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Stereotypes and national values in an intercultural advertising discourse : a case study: slavonic campaigns of danone's actimel brand

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STEREOTYPES AND NATIONAL VALUES IN AN INTERCULTURAL ADVERTISING DISCOURSE. A CASE STUDY: SLAVONIC CAMPAIGNS OF DANONE'S ACTIMEL BRAND

1. Preliminary Remarks

In social psychology a stereotype is recognised as generalising characteristics assigned to all representatives of a specific group, regardless of the actual differences among its individual members¹. A phenomenon of stereotypization is also related to simplifications in the way the world is perceived². In particular, it applies to advertising communication in which senders of messages build and direct emotions of recipients towards the presented contents on the basis of non-objective knowledge or oversimplified beliefs. Images of the world created in advertising propagate stereotypes by presenting sets of views that relate to specific life situations or certain categories of people. Those situations from the advertising's world include circumstances that are commonly known and experienced every day, with which a recipient of messages may identify. Whereas stereotype judgments about categories of people concern creation of message characters. There are two types of emotions stirred up in recipients of advertising. First one relates to beliefs that recipients act more reasonably than figures in commercials since as a result of a specific promotional and advertising offer (of using products or certain services) they shall avoid specific problems. Second type is represented by emotions relating to judgements that because of consumer decisions recipients shall become similar to advertising characters – owing to their believing that they shall attain a level of social prestige like them, their professional, family or personal success, satisfaction with life, pleasures, health, fitness, beauty, etc. As an element of the media culture advertising affects values, attitudes and motivation of its recipients. As noted by A. Ogonowska,

¹ E. Aronson, T. D. Wilson, R. M. Akert, *Psychologia społeczna. Serce i umysł*, Poznań 1997, pp. 543–544, 684.

² *Ibidem*, p. 544.

advertising affects the person's axiological system (the cherished values, ideals, and their hierarchy) [...]. „Possession” [...] of goods [...] defines man's identity as an individual that belongs to specific social and cultural sphere³.

Within the Internet users there is an intercultural transmission of values and patterns. Based on the analysis of advertising within the marketing efforts undertaken for the same brand in various national campaigns the following detailed research issues may be defined:

- What trends dominated creation of the world's visions for the purposes of national promotional and advertising campaigns?
- What stereotypes were disseminated in advertising campaigns?
- What anthropological situations were reflected in advertising spots?
- What tones of advertising rhetoric were used?
- What patterns of culture were disseminated in advertising?
- Is there a similarity of advertising communication in the selected countries?
- Are the cultures of specific countries characterised by the community of values?

2. Results of the Study

For the purpose of this paper the randomly selected audiovisual commercials of Danone that were distributed under national campaigns of the Actimel brand and constitute messages in intercultural communication among the users of the YouTube service have been investigated using quality analysis. The table below summarises the stereotype impressions disseminated in commercials and rhetoric inventions applied for the need of creating a vision of the world and persuasive appeal on target groups.

³ A. Ogonowska, *Przemoc w reklamie. Rzecz o represyjnym charakterze reklamy*, [in:] E. Wilk (ed.), *Przemoc ikoniczna czy „nowa widzialność”?*, Katowice 2001, p. 142.

