

Reflexivity and the Construction of Competing Discourses of Masculinity in a Female-Dominated Profession

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This paper contributes to the debates on reflexivity and change by extending our understanding of (non-)reflexivity mechanisms in the discursive constructions of gender. Specifically, I explore how and why women persistently construct contradictory discursive accounts of men and masculinity in a female-dominated profession of counselling psychology in Russia. Drawing on the concept of 'interpretative repertoires' I argue that female counsellors construct different kinds of masculinities based on three 'repertoires': psycho-biological, structural and relational. I demonstrate how these constructions of masculinity are imbued with different meanings and are used to explain only certain contexts, which precludes women's ability to reflect on their contradictory nature. I conclude by discussing how an exploration of discursive (non-)reflexivity extends our understanding of the conditions for gender transformations.

Keywords: reflexivity, discourses, masculinity, female-dominated profession, interpretative repertoires

Introduction

Recent feminist scholarship has expressed much interest in the role of reflexivity in challenging and changing conventional gender ideologies (Adkins, 2003; Barad, 2007; Brooks and Wee, 2008; Martin, 2006; McNay, 1999; Simpson, 2011). This paper contributes to these debates on the transformative potential of reflexivity by exploring the mechanisms that hinder reflexivity in the discursive constructions of masculinity in a female-dominated profession. Whilst acknowledging that the term 'reflexivity' is complex and widely contested (Beck *et al.*, 1994; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Giddens, 1991), here it is used to refer to a capacity to recognize and monitor one's conceptions, beliefs and practices of gender by 'cogitating, studying and thinking carefully' (Martin, 2003, p. 356). Drawing on in-depth interviews with female counselling psychologists in Russia, I explore how these women construct contradictory discursive accounts of their male colleagues and masculinity, and offer a lens through which to explain how and why they appear to be non-reflexive about these conflicting constructions.

Exploring non-traditional occupations has been a fruitful context in which to understand possibilities to challenge conventional gender norms (Adams, 2006; Ainsworth *et al.*, 2014; Cross and Bagilhole, 2002; McDonald, 2012; Pullen and Simpson, 2009; Simpson, 2005, 2011; Williams, 1995). For example, it has been suggested that the presence of men in traditionally female-dominated occupations will inspire reflexivity, which in turn may incite transformations by making taken-for-granted gender dynamics more visible. However, reflexivity does not always occur in such cases as predicted; moreover, being reflexive about gendered realities does not always result in their transformation

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(Adkins, 2003; Martin, 2006; McNay, 1999; Simpson, 2005, 2011). In fact, research still struggles to fully explain the link between reflexivity and change as well as the necessary conditions for reflexivity, i.e. why and how it happens in some circumstances and not in others (Adams, 2006; Farrugia, 2013). When exploring reflexivity processes, most recent research has focused on understanding the capacity to *self-reflect*, for instance, on one's own gender practices. Studies typically view gender as an *embodied practice* and treat talk as a medium through which to understand these practices. This means that while some mechanisms of embodied reflexivity have been identified, exploration of *discursive* reflexivity mechanisms has largely been neglected. This omission warrants attention because as well as 'doing' gender, we constantly construct our and 'the other'¹ gender through the use of language. In fact, many scholars argue that talk and language is a form of practice in itself (Fairclough, 1989, 2003; Foucault, 1972) and that gendered discourses play a central role in the construction of gendered practices (Martin, 2006). Therefore, investigating discursive reflexivity mechanisms is a critical step towards improving our understanding of the conditions for reflexivity and moving forward the debate on its transformative potential. This paper contributes to extant literature by complementing our understanding of embodied self-reflexivity with an analysis of reflexivity mechanisms and their limits in the process of the *discursive* construction of gender that is not our own. Specifically, I ask how conflicting accounts of masculinity are constructed and how they are able to 'co-exist' in women's narratives. How does reflexivity occur in the process of talk, if at all?

Focusing on the accounts of counselling psychologists in Russia offers a fruitful context for exploring the mechanisms of discursive reflexivity for several reasons. Firstly, the preoccupation with the 'self' in late modernity (Giddens, 1991) and the significance attached to self-reflection and emotional intelligence (Furedi, 2004) go hand in hand with the rise of a therapy culture and the expansion of professional psychology. The nature of the counselling profession requires these specialists to be able to reflect critically on clients' issues and to possess high levels of self-awareness and self-reflexivity as an integral part of their professional competence. Therefore, scrutinizing (un)reflexive accounts of counsellors may allow the complexities of the reflexive process to be unpacked further. Secondly, the counselling profession in Russia has been female-dominated since its emergence in the late 1980s (Griffin and Karepova, 2011) and, as discussed above, non-traditional occupations have proved to be a useful platform for the study of gender reflexivity mechanisms. Finally, given the persisting contradictions and inconsistencies of official gender rhetoric in (post-)socialist Russia (Ashwin, 2000; Attwood, 1990), investigating discursive reflexivity in this setting may show how individual discursive constructions of gender are embedded in wider social narratives.

