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Author: Eugenia Mandal, Karolina Zalewska

Citation style: Mandal Eugenia, Zalewska Karolina. (2012). The stereotype of femininity and the risk of suicide attempts W: E. Mandal (red.), "Masculinity and femininity in everyday life" (s.89-105). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.



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CHAPTER FIVE

The stereotype of femininity and the risk of suicide attempts

Eugenia Mandal

*Institute of Psychology
University of Silesia*

Karolina Zalewska

*Psychiatric Hospital
in Toszek*

Introduction

Suicide attempt is an act which does not end with death when a person consciously performs self-injury or takes any substances in prohibited or non-therapeutic dose (KREITMAN, 1976; O'CAROLL, 1998). Contrary to suicide, the suicide attempt (parasuicide) gives chance for survival (outside intervention is usually inevitable), and is a more often spontaneous act with ambivalence about death. STENGEL (1964) understands suicide attempts as manipulating behaviours, the goal of which is to “cry for help”, typical for women and people hurt by love crisis, financial problems and stressful, tempestuous life. The spread of suicide is shown by year index estimated for particular population, e.g. country. The lowest average suicide death index is noted in Egypt: 0.1 suicides per 10^5 people, and the highest: $40/10^5$ in Hungary, Russia and Lithuania. The index for Poland in years 1995—2005 was about $15/10^5$ of people (World Health Statistics, 2006). According to American statistics (American Association of Suicidology, 2006) the general number of suicidal attempts is over 780,000 per year, while the proportion of parasuicide to suicidal deaths remains relatively constant 25:1.

World statistics (EURO Multicentre on Parasuicide, 2006) show that women undertake suicidal attempts more often than men. On average,

there are three female's parasuicides to one man's, especially in the age range of 24—34. Moreover, the number of suicidal gestures in the group of women is significantly larger than number of parasuicides; at the same time, the number of parasuicides is several times greater than the number of suicides (DOPRAT and BOSWELL, 1963). The diversity of suicidal behaviours according to sex registered for many generations is relatively constant (JAROSZ, 1997).

The fact that women's attempts to commit suicide are often unsuccessful may be explained through gender stereotype perspective originating from cultural concept of femininity and masculinity.

Psychiatrists (BAUMEISTER, 1990; DIEKSTRA, 1994; FURGAŁ, 2004) link women's suicide attempts with other than men's emotional expression, i.e. spontaneousness, effusiveness, the need of sharing personal problems. Emotional openness of women results from cultural consent for weakness of females (BRANNON, 1999; MANDAL, 2000). Majority of parasuicides is characterized by the aspect of emotional demonstration, dramatic act to maintain interpersonal interaction, and instrumental use of threat of life loss, just to arouse strong feelings of other people (BAUMEISTER, 1990; DIEKSTRA, 1994; BROWN, COMTOIS and LINEHAN, 2002). It means that in suicidal behaviours of women we can find a call for help rather than the real wish for death. Men, on the other hand, are blocked by social request to be tough and smart (BRANNON, 1999). Overtaking the traditional role of men related to self-sufficiency, might cause that in a situation of accumulated tension men would choose suicidal death rather than humiliation and suicide attempt. In case of suicides committed by men, the dominant aspect is strong intention to kill themselves and thus to cut off interpersonal contacts (STENGEL, 1964; FURGAŁ, 2004).

The review of studies on suicide attempts (e.g. LINEHAN, CHILES, EGAN, DEVINE and LAFFAW, 1986; SORENSON and RUTTER, 1991; GOULD, FISHER, PARIDES, FLORY and SHAFFER, 1996; PŁUŻEK, 1997) give the significant connection between subjectively bad relationships, and committing parasuicide. Focusing on and concerning about the interpersonal relations, according to gender stereotypes, is the women's domain (BAKAN, 1966; CONSTANTINOPOLE, 1973; LEWIN, 1984).