Table 1

Stereotypes in Slovak, Czech and Polish advertising campaigns of Actimel product

Example of Advertising Campaign	Type of Stereotype	Creation of Advertising Character	Advertising Rhetoric Convention	Advertising Persuasive Strategy
1	2	3	4	5
Slovak ^a	„Wiseman”	The use of an advertised product is counseled by an authority whose role is played by Rastislav Mačura, MSc from the Tatra meteorological station.	Recommendation	Persuasive axiological appeal, persuading about advantages of the advertised product by recognizing the authority of the message proponent (character from the spot) and the instrumental value recommended by him: vitality – growth of life, health, power, full strength ^b .
Slovak ^c	Young active women	Health of the advertising's women characters is threatened by: sick persons met in the lift, illness-breeding germs in the public water closet. Another character from the commercial demonstrates using the product that is to sustain organism's immunity and protect it against virulent bacteria.	a) Rhetoric tone of a life situation; b) Rhetoric tone of a presentation.	Persuasive axiological appeal with values as kinds of good: medical goodness – encouragement to use what is connected with successful life thanks to healthy benefits; human goodness – his general prosperity and happiness (result of prosperity) ^d .
Czech ^e	Young active woman	Health of the commercial's character is jeopardized by: torrential rain, gusts of chilly wind, cold.	a) Rhetoric tone of a life situation; b) Rhetoric tone of a presentation.	Persuasive appeal of the commercial consists in identifying the advertising target group with the life situation of the commercial spot's woman character; efficacy of the product is persuaded by a woman testing Actimel and presenting vitality, satisfaction, resistance to bad weather; pleasure derived from tasting the product shown by the character serves as commercial's encouragement.
Czech ^f	„Wiseman”	The advertised product is tested and promoted by Dr Miloš Bubán, Med.	a) Recommendation; b) Presentation	a) Persuasion through recognition of the message proponent's authority; b) Showing the way the product works, presentation of advantages of the advertised offer; informing the recipient about such features of the products that he did not know about yet.

cont table 1

1	2	3	4	5
Czech ⁸	„Model Grandpa”	Commercial's main character – grandpa is a kind-hearted, grey-haired head of the family who represents such traits as: wisdom, life experience, deserving respect, care and protectiveness towards his grandson who, following the grandpa's example, uses the advertised product. The grandpa visits the family at breakfast time to walk the grandson to school. Before leaving they strengthen their immune systems by drinking Actimel.	a) Life situation; b) Presentation	a) Adoption of an assumption that satisfaction of the commercial spot's characters shall be transposed onto prospective satisfaction of the recipient, provided he selects the same product as the commercial characters did; b) Demonstration of the product's efficacy: health, vitality, a good frame of the mind in the morning, an optimistic disposition of the grandpa and grandson on the way to school.
Polish ⁸	Young mother caring for her family	The commercial's main character shows her face full of satisfaction derived from her successful family life, health of her dearest.	a) Life situation	The husband and a son of the commercial's main character actively spend their free time – playing in the snow, roller-skating. Persuasion consists in convincing into using the advertised product by following the presented anthropological situation of a healthy and happy family.
Polish ⁸	Young active man	Actor Andrzej Zieliński	Life situation	Axiological persuasion, the values of utilitarian goodness disseminated in the commercial – by using the advertised product the main character is distinguished by what is beneficial for others: assertiveness, communicativeness, kind-heartedness, empathy, kindness in social relations.
Polish ⁸	Young active woman, responsible mother, protector caring for the family	Traveller and journalist Martyna Wojciechowska	Life situation	Axiological persuasion: the commercial presents the values of a good frame (of body and mind) ⁹ .

cont table 1

1	2	3	4	5
^a	< http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=iOtPW5O59M8&feature=related >	11.02.2009.		
^b	J. Puzynina, <i>Język wartości</i> , Wyd. Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1992, p. 31, 35.			
^c	< http://danone.sk/plugins/flashPlayer/?videoId=8&height=330&width=380&inlineId=myOnPageContent >	11.02.2009.		
^d	J. Puzynina, op. cit., p. 35.			
^e	< http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=RbBh_dVB2aY&NR=1 >	11.02.2009.		
^f	< http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=v9Oud9aBY4A >	11.02.2009.		
^g	< http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=IerfQK9jRY&NR=1 >	11.02.2009.		
^h	< http://www.dailymotion.pl/relevance/search/actimel/video/x3y9ex_actimel-2008_ads >	11.02.2009.		
ⁱ	< http://www.dailymotion.pl/relevance/search/actimel/video/x6zp9n_actimel-andrzej-zielinski-2008-rekl_fun >	11.02.2009.		
^j	J. Puzynina, op. cit., p. 35.			
^k	< http://www.dailymotion.pl/related/x3icva_actimel_fun/video/x3id6s_actimel-martyna-wojciechowska-2_fun?from=rss >	11.02.2009.		
^l	J. Puzynina, op. cit. p. 36.			