To make sense of the women's accounts, I draw on the concept of 'interpretative repertoires', which are broadly defined as recurrent themes and patterns of talk (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Wetherell and Potter, 1988). Drawing on an analysis of in-depth interviews with female counsellors in Russia, I demonstrate that the counsellors' constructions of masculinity were based on three different repertoires: *psycho-biological*, *structural* and *relational*. I argue that teasing out how the different masculinity constructions are rooted in particular repertoires may help explain how reflexivity in women's accounts is obstructed. Reflexivity work is suggested as a potentially fruitful lens through which to articulate the relationship between discursive reflexivity and change.

The article proceeds with an analysis of the extant literature on reflexivity, arguing a need to focus on the discursive aspect. After a brief outline of the Russian context and data, three repertoires and three 'competing' constructions of masculinity are analysed, followed by a discussion of the findings.

Reflexivity and the potential for change

Beck *et al.* (1994, p. 174) argue that 'the more societies are modernised, the more agents (subjects) acquire the ability to reflect on the social conditions of their existence and to change them accordingly'. They maintain that such reflexivity may increase the possibility of questioning norms and structures. However, reflexivity and its transformative potential remain hotly debated (e.g. Adams,

2006; Adkins, 2003; Archer, 2010; Barad, 2007; Farrugia, 2013; Martin, 2006; Sweetman, 2003). Archer (2007, 2010, 2012), for example, argues that reflexivity is an inherent property of all individuals; it happens naturally and usually leads to action, albeit somewhat constrained (or enabled) by contextual circumstances. On the other hand, Adkins (2003) suggests that advocates of reflexivity fail to acknowledge that individuals' cognition does not exist outside the social world. Hence, a more situated understanding of reflexivity is offered, drawing on Bourdieusian theory, suggesting that social structures and norms are embedded and embodied in the habitus — a system of lasting dispositions, which determines individuals' practices and perceptions (Bourdieu, 1990). Reflexivity, then, is said to happen 'in circumstances where there is lack of "fit" between the habitus ("the feel for the game") and field ("the game itself"), that is, when synchronicity between subjective and objective structures is broken' (Adkins, 2003, p. 21).² For instance, the presence of men in feminized occupations may break the 'fit' between habitus and field, instigating critical reflection on gender (McNay, 1999).

However, dissonance or a 'lack of fit' does not always and/or 'automatically' instigate reflexivity or transformation. For example, although men in non-traditional jobs 'breach' the 'hegemonic masculinity' standards (Cross and Bagilhole, 2002; Lupton, 2000; Sargent, 2000), this does not necessarily lead them to question gender norms. On the contrary, they often tend to reassert their masculinity, disassociate from feminine tasks and otherwise stick to gender stereotypes (McDonald, 2012; Pullen and Simpson, 2009; Simpson, 2005; Williams, 1993). Similarly, women in non-traditional occupations often adjust their practices and behaviours to 'fit in', hence reproducing rather than reflecting critically on traditional gender norms (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2014; Dick and Cassell, 2002; Martin, 2006).

Several researchers have expressed doubts about the critical potential of reflexivity (for discussion, see Adams, 2006; Farrugia, 2013) and some (e.g., Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1997) reject reflexivity as a critical concept, arguing that reflection is effectively a return to the 'same' and therefore produces no new patterns. However, rather than rejecting the concept altogether, a more fruitful line of theorizing is a recognition that reflexivity is not homogeneous and should not be viewed in binary 'either/or' terms (e.g., present/absent or transformative/non-transformative). For instance, certain embodied aspects of identity (like gender) are more difficult than others to reflect on and to question because 'unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity cannot easily be reshaped' (McNay, 1999, p. 103). Brooks and Wee (2008) argue that the intensity of the 'lack of fit' matters and that everyone has a different threshold at which dissonance triggers reflexivity. In the same vein, Simpson (2011) suggests that different people exhibit different levels of reflexivity and that only certain levels of reflection lead to change. Archer (2007, 2010, 2012) also suggests that there are four modes of practising reflexivity and that not all of them entail action or change in the same way. Hence, I suggest that identifying the mechanisms and conditions that impede or stimulate critical reflection is a fruitful direction in which to take this debate.