American statistics data (American Association of Suicidology, 2006; www.womensissues.com, 2006) and Polish data (e.g. Police Department in Katowice, 2006) show that women decide on suicide attempt mainly (except cases of mental disorder) because of family misunderstandings and bad economic conditions.

Zenomena PŁUŻEK (1997) investigated 2,400 cases of parasuicides in Poland. It allowed her to classify the most frequent motives of suicide

attempts among women: conflicts with the closest members of family, feeling of social rejection, existential pains (loss of life-meaning, loneliness), no alternative solution, conflict with spouse (betrayal), problems at work or university, low self-esteem as well as blackmail, and finally, somatic illnesses.

American scientist Marsha M. LINEHAN together with her co-workers (1986) compared groups of psychiatric patients after suicide attempts, and the “suicide ideators” as well as patients who did not even think about suicide. The lack of interpersonal satisfaction, which was qualified as the biggest problem that caused crisis, showed over 60% parasuicides and nearly 30% of non-suicidal entities. According to O’CONNOR’S (1999) research, 20% of people after suicide attempts acknowledged interpersonal difficulties as dominant element of their “not-to-bear situation”. Difficulties in interpersonal relations occur in group of parasuicidal women regardless of their clinical diagnosis.

Another phenomenon indicating importance of cultural stereotype of women roles is diversification of suicide index for women in various social-professional groups, which has been noted in Poland and other countries (GORCEIX and ZIMBACCA, 1968; JAROSZ, 1997). Definitely many more suicidal acts are met in such professions like: constructors, or transport and mining workers. Also, suicidal attempts are often met among women on management positions — especially in technical and civil service industries. Here the number of deceases is even higher than men’s suicides (JAROSZ, 1997). The quoted professions might be classified as typical for men. Women in these jobs are obliged to connect two essential social roles, i.e. at work and at home, which causes the necessity of withdrawal from culturally elaborated stereotyped patterns of females behaviour. In the USA, since women started to take over professional men’s roles, the proportions of suicidal attempts among women have been decreasing compared to committed suicides (CARSON, BUTCHER and MINEKA, 2000). Probably professional activity, requiring activation of men’s behaviours (i.e. decisiveness, authoritativeness, operative thinking) may create more suicidal situations especially for women, who identify themselves, according to stereotypes, as weak feminine because of their psychological features.

Sandra BEM (1999) noticed, that people who were bounded by gender stereotype like “feminine women” and “masculine man”, had narrower domain of instrumental and emotional behaviour. In difficult situations or crisis, they may act in schematic way. Gender stereotypes may limit person’s skills of adaptation, by influencing their vivid behaviour, especially in difficult situations. It can be concluded, that stereotypes will be connected with acting of a person (who use stereotype as self-esteem form) and will influence the threat of suicidal tendencies.

Gender stereotypes include beliefs, internalized through socialization process, about psychic features and reactions that are adequate for both sexes, thus working as cognitive instrument of self-orientation in the role of woman and man (BRANNON, 1999; MANDAL, 2003). Kay DEAUX and Laurie LEVIS (1984) described the complexity of gender stereotype structure, and pointed out four components: features, social roles, appearance and profession. These components are coherent and mutually dependent, particularly the information about personality features brings stereotypical vision of fulfilled role. The stereotype of femininity encloses two dimensions: positive, that describes women as patient, sensitive, devoted; and negative — timid, weak, social desirable, dependent, nervous (RICARDELLI and WILLIAMS, 1995). High level of psychical femininity among women is generally linked with fear, worse self-esteem, sense of lower social acceptance than among men (STRYKOWSKA, 1992). From the suicidal point of view, these are typical characteristic features occurring among women, who attempt suicide (LINEHAN, CHILES, EGAN, DEVINE and LAFFAW, 1986; SZALAŃSKI, 2002) and directly affect the sphere of interpersonal functioning.

Since suicide attempts are more common among females, and that those attempts in majority are connected with interpersonal problems, the following variables were chosen for the analysis: gender identity, sense of self-appeal, attachment style, strategies of self-presentation, and coping style.