Source: prepared by the author on the basis of resources taken from the You Tube

In Slavonic advertising campaigns of Actimel there were persuasive messages created the purpose of which was to influence attitudes (obtaining possibly permanent product assessments by consumers) through a cognitive component, i.e. an impact of strong arguments. Persuasion of Polish advertising campaigns of the brand was primarily based on activating the central persuasion strategy while referring to the following arguments:

- persuading that consuming Actimel is of major personal importance since the product supports the body's immune system;
- suggesting that the issue directly affects every one who cherishes life activities, health, good stamina – both own and that of the dearest;
- justifying that usage of the product results in importance consequences for every day life.

Advertising influencing done centrally was accompanied by activating a peripheral persuasion strategy – the Actimel campaigns attempted to develop attitudes also through referring to emotions. An effort was made to associate the product with feelings like: family love, warmth, social kindness in general.

The cognitive component of persuasion in the Slavonic commercials of Actimel was presented in referrals to values. As J. Puzynina says „values felt (in other words: emotional experience of values) manifest themselves through utterances or non-verbal emotive behaviour”⁴. Only the subject of values has the knowledge of recognised values. Hence, advertising recipients make conclusions about recognised values from behaviour of a specific subject, i.e. the character (actor) in the commercial⁵.

⁴ J. Puzynina, *Język wartości*, Warszawa 1992, p. 30.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 30.

Persuasive strategies in the Slavonic commercials used assumptions of identifying the target groups with the anthropological situations presented in the spots and cultural models in the created visions of the world. Pursuant to the advertising mechanism

there are [...] needs released relating to belonging to a certain social group (building one's own social identity). I desire something that everybody desires who I identify with or who is an authority for me. I am not to desire something else, something that I should not desire because of my socio-psychological traits⁶.

In the Actimel national campaigns staged in Poland, Czech and Slovakia additionally family values were promoted, along with the presented product, based on the feeling of community and responsibility for the dearest which was a major advantage of the commercials as elements creating media culture and shaping the axiological awareness of modern recipients.

Because of a controversy in using violence in the rhetoric invention in the Russian campaign of Actimel, the results of quality analysis of those commercial spots have been presented separately. The table below shows disseminated stereotypes and applied models of influencing target groups.

Table 2

Stereotypes in Russian commercials of Actimel

Example of Advertising Campaign	Type of Stereotype	Creation of Advertising Character	Advertising Rhetoric Convention	Advertising Persuasive Strategy
1	2	3	4	5
I ^a	Young active man	The main character is accompanied by two other males – playing the roles of personified microbes that act as an allegory of omnipresent bacteria transmitted through touch.	Presentation	A voice over persuades that the advertised product may help the organism in fighting dangerous germs. The commercial is to persuade to use the product by demonstrating self-confidence that the main character acquires by consuming Actimel.

⁶ A. Ogonowska, op. cit., pp. 146–147.

cont table 2

1	2	3	4	5
II ^b	Man's dominance over woman in terms of knowledge of preventive health care, caring about health and physical fitness	A couple of young people decides to spend their free time skating in the skating rink. However, a woman with a cold lacks energy. This is due to her deficiency in knowledge that drinking the advertised product every day is the way of staying fit. Her male companion surpasses her in terms of his awareness.	Persuasive appeal	Persuasive influence consists in using the contrast – a comparison of a healthy and strong man (who uses Actimel) and a woman with cold deprived of vital energy. The persuasive effect is strengthened with the arrival of the third character in the commercial – a Superman-stylised person with an „A” logo on the chest who epitomises healthy people drinking Actimel.
III ^c	a) Type of a man with weak psyche, gloomy and aggressive; b) Type of a defenceless, passive man	a) The commercial's main character is middle-aged, obese, slow, not coping with office duties (has problems with using the computer printer), gives an impression of a bitter, egotist person, keeping himself to himself and unable to carry social communication; he vents his frustration caused by inability to operate the equipment on the computer monitor and photo-copier by destroying them; b) The response of two women working nearby the position of the aggressive man is passive and fearful.	As intended by the commercial authors: a) co-mical features of the character; b) comical situation.	A controversial and marketing risky concept of influencing recipients by evoking an aesthetic situation that is determined by aesthetic values of comicality (deviation from the standard), fun (causing laughter), ugliness (disharmony, excessive explicitness of the stereotype, deformation that is unpleasant to see, uneasiness), triviality (seeking unsophisticated effects) ^d . The advertising slogan „Live Through Till Holiday”.
IV ^e	Dangerous man	The main character is a type of a white-collar worker in a large corporation. Unexpectedly, he grabs a gun from the security man in the lift and tries to terrorise the other passengers.	Aesthetics of terror and a down-to-earth situation.	An attempt at convincing the recipients to the created vision of reality that is determined by the following factors: terror (threat of decline, destruction, mishap as a result of powerful force), down-to-earth (caring about details, the authenticity of a daily life) ^f . The advertising slogan „Live Through Till Holiday”.

