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## LOVE IN NOVELS: PREFERENCES FOR AUTHENTIC AND FAKE GENDER CHARACTERS AMONG POLES AND AMERICANS (At Home and in the Other Country)

Pawel Boski & Anna Antosiewicz

Masculinity-femininity is this research domain in cross-cultural psychology where a multitude of concepts coincides with low level of their empirical convergence and replicability. Hofstede's (1998, 2001) MAS dimension has been particularly controversial (Boski, 2006b) and the recent measure of *Gender Equality* from GLOBE project (House, et al., 2004) added to this lack of clarity with a zero-level correlation between the two. Culture of gender reflects—in our view—a complex and multifaceted reality, which can not be reduced to an oversimplified picture seen through the lenses of existing scales.

An alternative approach is offered by cultural psychology with its emphasis on the study of psyche as mediated by artifacts (Cole, 1996). Working with cultural artifacts has some advantages compared to traditional psychometrics in comparative studies: 1) research materials are representative of the culture(s) under investigation, thus valid; 2) participants' responses are contextualized which reduces the range of nonequivalence; 3) inherent in artifacts is their flexibility, which allows their transformations for research purposes. Boski and colleagues demonstrated usefulness of this approach with Polish and Swedish videoscripts of gender relations to elicit participants responses concerning their meaning, typicality and evaluation (Boski, van de Vijver, Hurme, and Miluska, 1999; Boski, Struś, and Tlaga, 2004). The present paper is a continuation of this line of studies, where episodes of literary fiction form the basis for measuring preferences of male and female characters as romance or love partners. In a broader sense our study explores the syndrome of cultural femininity-masculinity: by providing answers on their most and least preferred actors, participants reveal their cultural make-up.

The questions we address are as follows: (i) Are people sensitive to experimental change of fiction characters' sex and do they prefer the authentic or rather the transformed versions? (ii) Are female or males characters generally more preferred when people read novels? (iii) Do Poles and Americans differ in their likes and dislikes for gender-defined fiction characters?

We will examine first various theoretical perspectives that stand behind these questions.

## SEX CATEGORIES, GENDER DIMENSIONS AND CULTURE

Traditional world, we are led to believe, established an equation between sex and gender which made males masculine and females feminine. Reading a narrative where explicit markers of sex would be missing or purposely omitted, one could easily guess whether a character was a female or a male. As Ashmore and del Boca (1981) reported in their unique study, novelists (Theodore Dreiser in their case) created their fiction characters according to implicit personality theories of their times, distinct for men and women.

As human personalities, both in reality and in fiction, are *Gestalts*, rules of schema congruity apply to their structure, and script congruity controls their actions (Fiske, Taylor, 1991). Consequently, a character bearing female/male sex identity (her/his name, physical features, etc.) but retaining all personality descriptions of the other gender group, should be regarded fake, unfit and disapproved.

In psychology, this representation of culture and gender ended up some 30 years ago (Bem, 1974), with the discovery that individuals of both sexual categories could blend feminine and masculine characteristics in varying proportions. Especially, they could score high on both gender dimensions, which was labeled androgyny and considered as psychologically most adaptive in contemporary Western culture (Bem, 2002). Androgynous overlap of traditional sex-roles and the ensuing psychological flexibility of modern men and women was proposed by Hofstede (1998, 2001) as the essence of cultural femininity.

Following this thread of arguments, one could think that cultural actors transcending gender boundaries could enjoy high levels of evaluation and perhaps serve as role models for identification. If so, then fiction characters in masterpieces of great novelists of XIX and at least first half of XX centuries would be outmoded and less appealing in our times. A less stringent hypothesis would posit no differences in approval ratings of fiction characters, female or male: an individual could be either of them.

Thus, literature provides arguments for alternative predictions of authentic vs. sex-transformed characters' evaluation.

We are turning now to discuss the possibility of sex and gender attributes directly affecting character preferences. Introduced by Hofstede as its defining term, cultural androgyny is a complex and not sine qua non condition of femininity. The ideological, political, legal and mentality changes of the last four decades are the testimony of women's issues being pushed at the center stage of Western civilization. With femininity on the rise, masculinity has been under attack, held responsible for various kinds of aggression (Van de Vliert, et al., 1999; Nisbett, Cohen, 1996) and not much defended. Recent evidence also suggests that women's gender identity becomes firmer and more crystallized than men's. (Chojnowska, Boski, Koziej, 2006). Based on these arguments another hypothesis may be put forward, predicting higher approval rates for female characters, and feminine personalities, (irrespective of their authentic or transformed status).