Gender identity is a set of psychological features that express femininity or masculinity which has been created since early childhood because of participation in social life (KUCZYŃSKA, 1992). The sense of gender identity builds itself in the structure of self, creating a label that is helpful in perception, description and identification of personal features and attitudes (BEM, 1999). Gender includes characteristic features, which are mainly based on gender stereotypes (DEAUX and LEWIS, 1984; EAGLY, 1987; MANDAL, 2003). The domination of psychological femininity over psychological masculinity may be the indicator of internalization of weak feminine stereotype, which is connected with the other examined features.

The sense of self-appeal is an integral element of gender stereotype. It is created over the lifespan of interpersonal relations and is based on the norms in a given culture (BUSS, 2000; NĘCKI, 1996). It is not about real attractiveness, which means that woman objectively looks charming, but the inner self-picture does not (see GŁĘBOCKA and KULBAT, 2005). Subjective sense of self-appeal is the ingredient of self-concept, cognitive self-representation that points out the direction of one's behaviour (DYM-KOWSKI, 1993). One's perceived attractiveness may influence social atti-

tudes or interpersonal behavioural styles (SHEA, CROSSMAN and ADAMS, 1978). It is an important conclusion for the subject of parasuicides. It may be expected that estimation of self-appeal (according to stereotype of femininity) may play regulative function on behaviour. The lower sense of self-appeal, the lower level of interpersonal skills, and higher risk of acts of self-destruction.

Attachment style is the next factor strongly connected with quality of undertaken social interactions and depends on gender stereotypes. Attachment style is the complex constellation of anticipations which are formulated toward proximity level of interpersonal relations, and the complex of emotions and bonding behaviours the goal of which is to gratify individual needs (HAZAN and SHAVER, 1987; KUCZYŃSKA, 2001). Attachment styles are the result of early, original bond with parents. The main function of attachment is to assure the subject the guarantee the sense of safety (BOWLBY, 1973). Cindy HAZAN and Philip SHAVER (1987) described three basic attachment styles: secure — characterizes people who feel to be liked and wanted by others, they emphasized being able to accept and support their partner; anxious/ambivalent — typical for people who feel uncertain in most of interpersonal situations, and they desire for reciprocation and wish to make the union with their partner, although they fear incessantly to be abandoned; avoidant style — characterizes people who undertake defensive behaviours that sustain distance; they have difficulties to establish close, intimate contact, because of unconscious fear of being abandoned.

The patterns of socialization, based on gender stereotypes, might give the direction to expectations about kind of attachment. According to stereotype, women are more often submissive and passive, while men are independent and active (BRANNON, 1999; MANDAL, 2000). Submissive women, full of fear about closeness may be characterized by anxious/ambivalent or avoidant style (FEENEY and NOLLER, 1996). Because of difficulties in relations with close people that are signaled in researches, these styles should be acknowledged as possible among women with suicidal attempt tendencies; avoidant and anxious/ambivalent style result in low satisfaction of partnership and may block access to social support (FEENEY and NOLLER, 1996).

Strategies of self-presentation are also linked with dealing with problematic interpersonal situations. These strategies are different forms of actions, the goal of which is to create a particular impression of the self (like appearance, psychic features, behaviours) to gain someone's sympathy, good will, support or help (LEARY, 1994; KENRICK, NEUBERG and CIALDINI, 2002). Controlling impression of the self is based on existing in particular society stereotypes concerning reaction to others on a speci-

fied creation (ADLER, ROSENFELD, RUSSEL and PROCTOR, 2006). The following are distinguished among strategies of self-presentation: adonization — using and exposing the aspects of physical self-attractiveness, coqueting of relations; self-promotion — showing own high competence, being accomplished or successful appreciation of the partner, flattering other person; conformism — submission and agreement with partner's initiatives; self-depreciation — lowering self-esteem by showing own weakness and self-criticism (JONES and WORTMAN, 1973; LEARY, 1994; MANDAL, 2000).