cont table 2

1	2	3	4	5
V ^z	a) Type of a young girl; b) Type of an aggressive man	a) The commercial's main character behaves inappropriately at work: noisily talks over the telephone and laughs so loud that she disturbs other office workers; b) An un-assertive man explodes in anger and destroys the girl's telephone smashing it against the office equipment and furniture, after which he thrusts the telephone into another cubicle. He then follows the girl out, and there is her scream heard off screen.	As intended by the commercial authors: a) comical situation; b) comical features of the character.	A risky marketing concept of stirring a comical effect by presenting irritating behaviour of a girl with bad manners (who disturbs others at work) in the commercial and aggression of a man responding by destroying the telephone device and resorting to violence against the girl. The advertising slogan „Live Through Till Holiday”.
<p>^a <http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=RNT4EQcUtsI&NR=1> 11.02.2009.</p> <p>^b <http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=oD_2IN0HYal&feature=related> 11.02.2009.</p> <p>^c <http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=7EEjomPXjfs&feature=related> 11.02.2009.</p> <p>^d M. Gołaszewska, <i>Istota i istnienie wartości. Studium o wartościach estetycznych na tle sytuacji aksjologicznej</i>, Państwowe Wyd. Naukowe, Warszawa 1990, pp. 173–174.</p> <p>^e http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=7axnjC0vf6s [retrieved: 11.02.2009].</p> <p>^f M. Gołaszewska, <i>Istota i istnienie wartości. Studium o wartościach estetycznych na tle sytuacji aksjologicznej</i>, Państwowe Wyd. Naukowe, Warszawa 1990, p. 174.</p> <p>^g <http://pl.youtube.com/watch?v=FoOwvnpqq6w&feature=related> 11.02.2009.</p>				

Source: prepared by the author on the basis of resources taken from the You Tube

The Russian spots with the Actimel brand raise concern about a peculiar marketing approach that consists in using the motifs of aggression and violence in anthropological situations of the commercial characters shown. Ogonowska stated:

Apart from its physical dimension violence also has a psycho-social aspect. Although the first is manifested in inflicting personal injuries and showing the whole act, the second is related to influencing the system of the person's beliefs and values without her knowing about it or when the person is not fully aware of such influence⁷.

The quoted observations seem to correspond to the situation of recipients both on the Russian market, and among a broader spectrum of the Internet

⁷ A. Ogonowska, op. cit., p. 140.

viewers – persons who are interested in advertising messages placed on the YouTube.

The Russian Actimel spots seem to be controversial, given the role of the commercial as a social institution within the traditional European socio-cultural context. In the opinion of Ogonowska:

in social sciences institutions are treated as social control tools that allow satisfaction of various needs at the same time taking repressive measures against undesired behaviour. They play the role of »objective controls« the task of which is not only to maintain behaviour of members of a specific social group within the framework of existing standards, duties and established patterns, but to reward desired behaviour, too, also in terms of good of the entire society. Institutions allow satisfaction of individual needs under control, within social relations, in other words in such way to limit individuals' arbitrariness that would threaten the existence and functioning of society and which would break up the internal cohesion of the community. Behaviour that stays within patterns and ideals that prevail in a given socio-cultural context is stigmatised and face sanctions having various forms of formality⁸.

However, the Russian Actimel commercials aired in the campaign with a marketing slogan of „Living Through Till Holiday” did not repress any aberrant behaviour, and what is even more, they alluded to their comical nature within the ethnic culture instead.