Our final point addresses possible cultural differences between Poles and Americans (and their acculturation to the other country). The two countries occupy distant spatial points on the world map of values. According to Schwartz's (2004) multinational project, Poland scores relatively high on Embeddedness values (conservatism), while the U.S. are high on Mastery and Affective autonomy (*work hard and enjoy your life!*). In Inglehart

and Oyserman's (2004) mapping, the two countries are distant on Survival-Self-expression values: Poles still cope with life difficulties *to make the ends meet*, while Americans pursue for life quality. Poles are also much more oriented towards humanist values, i.e., caring and prosocial concerns for close interpersonal relations (Boski, 2006a). Considering these background cultural factors, Poles should appreciate fiction characters who endure hardships, go through life complexities and are committed to others (partners); Americans—on the other side—should show more liking for liberated, hedonistic and self-conscious/-centered characters.

*Cultural experiments of gender transformation.* Cultural psychology postulates distinction between category (sex, ethnic/social group, etc.) and its content (culture, value dimensions, etc.). This conceptual independence allows matching a given category with its traditionally proper content as well as a “misfit formation”. Boski (1988) and Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, Ybarra, (2000) demonstrated the effects of crossing two ethnic categories (Ibo and Hausa in Nigeria; or Anglo-Americans and Mexicans) with cultural scripts typical for each of them (achievement and social comparison vs. Muslim fundamentalism; or task vs. task+interpersonal orientation). Boski, Struś and Tlaga (2004) set traditional and “reversed” male-female interactions of Swedish actors in a Scandinavian ecological and organizational context. In Sanchez-Burks, *et. al.* (2000) cultural identity prevailed in the dominant group, while ethnic identity was more important for a minority group. Boski and his colleagues reported interactive effects of the two factors incongruity.

Research methodology in the past studies employed video-scripts which were recorded by- or attached to their fitting and misfitting actors/contexts. We have followed that path in the present work where selected novels served as sources for original materials of fiction characters. In designing these materials for cultural experiment<sup>1</sup> we were facing two options: (i) changing the ‘grammar’ concerning the lead character (personal, possessive pronouns, name and possible gender markers of her/his partner); (ii) leaving her/his sex category intact while modifying some of behaviors and personality traits. We have chosen the first option, since it entailed less invasion into the original text and more control over the process of transformation.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were Americans and Poles, residents in their countries of origin and sojourners/immigrants in the other country; their total number was 357. Structure of research sample can be seen on Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Structure of Research Sample**

Nationality	Country of residence	
	Poland	USA
Poles	Poles university students (Warsaw)	Polish immigrants, students (New York)
F/M	53/47	50/50
Americans	American expatriates in Warsaw (students, language teachers)	Americans students (New York)
F/M	18/39	49/51

## Research materials

Twelve episodes from well known classic novels and contemporary best-sellers were drawn as half page long portrayals of 6 female and 6 male lead characters.

*Twelve Original Characters and their transformations:*

1. *Jack Rossiter*; from J. Lloyd i E. Rees “*Come together*” (American); [A: FF; B: TM)
2. *Swann*; from M. Proust “*Searching of the lost time*”, (French); [A:FF; B: TM]
3. *Pilar*; from E. Hemingway “*To whom the bell rings*”, (American); [A: TF; B: FM]
4. Kinsky (autobiography) “*What I need is love*”, (American); [A: FM; B: TM]
5. Narrative subject; Gretkowska, “*Silikon*” (Polish); [A: TF; B: FM]
6. *Scarlet O’Hara*; from M.Mitchel “*Gone with the wind*” (American); [A: TF; B: FM]
7. *Patti Diphusa*, Almodovar (Spanish); [A: FM; B: TF]
8. *Hela Bertz*; from Witkacy “*Farewell to the autumn*” (Polish); [A: FM; B: TF]
9. *Bridget Jones*; from H. Fielding “*Bridget Jones*” (English); [A: FM; B: TF]
10. *Piotr*; from W. Myśliwski “*Horizon*”, (Polish); [A: TM; B: FF]
11. *Mathew*, from J.-P. Sartre “*Male age*” (French); [A: TM; B: FF]
12. *Martin Eden*; from Jack London “*Martin Eden*” (American); [A: TM; B: FF]

From each original episode a transformation was done into a fake gender character:  $F \rightarrow M$  and  $M \rightarrow F$ , by changing grammatical gender of the original subject and/or object. Two examples will demonstrate the way it was done. In our first example authentic female is Pilar, from E. Hemingway *To whom the bell rings*.