According to gender stereotypes, women are supposed to be modest (PANDEY, 1986; DABUL, WOSIŃSKA, CIALDINI, MANDAL and DION, 1997). Defensive and submissive strategies at self-presentation may, however, enhance the sense of dependence on others and helplessness. People showing their weakness, by undertaking passive attitude, limit their access to social support and create inner sense of loneliness. Thus, they form psychological conditions for the decision about suicide attempt.

The coping style is the specific tendency for individual to react when facing with negative and potentially threatening events. It determines the effective response to some external and internal stress factors which are appraised as aggravating or overcoming individual resources (LAZARUS and FOLKMAN, 1994). Norman ENDLER and James PARKER (1994) distinguished three main coping styles: task-oriented, emotion-focused, and avoidance-oriented, concentrating on seeking out other people (social diversion) or engaging in a substitute task (distraction). The change of stressful situation may happen on bipolar continuum: from emotional (overcoming the negative nervous tension) to instrumental (changing external situation or the way of interaction between subject and environment) (BISHOP, 2000). It is admitted stereotypically that first pole is more feminine and the second more masculine (PTACEK, SMITH and ZANAS, 1992).

Studies on the types of stressful situations and reactions to them (HAMILTON and FAGOT, 1988) show that people generally use emotional style of coping with interpersonal problems, which are significant determinants in parasuicides. What is characteristic, women potentially more often face stress connected with interpersonal interactions (BRANNON, 1999). It is essential that people cannot use the way of coping which they do not believe they possess (PARGAMENT, 1997). So probably stereotypical women would mainly make use of emotion-focused style, and in their repertoire of reactions would go for suicide attempts as the forms of emotional manipulation.

The aim of the presented search was to answer the question whether there is a connection between psychological femininity, stereotypically

feminine set of psycho-social features (cognitive and emotional personal resources used for interpersonal situations), and women's suicide attempts. Moreover, whether it is possible to detect among these chosen variables the highest risk factors for suicide attempts.

The following hypotheses were put forward: women with suicide attempts compared with women without suicide attempts have more stereotypically feminine profile of features:

- strong psychological femininity and weak psychological masculinity
- low sense of self-appeal
- anxious/ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles
- defensive strategies of self-presentation
- emotion- and avoidance-oriented styles of behaviour in stressful situations.

Methods

Subjects

The search group has been established by 35 adult females, who attempted suicide during two years before study. At the time of research all the women were patients of psychiatric wards in clinical institutions of three Polish voivodeships: śląskie, małopolskie, opolskie. The dominant diagnosis in this group of females were: depression (45%) and personality disorders (21%). Nearly 33% of women from search group were under diagnostic process. To eliminate cases where suicidal attempts might have been the result of delusion, imperatives or hallucinations, there were included no women mentally retarded or with active psychosis. Most of the women (83%) had two or more suicidal attempts in their lives. The average age was 36.2 years (SD = 9.88). The marital status of the women in search group: married (18 people — 51.42%), single (11), widowed (3), divorced (3). Education: elementary (4 people), vocational training (8), high-school level (17), university degree (6).

Thirty-five females who had never undertaken a suicidal attempt in their lives established the control group. The average age was 34.7 years (SD = 9.23). There were purposive sampling used during recruitment process to this group to control such variables as age, marital status, education, region of living.