The Russian Actimel commercials presented a stereotype scheme of companies employing white-collar workers. Thus a picture of corporate life was created that is excessively simplified, not reflecting an objective reality. By suggesting universality of the occurrence of threats at places of work (due to unexpected aggressiveness of other fellow employees) the Russian commercials transmitted a negative emotional load, thus creating appearances of truth, and they also disseminated a stereotyped vision of the reality with a dominant feature of constant threat.

A potentially adverse impact of the Russian commercials of Actimel on the international viewers among YouTube users stems from the fact that stereotypes disseminated in the spots shape impressions about a given national culture. Culture – as stated by G. Hofstede – is „programming of the mind”, i.e. patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving as formed by a social environment in which man stays and where he acquires life experiences⁹. The personality of recipients of the Russian commercials crammed under the slogan reading „Live Through Till Holiday” is, among others, formed by experiencing the media contents, as well as

⁸ Ibidem, p. 143.

⁹ G. Hofstede, *Kultury i organizacje. Zaprogramowanie umysłu*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 38–39.

resulting from an „impact of collective programming”¹⁰. Hence, there is a danger of an adverse influence of advertising messages, e.g. on children or young people seeing the commercial spots of the said campaign.

Furthermore, stereotype situations of aggression within a social group of office employees, developed by the creators of the Actimel advertising campaign, may be transmitted by an intercultural community of the Internet users over the entire Russian culture, distorting its actual character and damaging its international image in the global cultural space of modern media. National indicators are used to characterise social systems. Hofstede remarked that „social systems are not built with a thought of unique members of given societies, but rather with a thought of values dominant among the majority of population”¹¹. Even when the characters appearing in the commercial spots are fictitious, they still „exemplify certain features particularly valued in a given culture and thus constituting a type of model behaviour”¹². Henceforth, the recipients of the Russian Actimel spots may seem to believe that aggression at the place of work constitutes a cultural denominator – a routine model of behaviour characteristic for Russian corporations. In the opinion of Hofstede „what people do with their feelings, how they express their fear and joy, as well as how they perceive the reality, is modified by culture”¹³.

The Russian commercials disseminating violence as a model of social functioning confirm existence of cultural problems common to any community in the world, such as: continuance of social inequalities, the quality of relations between an individual and a group, concepts of masculinity and femininity, the ways of solving conflicts, controlling aggression or expressing emotions¹⁴. As presented in the commercials visions of the world create a circle of negative values: rejection of dialogue as a way of solving conflicts, renouncing social communication, attaining goals by resorting to violence. The Russian spots of Actimel promote the culture of violence as a pattern of thinking and way of acting, since the components of culture include, among others, values and standards that affect collective and individual identity and specify the framework of socially accepted behaviour¹⁵. Implications of the said commercials are contrary to the modern axiological model established on the foundation of global values that among others include: moderation, following the road of compromise, ability to adjust, prudence (cautiousness), tolerance towards others, maintaining harmony in rela-

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 41.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 364.

¹² Ibidem, p. 43.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 41.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 50.

¹⁵ W. Patrzalek, *Czynniki kulturowe wpływające na zachowania konsumenckie*, [in:] W. Patrzalek (ed.), *Kulturowe determinanty zachowań konsumenckich*, Wrocław 2004, pp. 14–15.

tions with others, solidarity with others, having friends, being trustworthy, satisfaction with one's own life situation, patience, kindness, goodness (forgiving, compassion), sense of righteousness and justice, caring about a harmonious family life, setting noble and right goals in life¹⁶. The message of the Russian audiovisual spots in the „Live Through Till Holiday” series available to the international community of the Internet users in the YouTube service, promotes an attitude of joking about unassertiveness and aggression, also acceptance of destruction and violence as well as passiveness towards deviant behaviour in organisational cultures of modern corporations or institutions. It thus positions itself in opposition to the ideas promoted in the modern world of renouncing violence in solving conflicts or the ideas of „globalising solidarity”. As A. Flis observed,

a political and economic regime of modern societies [...] requires not so much passive obedience of citizens, but rather active and voluntary co-operation of a multitude of specialised individuals and professional groups¹⁷.