*I am not ugly, but I was born ugly and I was ugly throughout my life, but inside I felt beautiful. Despite that many **men** fell in love with me and I loved many **men**. Life is interesting, you never know what is waiting for you. Now look at me and listen and I will tell you how it is. Look at my ugliness. However I had inside this feeling, which blinded **men** as long as they loved me. I blinded them and myself with this feeling. And then one day for no reason they saw me as ugly as I really was and suddenly they stopped being blind and then I was, I saw this ugliness, which they saw and I lost them and my feelings. You have to know life, to bear it, you have to be strong.*

In male fake version, “he-Pilar” had this to say:

*I am not ugly, but I was born ugly and I was ugly throughout my life, but inside I felt handsome. Despite that many women fell in love with me and I loved many women. Life is interesting, you never know what is waiting for you. Now look at me and listen and I will tell you how it is. Look at my ugliness. However I had inside this feeling, which blinded women as long as they loved me. I blinded them and myself with this feeling. And then one day for no reason they saw me as ugly as I really was and suddenly they stopped being blind and then I was, I saw this ugliness, which they saw and I lost them and my feelings. You have to know life, to bear it, you have to be strong.*

The second example comes from an American novel *Come together*, where the narrative of Jack Rossiter, the lead male character goes like this:

*M(auth.): It is June, Friday morning, and I have a problem. What's worse I do not even remember its name. Fast asleep she is murmuring and mumbling something. I look at the display of the alarm clock standing on the night stand. It is 7:31. On one side the situation I am in looks rather nice. It is me, a single, successful man, working for the recognised company, with my own apartment, good car, nice, wealthy life, so I am lying in bed next to the naked strange woman, who turned out to be rather nice company for the evening and bed. I am lucky. Living alone is OK., sometimes it is even quite fun. (Jack Rossiter from J.Lloyd, i E.Rees "Come together")*

This may be associated with a "one-night stand", liberated, and more cynical than romantic approach to love relationship. The transformed female version reads as follows:

*F(fake): It is June, Friday morning, and I have a problem. What's worse I do not even remember its name. Fast asleep he is murmuring and mumbling something. I look at the display of the alarm clock standing on the night stand. It is 7:31. On one side the situation I am in looks rather nice. It is me, a single, successful woman, working for the recognised company, with my own apartment, good car, nice, wealthy life, so I am lying in bed next to the naked strange man, who turned out to be rather nice company for the evening and bed. I am lucky. Living alone is OK., sometimes it is even quite fun.*

Two sets (A and B) of research materials were created. Each consisted of twelve elements where four cells were made of 2 (female / male) × 2 (authentic / fake) variables. Each of them had three characters. The design of experimental variables is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Structure of Research Materials: Between Factor (Set A and Set B) and within Factors 2 (female / male) × 2 (authentic / false) Characters**

Set A (12)	Authentic (6)		False (6)		Subject Standardization
(half research sample)	3 Females (Pilar, Gretkowska, Scarlet)	3 Males (Piotr, Mathew, Martin Eden)	3 Females (Jack', Swann', Kinsky')	3 Males (Patti', Bridget', Hela')	Z-scores across each participant's scores for all 12 characters
Gender (grammatical) transformation	↓	↓	↑	↑	
(half research sample)	3 Males (Pilar', Gretkowska', Scarlet')	3 Females (Piotr', Mathew', Martin Eden')	3 Males (Jack, Swann, Kinsky)	3 Females (Patti, Bridget, Hela)	Z-scores across each participant's scores for all 12 characters
(12) Set B	False (6)		Authentic (6)		
Character Standardization	Z-scores separately across each of 12 characters and irrespective of their gender transformation				

**Dependent variables and Procedure**

Participants had two tasks to complete. First was a rank-nomination task. After having read twelve episodes in their set, they were asked to select one female and one male character which they liked most (ideal) and one for each gender which they disliked most (anti-ideal). Second, each episode was rated on twelve bipolar, seven point scales presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Rating Scales for Fiction Characters**