Measures

There were the following measures used in research:

1. Gender Inventory (IPP), KUCZYŃSKA (1992), which is the Polish adaptation of Bem Sex Roles Inventory (BSRI) (1974). The inventory consists of 35 items which the subject refers to on five-point scale (1 — *I am not like this at all*, 5 — *It is exactly how I am*), where 5 means the highest intensification of the feature. Items are grouped into two scales: scale of femininity and scale of masculinity, 15 items in each scale. 5 items serve as a buffer. The sum of point gathered in inventory is the basis for psychological type of gender. Reliability index for femininity scale $r_{tt} = .78$, masculinity scale $r_{tt} = .78$.
2. Attachment Style (SHAVER, HAZAN and BRADSHAW, 1987). It includes three alternative descriptions according to three distinguished attachment styles: secure, anxious/ambivalent, avoidant; subject chooses the one which characterizes him/her the best.
3. Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS), ENDLER and PARKER (1994), in Polish adaptation of SZCZEPANIAK, STREALU and WRZEŚNIEWSKI (1996). Subject refers to each item on five point scale (1 — *I never do so*, 5 — *I do it very often*); there are 48 items which describe ways of behaviour in difficult and stressful situations. Items are grouped into three scales: task-oriented, emotion-oriented, avoidance-oriented, 16 items per each scale, and the scale of avoidance is divided into two underscales: social diversion (5 items) and distraction (8 items). Reliability signified by *Cronbach's alpha* ($N = 296$) for particular scales takes .71—.89; test — retest reliability: .73—.86; validity — three factors cover 31.7% of result variance.
4. Scale of Self-Appeal (SPWA), the authorial method. It consists of 31 items, 25 of which are grouped into five dimensions of attractiveness (5 to each): physical (health, appearance, beauty), intellectual (conviction about own cognitive maturity and decision-making skills), professional (engaging own resources and skills to achieve good professional status), interpersonal (self-perception in categories of being sociable person, having friends) and partner attractiveness (participation in partnership, which is created as arena for development and receiving gratification of love, bond and care). The individual refers to every item on 5-point scale (1 — *I do not agree at all*, 5 — *I agree*). Reliability: *Cronbach's alpha* ($N = 296$), for particular scales, takes: physical attractiveness .72, interpersonal .65, intellectual .84, professional .79, partner attractiveness .73; validity — five scales cover 60% of result variance.

5. Strategies of Self-Presentation Questionnaire (KSA), the authorial method. Consists of 20 items, describing ways of woman's behaviour in relations with other persons in order to gain sympathy and good will. Items are grouped in five underscales, which constitute self-presentation tactics: adonization, self-promotion, appreciation of the partner, conformism, self-depreciation (4 items per each scale). The individual refers to every item on 5-point scale (1 — *I never do so*, 5 — *I nearly always do so*). Reliability: *Cronbach's alpha* for particular scales, takes: adonization .75, self-promotion .62, appreciation of the partner .60, conformism .75, self-depreciation .69. Validity: KMO index .79.

Results

The analysis of intergroup differences by using method of variance analysis ANOVA showed that independent variables have different values in the group of females who attempted suicide and the sample of females who never attempted suicide. Women with suicidal attempts achieved significantly lower index of psychical masculinity ($M = 37.60$) ($SD = 11.44$) than women without suicidal attempts ($M = 48.34$), for $F(1.68) = 16.41$, $p < .00001$. The difference in the level of femininity for both groups was insignificant (see Table 1).

Table 1. The index of psychological femininity and masculinity in groups: 35 women with suicide attempts (parasuicides) and 35 women without suicide attempts (control). ANOVA results

Gender identity	Parasuicides		Control group		F(1.68)	p <
	M	SD	M	SD		
Femininity	53.629	7.693	54.714	6.299	0.417	.520
Masculinity	37.600	11.446	48.343	10.726	16.415	.0001

The women who attempted suicide were characterized by generally lower sense of self-appeal than the women from control group, in each aspect of the tests: physical attractiveness (women with suicide attempts $M = 12.60$) (control group $M = 18.34$), $F(1.68) = 43.98$, $p < .00001$; intellectual (women with suicide attempts $M = 12.86$), (control group $M = 18.63$), $F(1.68) = 35.76$, $p < .00001$; professional (women with suicidal attempts $M = 12.60$), (control group $M = 16.80$), $F(1.68) = 15.41$,

$p < .00001$; interpersonal attractiveness (women with suicide attempts $M = 16.48$), (control group $M = 20.91$), $F(1.68) = 43.98$, $p < .00001$; and partner attractiveness (women with suicide attempts $M = 15.40$), (control group $M = 19.80$), $F(1.68) = 19.33$, $p < .00001$ (see Table 2).