As used in the Russian campaigns of the „Live Through Till Holiday” series rhetoric invention is contrary to the trends in audiovisual advertising of re-updating an archetypal motif of transforming Chaos into Cosmos. Such archaic trend to rebuild the world order, introduce some structure, to follow the reasonable principle of Logos – known in mythological systems, literature, theatre – has hitherto dominated the media culture in such artefacts as a feature film, film adaptations of works of literature, plays or audiovisual advertising.

3. Summary

In the reference works on stereotypes a belief has been expressed that they occur within a dimension of verbal communication, i.e. stereotypes are triggered by words-catch phrases¹⁸. In the modern media culture, however, stereotypes also exist in non-verbal communication, the examples of which may be observed in visual or audiovisual advertising messages in the form of impression patterns: irrational manifestations of non-analytical thinking, exaggerated judgements, generalising categorisations – beliefs concerning impressions about certain social groups or individuals (human types).

¹⁶ G. Hofstede, op.cit., pp. 245–249.

¹⁷ A. Flis, *Czego się Zachód nauczył od Wschodu*, [in:] J. Danecki, A. Flis (eds.), *Wartości Wschodu i wartości Zachodu. Spotkania cywilizacji*, Kraków 2005, p. 28.

¹⁸ A. Schaff, *Stereotypy a działanie ludzkie*, Warszawa 1981, pp. 115–116.

Visions of the world presented in Slovak, Czech and Polish audiovisual commercials of Danone's Actimel brand show an axiological similarity. Based on the quality analysis of those spots existence of a cultural community of the Slavonic creators of the commercials may be confirmed in terms of similarity of the preferred values that are reflected in advertised images of the world, as well as in created stereotypes of the characters from commercials. On the grounds of the analysis of the said national campaigns a phenomenon of globalising homogenisation may be discerned in the aspect of advertising media conventions. There is recurrence in motifs of rhetoric invention in terms of stereotypes relating to perception of reality, creation of characters and anthropological situations. Among national campaigns of Actimel in the said countries the dominating trends included: the need to improve the world; instrumental rationality – recognized as a major feature of modern European culture¹⁹; cultural activism – focused on practical actions; conviction of a major role of interpersonal relations.

The nature of the Russian spots of the Actimel brand indicates the need of considering the issue of how to interpret such broadcasts and their messages – i.e. different ways of thinking, feeling and acting – under conditions of intercultural experiences of recipients of messages in an international and intercultural environment of the YouTube users. Perhaps the creation of commercial characters and specific practice of corporate behaviour and interpersonal relations presented in the Russian spots of Actimel constitute a code the cultural importance of which is explicit and members of the ethnic culture are able to accurately interpret them by assigning a positive dimension. However, among the recipients who represent the remaining part of the Slavonic culture an image of the world presented in those commercials shall potentially have a negative value assigned: bad, non-humanitarian, abnormal, irrational. Such reception would be a proof of ineffectiveness of the Russian campaigns in the „Live Through Till Holiday” series, it would turn to be adverse in terms of the product image of Actimel among the target groups and would be detrimental to Danone corporation's international repute. The modern civilisational situation sets off the needs to abandon conflicts, to limit aggression, to seek solutions that would create conditions for cohabitation of people and would ensure stability of social structures.

¹⁹A. Flis, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

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Stereotypy i wartości narodowe w międzykulturowym dyskursie reklamowym. Studium przypadku: słowiańskie kampanie marki Actimel firmy Danone

Artykuł dotyczy zjawiska stereotypizacji w aspekcie sytuacji antropologicznych oraz wizji świata zawartych w przekazach audiowizualnych narodowych kampanii reklamowych jednego z produktów korporacji Danone na Słowacji, w Czechach, Polsce i Rosji. Analizie jakościowej poddano reprezentatywne przykłady spotów dostępnych w międzykulturowym środowisku użytkowników serwisu internetowego You Tube. Zwrócono uwagę na stereotypy oraz perswazję reklamową ukierunkowaną na wartości instrumentalne współczesnej kultury. Wskazano na pewne uniwersalia aksjofery w reklamowym wymiarze medialnej kultury krajów słowiańskich. Poddano również analizie osobliwość rosyjskich kampanii reklamowych polegającą na upowszechnianiu stereotypu męskiej agresji w relacjach interpersonalnych.