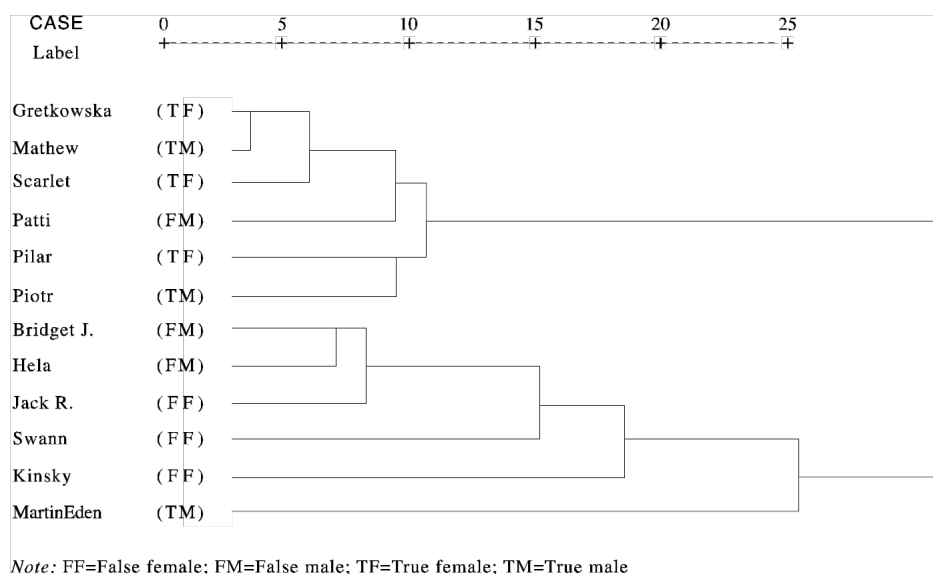
rational							irrational
sensitive							insensitive
sad							joyful
sensual							cold
submissive							domineering
effective							ineffective
repulsive							attractive
gullible							shrewd
irresponsible							responsible
uncaring							caring
having sense of humor							not having sense of humor
dissimilar to me							similar to me

Data collection was conducted in New York and in Warsaw. Sessions were run individually or in groups up to five participants.

**RESULTS**

Since rating scales for each sample episode had high reliabilities, they were averaged for a single evaluation or preference score. Preliminary analyses revealed cultural response bias: American participants rated fiction characters generally much higher than Poles did,  $F(1,353)=659.36^{***2}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.651$ . To eliminate this bias, rating scales were standardized in two ways: (i) within national categories across each literary episode (for its original and false versions combined); and (ii) across each participant for her/his all twelve scores. [Please go back to Table 2 for the scheme of standardization procedures]. Data transformed by the first standardization allowed to test the hypothesis of sex transformation effects. The second transformation will make it possible to test the hypotheses of sex preferences and culture differences.

*Does manipulation of character's gender matter for her/his preference?* Based on outcomes of the first standardization, cluster analyses were performed within each set of 12 characters to see if they might be grouped in true/false categories for further hypothesis testing. Figure 1 presents summary results of these analyses (Set A).



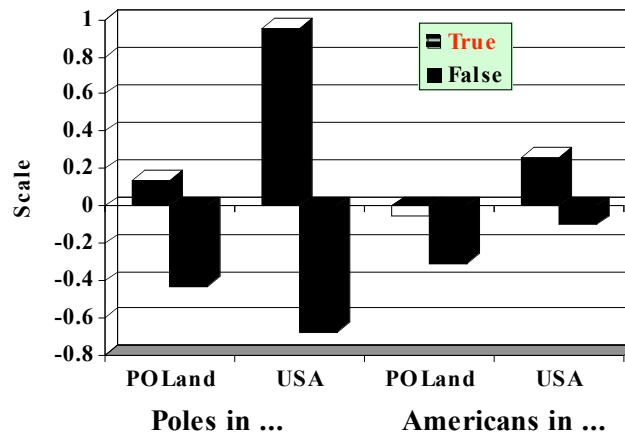
**Figure 1**  
**Cluster Analysis of: Dendrogram of Authentic and False, Male and Female Characters—Rescaled Distance Cluster Combine (Set A)**

It can be seen that the true (authentic) vs. false divide splits the characters in two clusters, closely resembling and validating the categories of experimental manipulation on the text. [Same results were replicated with data of set B.] One major exception is Martin Eden whose empirical placements run contrary to where he/she should belong. Surprisingly, his authentic male version fits better into the category of false characters, while the transformed female version seems more convincing when it appears among other true characters.