Table 2. The self-appeal in groups: 35 women with suicide attempts (parasuicides) and 35 women without suicide attempts (control). ANOVA results

Self-appeal	Group	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	F(1.68)	p <
Physical attractiveness	Parasuicides	12.60	3.96	.50	-.20	43.98	.0001
	Control	18.34	3.24	-.87	.14		
Interpersonal attractiveness	Parasuicides	16.48	3.91	.02	-.57	32.17	.0001
	Control	20.91	2.45	-.67	-.19		
Partner attractiveness	Parasuicides	15.40	4.23	-.37	.075	19.33	.0001
	Control	19.80	4.14	-.95	.061		
Professional attractiveness	Parasuicides	12.60	4.81	.32	-.68	15.41	.0001
	Control	16.80	4.11	.13	.05		
Intellectual attractiveness	Parasuicides	12.86	4.52	-.31	-.87	35.76	.0001
	Control	18.63	3.49	.21	-1.09		

The avoidant attachment style was diagnosed among women with suicidal attempts significantly more often, than in the control group; it was characteristic for 22 women (62.90%), who had suicide attempts and 12 women (34.30%) from the control group. Secure attachment style in group of parasuicides occurred in 4 entities (11.40%) and in the group of women without suicide attempts in 19 cases (54.30%) (see Table 3). The differences in the attachment style between women after suicide attempts and women from control group were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 14.65$, Cramer’s V index = .45, $p < .001$).

Table 3. Frequency of particular attachment styles in groups: 35 women with suicide attempts and 35 women without suicide attempts

Attachment style	Women with suicide attempts		Women without suicide attempts	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
Secure	4	11.4	19	54.3
Anxious/ambivalent	9	25.7	4	11.4
Avoidant	22	62.9	12	34.3

Women with suicide attempts used the self-depreciation strategy more often ($M = 13.66$) than women from the control group ($M = 9.89$), $F(1.68) = 26.14$, $p < .0001$. On the other hand, parasuicides achieved

lower scores for scale of adonization ($M = 8.46$) than women from the control group ($M = 10.26$), $F(1.68) = 5.24$, $p < .025$. Similarly, women with suicidal attempts scored lower results ($M = 9.51$) in positive self-promotion application than women without suicidal attempts ($M = 11.23$), $F(1.68) = 4.97$, $p < .029$ (see Table 4).

Table 4. Strategies of self-presentation in groups: 35 women with suicide attempts (parasuicides) and 35 women without suicide attempts (control). ANOVA results

Strategies of self-presentation	Group	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	F(1.68)	p <
Self-promotion	Parasuicides	9.51	2.70	.36	-.54	4.97	.029
	Control	11.23	3.65	-.39	-.57		
Adonization	Parasuicides	8.46	3.47	.46	-.63	5.24	.025
	Control	10.26	3.09	-.49	-.35		
Appreciation of the partner	Parasuicides	13.46	2.96	-.001	-.54	0.78	.381
	Control	14.11	3.26	-.69	-.13		
Conformism	Parasuicides	13.60	2.94	-.38	.28	0.89	.347
	Control	12.89	3.35	-.33	-.52		
Self-depreciation	Parasuicides	13.66	3.26	-.38	-.22	26.14	.000
	Control	9.89	2.89	-.056	-.83		

Women with suicide attempts used in a bigger extend the coping style oriented on emotion ($M = 61.03$) to deal with stressful situations than women from control group ($M = 44.88$), $F(1.68) = 53.55$, $p < .0001$ (see Table 5).

