM* (1998) 86(5): 37.
- 79 *BM* (1998) 83(2): 39.
- 80 *BM* (1998) 86(5): 119.
- 81 *BM* (1999) 96(3): 94–5.
- 82 *BM* (1998) 83(2).
- 83 *BM* (1999) 101(8): 118.
- 84 This is an illustration to an article about education in *BM* (1998) 91(10): 82–3.
- 85 *BM* (1998) 92(11): 112–14.
- 86 *BM* (1999) 105(12): 56.
- 87 *BM* (1999) 105(12).
- 88 *BM* (1999) 105(12): 56–8.
- 89 *BM* (2000) 107(2).
- 90 It is hard to say, again, whether there are any gay men among the managers presented: their gay identity is not mentioned, nor is any other aspect of their private personality. Lesbians, if they exist in *BM*, are possibly even more closeted by the journal, as most women are explicitly presented as heterosexual wives and mothers. However, the point is that the gay and lesbian companies are openly gay or lesbian, this is a part of their organizational identity, and they have been presented as such by, for example, *Przyjaciółka* (1998) 17(1) ('Nietypowy fryzjer') and by the gay and lesbian magazine *Inaczej*.
- 91 Actually, I believe that there is an almost infinite variation of genders. This has to do with the individual definition of identity, but also with sexuality: what one finds attractive in others. I have not yet met a person who would be attracted to all, let us say, (biological) women. A person is usually attracted to one or several types of people, of one or both biological sexes. Even the strict division into only two biological sexes among humans is debatable, since there are so many actual variations. Biology defines seventeen different sexes according to genetic make-up, hormone production, etc. (Kaplan and Rogers 1990). Exclusively women can (currently) give birth to children, but not *all* women can do that and, of those who can, not all would want to. Nevertheless, the ability to give birth is absent for *all* biological men (currently). Also, statistically there are differences among the genders that can be listed, such as height, muscular mass, etc. However, the individual variation is very high, and I do not believe that those differences should be used as closed categories to define identity and self-presentation for individuals. The press seems to impose such a dichotomous, closed categorization.
- In practice, there is currently a finite number of genders in the sense of cultural identity in use, but certainly more than two. This depends on how people identify themselves, and to what extent they problematize gender as such.

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