Based on the above results, we found it justified to create two repeated measures variables: (i) true vs. false; and (ii) female vs. male characters. They were aggregated of twelve character evaluations, separately within sets A and B<sup>3</sup>. First, frequency distributions of ideal and anti-ideal choices were compared in each of these two sets. The authentic characters were significantly more often chosen as ideals and less often as anti-ideals, than it was the case for sex transformed characters (for set A:  $\chi^2(4)=56.48^{***}$ ,  $r(357)=-0.326^{***}$ ; for set B:  $\chi^2(4)=60.35^{***}$ ,  $r(357)=-.354^{***}$ ). Next, analysis was run for the full factorial research design: 2 nationality (American / Polish)  $\times$  2 country of residence (United States / Poland)  $\times$  2 participant's sex (F / M)  $\times$  2 character's sex (F / M)  $\times$  2 character manipulation (authentic / fake); the first three between, the latter two were within subject factors. We obtained a number of strong effects which are illustrated in Figure 2.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1 and most potent of these findings is the main effect of sex manipulation,  $F(1,341)=1560.83^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.821$ . As it can be seen, characters as originally created by artists are much more appealing to the readers than their researcher-made alterations. When the true vs. false versions for individual characters are compared, the overall result holds for 10 out of 12 cases (with each difference significant well beyond  $p=0.001$ ). Only two characters, London's *Martin Eden* and Almodovar's *Patti* are preferred in their gender transformed version.





**Figure 2**  
**Approval Rates of Authentic and Transformed Characters among Poles and Americans Residing in both Countries**

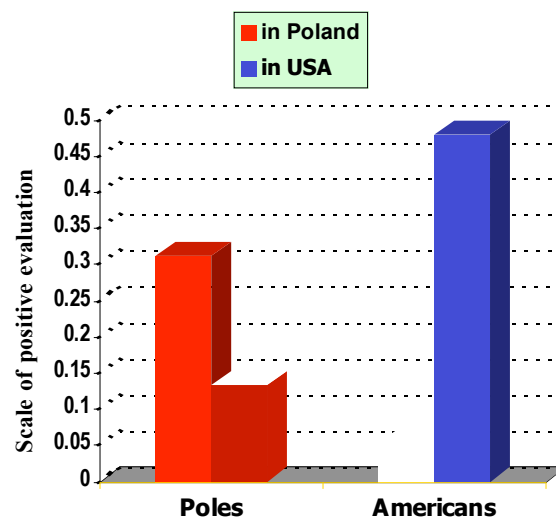
Three highly significant interactions complement this major finding. Poles are more sensitive to gender manipulation than Americans,  $F(1,341)=499.27^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.594$ ; next, residents in the USA respond more strongly to sex transformation than residents of Poland,  $F(1,341)=274.71^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.446$ ; and the triple interaction,  $F=176.03^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.340$ , reveals that these are Polish immigrants who are most affected by the manipulation.

*Joint effects of character's sex and gender transformation.* To test the interactive effects of sex and its transformation, data were first submitted to the earlier mentioned within-subject standardization procedure, which also eliminated nationality response bias but retained differences across preferences of 12 target-characters. We received a number of significant effects that would be difficult to present on a single illustration. Thus, results for two repeated factors appear in Figure 3.

A strong interaction between characters' sex in their authentic vs. transformed format is reported,  $F_{inter}(1,341)=1886.94^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=.847$ . Authentic female characters are much more preferred than their male counterparts [ $t(356)=20.78^{***}$ ]. This tendency holds largely unchanged after gender modification in the sense that male transformed females still remain appealing [though the decline from authentic females is significant,  $t(356)=1.95$ ,  $p=0.05$ ]; while female transformed males are just as low appealing as their original male characters ( $t<1.00$ ). Thus, caution should be exercised not to interpret these results as evidence for evaluation switchover with sex transformed characters. Though the newly acquired sex identities show just the opposite preference patterns than the original males or females, it only indicates—in the present context—that the initial taste for literary episodes has remained relatively unchanged.