Table 5. Styles of coping in stressful situations in groups: 35 women with suicide attempts (parasuicides) and 35 women without suicide attempts (control). ANOVA results

Coping styles	Group	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	F(1.68)	p <
Emotion-oriented	Parasuicides	61.03	7.34	-.61	-.62	53.55	.000
	Control	44.88	10.79	.79	.55		
Task-oriented	Parasuicides	48.06	7.35	-.003	-.63	42.70	.000
	Control	59.86	7.74	-.31	-.50		
Avoidance-oriented	Parasuicides	43.08	10.16	.36	.27	0.043	.836
	Control	42.57	10.49	.84	.41		
Distraction	Parasuicides	20.88	6.11	.08	-.58	8.39	.005
	Control	16.71	5.93	.72	-.11		
Social diversion	Parasuicides	13.83	4.72	.56	.26	14.21	.000
	Control	18.06	4.66	.31	-.14		

The parasuicides were far more ($M = 20.88$) characterized by style of coping oriented on substitute task than the control group ($M = 16.71$),

$F(1.68) = 8.38$ for $p < .005$. The mean scores for women with suicide attempts for task-oriented style and social diversion were: ($M = 48.05$) and ($M = 13.82$), and for women without suicide attempts: ($M = 59.86$) and ($M = 18.06$); $F(1.68) = 42.70$, $F(1.68) = 14.21$ significant for $p < .0001$. There was no statistically significant relation between avoidance-oriented style of coping and the women's tendencies to perform suicide attempts (see Table 5).

There were women's suicide attempt risk factors assessed, from particular independent variables, with the backup of binary logistic regression (stepwise regression method). The following predictors were proved: avoidant attachment style $\text{Exp}(B) = .35$, $p < .038$; self-depreciation $\text{Exp}(B) = .64$, $p < .014$; low sense of self-appeal in the domain of partner attractiveness $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.37$, $p < .023$; emotion-oriented coping style $\text{Exp}(B) = .83$, $p < .001$. This configuration of variables in the model explained 59% of variation (see Table 6).

Table 6. Suicide attempt risk predictors. Results of logistic regression analysis

Variables	Beta*	SEM	Wald	df	Exp(B)	p <
Emotion-oriented coping style	-.19	.06	10.50	1	0.83	.001
Avoidant attachment	-1.04	.50	4.28	1	0.35	.038
Strategy of self-depreciation	-.44	.18	6.06	1	0.64	.014
Partner attractiveness	.31	.14	5.19	1	1.37	.023

* By minus values of Beta: the closer is Odds Ratio [Exp(B)] value to 0, the higher is risk of suicidal attempt. By the plus values of Beta: if Exp(B) value is higher than 1, there is a lower risk of suicidal attempt.

Discussion

The collected results confirmed the hypothesis that women attempting suicide in comparison to women without suicide attempts, are characterized by such psycho-social functioning features which fit to stereotypically weak femininity. As it occurred, the index of psychological masculinity in the group of women with suicide attempts was significantly lower than for the women without suicidal tendencies. In the domain of psychological femininity there were no significant differences. Lower level of sense of self-appeal was also affirmed among women with suicidal attempts. This score confirmed the data coming from other research referring to low self-esteem among parasuicides (LINEHAN, CHILES, EGAN, DEVINE and LAFFAW, 1986; PŁUŻEK, 1997; SZALAŃSKI, 2002).

Presented studies elicited that women with suicide attempts were identified as those applying avoidant attachment style. It may influence the difficulties in interpersonal relations, especially in close relationships. Individuals who are characterized by this attachment style often withdraw from intimate social contacts, which may result in difficulties to get a social support in problematic live events. Moreover, avoidant attachment style blocks the natural need to ask for help from others in the stressful situations (FEENEY and NOLLER, 1996). There is a negative correlation between avoidant attachment style and sense of satisfaction from own partnership relation (HAZAN and SHAVER, 1987). Similarly, anxious/ambivalent attachment style, also used by tested parasuicides, brings the risk of lack of satisfaction in interpersonal contacts. It causes that people unconsciously sabotage their own relations with close relatives. The simultaneous desire to create a unique union and the fear that they might be soon rejected develops frustration and often despair (HAZAN and SHAVER, 1987).