In light of the above findings, data for original and female transformed characters were aggregated and used in the next analysis to test nationality and country of residence effects on target preferences; male results were discarded as complementary to females, and thus redundant. Figure 4 brings the relevant results.

**Figure 3**  
**Approval Ratings of Female and Male Characters, Authentic and False**



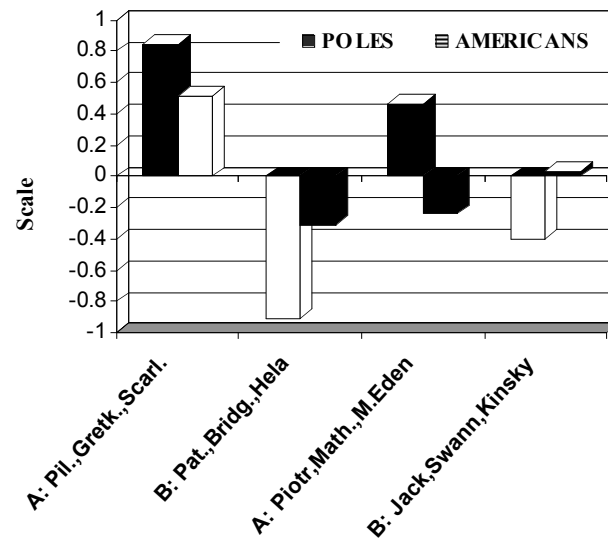
**Figure 4**  
**Preference for Female Characters (Authentic and Male Transformed) among Poles and Americans Residing in both Countries**

The interaction effect,  $F(1,341)=716.02^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.677$  reveals that the preference for female characters is more pronounced within the context of participants' culture of origin than when they have been residing abroad. All simple effects are highly significant too ( $p<0.0001$ ), including the difference Americans > Poles. These general findings need to be qualified, however by the heterogeneity of literary material, which we have, so far, left aside. It appears for instance that Poles responded in a contrastingly different way to female characters the two sets (A and B) of literary episodes, while for Americans the inter-character differences were much more moderate. This observation leads us to the last research question concerning culture specific profiles of preferred femininity and masculinity.

*Cultural differences in personality preferences of literary characters.* The results so far analyzed have been based on data pooled from all twelve literary episodes, very different in style and in substance. We will now turn to four subsets comprising of three characters each, irrespective of their authentic or transformed profiles. *Pilar*, *Scarlet* and *Gretkowska* make, for instance, a subset of authentic females for half of research participants (A) and are aggregated as false male opposites for the other half (B). We investigated first the problem of Polish-American cultural differences in preferences for fiction personalities by comparing their choices of ideal and anti-ideal females and males. Percentages of negative (anti-ideal), neutral and positive (ideal) choices were computed in the four subsets. Their cross-tabulations with participants' nationality are presented in table 4, indicating culture's of origin strong effects. Poles find more ideals (and less anti-ideals) in the female triad {*Pilar*+*Gretkowska*+*Scarlet*} and in the male triad {*Piotr*+*Mathew*+*Martin Eden*}. For Americans the two remaining triads {*Patti*+*Bridget*+ *Hela*} and {*Jack*+*Swann*+*Kinsky*} are the sources of positive choices. Figure 5 mean aggregated evaluations of these triads on which analysis of variance was performed.

**Table 4**  
**Frequency Distributions and Statistics of Four Subsets of Fiction**  
**Characters as Anti-Ideal vs. Ideals Males and Females**

Anti-Ideal vs Ideal	A <sub>Fem</sub>		B <sub>Fem</sub>		A <sub>Mal</sub>		B <sub>Mal</sub>	
	Pilar Gretk. Scarlet	Poles Americans	Patti Bridget Hela	Poles Americans	Piotr Mathew Martin	Poles Americans	Jack Swann Kinsky	Poles Americans
-	5.5	31.8	73.0	23.6	0.5	28.7	65.5	19.1
0	29.5	48.4	26.5	47.8	27.0	47.8	28.5	49.0
+	65.0	19.7	0.5	28.7	72.5	23.6	6.0	31.8
X <sup>2</sup> <sub>(2)</sub>	84.00***		107.17***		105.95***		85.70***	
r	-0.482***		0.548***		-0.546***		0.484***	



**Figure 5**  
**Culture and Gender-Personality Preferences: Differential Approval Ratings for Four Subsets of Literary Characters among Poles and Americans**

Cultural differences are highly significant within each subset. *Pilar, Gretkowska and Scarlet O'Hara* (and their male transformations) are more to the liking of Poles,  $F(1,353)=109.75^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.237$ ; while *Patti, Bridget Jones, and Hela* are less disliked by Americans,  $F(1,353)=458.60^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.565$ . On the male side, *Piotr, Mathew, and Martin Eden* better fit to the tastes of Poles,  $F(1,353)=680.39^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.658$ . With the other male triad, that of *Jack, Swann and Kinsky*, the direction of difference is shifted again towards Americans,  $F(1,353)=269.78^{***}$ ,  $\eta^2=0.433$ . It was intimated in the introduction, that Poles should identify more with novel characters who are socially embedded rather than independent and self-centered, who portray life problems and suffering rather than hedonism; while the reverse positioning should apply to Americans. These results are in line with our reasoning; more cultural interpretation will be offered in the concluding section.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Three theoretical hypotheses were formulated concerning preferences for sex and gender of fiction characters: 1) the effects of sex transformation; 2) comparison of female vs. male characters evaluation; and 3) cultural differences between Poland and the US in the profiles of liked and disliked personality profiles. We will now discuss results reported in the preceding section.

### Cultural experiment on sex transformation

Our findings brought unusually strong evidence for the effectiveness of cultural experiments in sex transformation of literary characters. The way they appear in original episodes extracted from the novels is much preferred to the impressions they give after

slight linguistic modification, where the he/she pronouns have been substituted for. We do not think we caused any dramatic changes in ideal/anti-ideal choices and in character evaluations by simply spoiling the artistic effects produced by accomplished writers in their linguistic expressions. There appear, instead, to be general psychological constraints for shaping a female or a male personality such that readers separated from the authors by generations and cultural space are still sensitive to detect falsification. One can not play with sex categories at random! Since the overall result is consistent across 10 out of 12 individual episodes, written by different novelists coming from four cultural-linguistic and artistic traditions throughout whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, the robustness of our finding has a solid cross-cultural foundation. Still, exceptions exist. J. London created Martin Eden who has been a masculine hero of American literature for long time. It is surprising that his female transformation turned out to be more appealing at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Perhaps the enduring and successful struggle for achievement, which the episode once symbolized as a male story, has become more emblematic for lives of many contemporary women (especially for Polish participants).

Recognizing that our results are restricted to Euro-American cultural region, we invite the readers of this paper to expand the scope of our research, with the use of this successful methodology, to other cultural worlds<sup>4</sup>.

### **Female characters are preferred to males**

The last decades of 20th century have brought deep cultural changes in gender relations; with the birth of feminist movement masculinity has been in retreat. It would have been surprising if these phenomena did not reflect in literary preferences. To test Hypothesis 2, we used within-subject ipsative measures and we found strong confirming evidence: authentic female characters were largely more appealing to their male counterparts. Sex transformation did not produce dramatic differences in the degree of liking compared to the original characters.

Other than profound changes in the culture of gender relations, we should point out to love as a specific theme of all literary episodes in our research. Since relationships form the domain where women may be more competent and influential than men, this is the other explanation for preferential treatment of female character in fiction masterpieces. It remains to be seen if these findings could be extended to other domains of life and literature, such as power, achievement, conflict and war.

### **Cultures of Poland and the U.S: Gender prototypes that make the differences**

Cultural differences are not overshadowed by the two major findings discussed above. For Poles, particularly those residing in the U.S., the gap between authentic and false characters is wider than for Americans; Poles happen to be more conservative (or sensitive) to who a gender-typed person should be like. This finding corresponds to other results reported by Chojnowska, Boski, Koziej (2006), where Poles showed greater gender-role polarization than Italians and Germans. Why is this tendency more pronounced overseas rather than inside Poland? —Acculturation does not always and immediately facilitates adaptation to the receiving country. Its initial stress may intensify rigid attachment to the culture of origin. Grabowska (2006) reports similar tendency among Vietnamese immigrants residing in Poland.