Strategies of self-presentation preferred by women with suicide attempts, were featured by defensiveness. Self-depreciation strategy may enhance sense of dependency and helplessness, thus having an effect on reduction of own coping in stress. People who present themselves as ones without positive character features, may be perceived as less active and non-assertive. These self-presentational behaviours are compatible with the stereotype of weak women. The reason of avoidance of self-promotion (positive self-presentation) by parasuicides, may be explained with the fact that emphasizing own values and boasting seem to be conceived as typically men's strategies (PANDEY, 1986; DABUL et al., 1997).

Presented studies also showed that emotional style of coping in stressful situations and avoidant style focused on substitute task were dominant among women with suicide attempts. It conforms to the stereotype of weak femininity. The majority of stressful situations which are faced by women with suicidal behaviours, have the character of interpersonal conflict; the most often these are family problems (LINEHAN, CHILES, EGAN, DEVINE and LAFFAW, 1986; O'CONNOR, 1999; PŁUŻEK, 1997). In this kind of situations people usually react with emotional strategies (HAMILTON and FAGOT, 1988). The reason of concentrating mainly on emotional dimension of stressful situations may also be the result of wrong attribution of causes and learned helplessness of parasuicides (COLE, 1988; SZALAŃSKI, 2002). Emotional way of answering to stress or passive behaviours which involve diversion, suppression of activity toward changing stressful conditions, may result in deeper sense of helplessness and lack of possibilities of dealing with a difficult situation. Concentration on

negative experiences and the lack of discerning the opportunity to fight problems may lead women to attempt suicide.

The above research elicited that the strongest predictors of risk of suicide attempt were as follows: avoidant-attachment style, self-depreciation strategy, low sense of partner attractiveness and emotion-oriented style of coping. The most important meaning of the attachment style for risk of suicide attempts may come from the fact that this feature develops since early childhood. It determines the frequency and level of closeness in relations with others (BOWLBY, 1973; AINSWORTH, 1976). Avoidant-attachment style which characterizes parasuicides implicates interpersonal distance. This distance is a paradoxical reaction of the subject on the strong, unconscious need for intimacy (HAZAN and SHAVER, 1987).

Attachment style is also significantly connected with behaviours that regulate emotions and dealing with stress. People with avoidant attachment style hardly ever engage in searching for effective support in situations of crisis and strong tension and fear. Usually, they physically and psychically withdraw from partner (KOBAK and SCEERY, 1988; FEE-NEY and NOLLER, 1996). Women with suicide attempts focused mainly on their own emotional status in difficult situations, not on searching for help. Strategy of self-depreciation in self-presentation, which apparently seems to indicate uninventiveness of women who use this strategy, may also serve parasuicides to maintain and intensify the distance toward relatives, whereas narrowing social contacts in this way and the lack of the ability of direct-communication increase the probability of manifestation of the experienced difficulties through suicidal attempts.

Summing up, it should be stressed that gender stereotypes context contributes to new perspective on suicidal phenomenon. Clinical psychology issues are considered from the point of view of social and cultural gender aspects. Components of stereotypes are coherent and depend on each other. Especially, information about personality features implicates the concept of performed social roles (DEAUX and LEVIS, 1984). Thus, stereotype as cognitive schemata, helpful in the self-conceptualizing, may determine taking steps toward behaviours which are clinically considered as disadaptational or dangerous for life.

Confirmed connections between weak femininity stereotype and suicide attempts, as shown in this study, may be helpful in psychotherapeutic or prevention programs for women with suicidal tendencies. In such programs, the important element would be the change of strong identification of parasuicides with stereotype of weak femininity into a personality integrating both feminine and masculine components.

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