Though the general preference for feminine characters (female authentic and transformed) is stronger among Americans, this effect is not consistent across all research stimuli. Poles are more radical in their likes and dislikes, while Americans are more moderate. These more radical views persist also with masculine characters (male authentic and transformed) but to a lesser degree. So who are the Polish prototypes eliciting positive evaluations and who are their opposites focusing negative evaluations?—*Pilar* and *Scarlet O'Hara* belong to the classics of American literature, yet they are the leading heroines for Polish and not for American readers-participants. They experience sufferings, self-criticisms (*I am ugly, I never really understood him*), life complexities, hardships and will-power (*you have to be strong; life is not all over*). The triad of {*Patti, Hela* and *Bridget* } makes the opposite and unfavorable personality profile of a provocative, sexually conscious and confident woman: *I have the body, which drives man crazy; she is dangerous but this danger is what is attracting me the most* ; and someone narcissistic: *hours in the gym and at the beauty palace only to have his call later (...), — 'I am really sorry but can't make it today'* .

The liberal, free-love approach to relations is also portrayed by Jack Rossiter and by his female alter, they are not to the taste of Poles either, yet much more approved by American participants.

Polish femininity is centered around responsibilities, dignified coping with problems, and survival, though without subordination to men (Boski, 2006; Boski, et al., 1999). Extravagant, individualist and free-love approach to sexuality does not belong to this pattern. The conclusions that we draw here and not farfetched from those of an earlier study comparing love songs in the U.S. and in China (Rothbaum, Yuk-Pin Tsang, 1998). There too, American popular songs projected love relations as simpler and easier than Chinese songs which carried the message of embeddedness and sufferings impeding fulfillment. Lack of commitment (Patti, Jack) may be characteristic for American style of love typical for its individualist culture, while love and suffering is embedded in more collectivist cultures.

Two different examples of parental love are illustrated by two male characters: *Kinsky* and *Piotr*; the former is disapproved while the latter approved by Poles. *Kinsky* describes his existence before becoming a father in these words: *I was living and breathing as a free animal. (...) I was free and fearless. You pulled me out of this existence by your love*. Here the young child is a humanizing factor of an adult person. The two roles are completely reversed in *Piotr* episode by Polish novelist Myśliwski. Here son's narrative is focused on his father and the past: *This small scraggy man in the photo, with staring eyes, wearing a gabardine, somewhat too big coat, is my father. I am sitting next to him in a sailor's uniform. (...) I am teaching my children to know, where their roots come from. Remembering the past and respecting it and your own roots is very important*. Thus, *Kinsky's* unique and self-centered relationship is contrasted with *Piotr's* contextualized family history, its continuity and emphasized importance; the preferences of Poles and Americans for the two characters are contrastingly different.

This paper offers a cultural psychological perspective on masculinity—femininity. The essence of this approach consists of using cultural artifacts and experiments (see also Boski, et al., 1999; Boski, Struś, and Tłaga, 2004) instead of pure measurement scales as it is done in large cross-cultural projects of Hofstede (1998, 2001) or GLOBE (House, et al., 2004). Obviously our research paradigm is limited in scope and can never reach the level of a multi-national study. Yet, considering the inconclusive results of these large projects on femininity-masculinity and very strong effects obtained in the

present one, we conclude with the opinion that the cultural paradigm offers very promising prospects. We do not diagnose Polish culture as more or less feminine than that of North America; nor we think such statement is necessary. We challenge the widespread view that androgyny is the ultimate solution of gender issues (Bem, 2002) by showing unequivocal preference for “schema consistent” fiction characters. We have also demonstrated strong preference for female heroines which may be interpreted as the sign of *Zeitgeist* at least in the Western culture; though the personality profiles of ideal femininity largely differs between readers-participants on both sides of the Atlantic.

## NOTES

1. Cultural experiment (Boski, 2002) consists of a manipulation performed by a cultural psychologist on cultural artifacts, by analogy to bio-engineering invasion in genotype. In this context, gender transformation constitutes a cultural experiment.
2. A convention applied in this paper for presenting levels of significance renders \*\*\*= $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*= $p < 0.01$ ; and \*= $p < 0.05$ .
3. Since male/female and true/false characters differed for participants allocated to sets A and B, the sense of ‘within subject variables’ refers here to the sameness of four categories of measurements and not to the exact repetition of their objects.
4. It would be particularly interesting to broaden the scope of research to literature from other regions of the world. But as one of our colleagues, a specialist on Arab-Islamic culture remarked, a mechanical transformation of characters’ sex categories would be impossible in Arab novels. The contexts of female and male worlds are so different that complex translation would be required instead.

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