The aforementioned studies have shed some light on the process of reflexivity, yet they view reflexivity predominantly as a theory of subjectivity and explore the possibilities for *self-reflexivity* in relation to gender as an *embodied practice*, i.e. how do/can we reflect on doing our own gender. Yet, reflexivity 'arises from a self-conscious relation with *the Other*' (Simpson, 2011, p. 378); therefore, it is no less important to be able to reflect on the process of *discursive* construction of the gender that is not one's own. Interestingly, exploring the possibility of such reflexivity has been largely neglected, partly because much research tends to employ Bourdieusian theory in which embodiment is central and habitus is very much pre-reflexive and pre-linguistic (Bourdieu, 1990). The focus is usually on gender practices rather than on language. Whilst most research uses interview data, participants' accounts are used only as a way of understanding embodied (gender) practices, missing out on the analysis of the linguistic aspect.

However, language in itself is an (embodied) practice (Fairclough, 1989, 2003; Foucault, 1972). Moreover, gender as embodied practice and gender as discourse are by no means mutually exclusive concepts: we construct our own and the 'other' gender discursively and then 'draw on, resist and play with discursive practices, shifting within and between different positions' (Simpson, 2011, p. 381). Archer (2007, p. 40) suggests that, whilst for Bourdieu embodiment gives a 'feel for the game', increasingly novel and global games 'need to be mastered by an intensively discursive and deliberative

approach'. Thus, I do not suggest a return to a disembodied understanding of reflexivity; but I argue that it is important to complement our knowledge of embodied self-reflexivity with an analysis of reflexivity in the process of constructing gender through talk. Because gendered discourses constitute gendered practices (Martin, 2006), investigating the possibility of becoming aware and critical of these constructions and unpacking the mechanisms of discursive reflexivity is an important step to understanding the link between reflexivity and transformation. The next section discusses a lens through which, I suggest, it is possible to understand contradictions in discursive accounts and (un)reflexivity mechanisms in talk.

Discourses, contradictions and reflexivity

Research suggests that discourse has material consequences and that analysis of language in use can improve our understanding of patterns of inequality creation and change (Frenkel, 2008; Nentwich, 2006; Weatherall, 2002). Fairclough (2003) argues that discourses construct social categories and processes and, at the same time, social actors (re)produce discursive representations of practices. For example, the (re)production of certain discursive constructions of gender fosters the continuity of job segregation patterns (Ness, 2012). However, the mutually reciprocal relationship between discourse and practice may have the potential to change gender practices by changing discourses (Frenkel, 2008). For example, Dick and Cassell's (2002) study of workplace diversity initiatives demonstrates that, in order to change actual inequality practices in the workplace, it is important to understand how to change *discursive* practices of gender.

Discursive constructions of gender may often be contradictory. For example, when women in feminized professions talk about men's advantages, they often justify the status quo, e.g. drawing on a male breadwinner ideology (Martin, 2006; Simpson, 2011), while at the same time criticizing men's promotion and advancement (Williams, 1995). Allan (1993) shows that preferential hiring of male elementary teachers caused conflicts with female staff, and the women interviewed questioned male qualifications and doubted their skills and suitability for the job. Similarly, Simpson (2011) demonstrates that female nurses justify some of men's advantages but at the same time express resentment when men avoid certain day-to-day menial work deemed to be 'feminine'. Another typical paradox arises when interviewees talk about men in female-dominated professions as needing to be masculine role models, yet their masculinity and heterosexuality is doubted because they do a 'woman's job' (Allan, 1993; Sargent, 2000; Sevier and Ashcraft, 2009). The above examples indicate that contradictory discursive constructions of masculinity do not necessarily cause dissonance or inspire reflexivity.

I argue that in order to begin to understand the existence of such conflicting accounts and why such dissonance does not trigger discursive reflexivity, it is helpful to draw on the works in discursive psychology (Weatherall, 2002; Wetherell and Potter, 1988). Specifically, this research shows that the existence of multiple discursive accounts of a single phenomenon is very common. Mulkey and Gilbert (1982), for instance, analyse how scientists' accounts of the same phenomenon — the research process — varied depending on whether they were accounting for success or failure. They described successful results ('correct belief') as the due result of successful experimental research and as a natural process of scientific inquiry. However, 'errors' (incorrect belief) were attributed to personal faults of the researcher and other non-scientific influences. Mulkey and Gilbert argue that such different explanations are not a distortion of data or a lie, but happen because accounts of the world will necessarily be related to the context in which they are produced. In other words, when one talks about a phenomenon in a particular setting, a certain 'range' of terms and explanatory resources — a particular 'interpretative repertoire' — is available in this situation. Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 172) argue that, whilst discourses and accounts vary, 'there is regularity in the variation' and the concept of *interpretative repertoires* is a way to think about and tease out these regularities. Interpretative repertoires are therefore defined as 'recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena'; in other words, they are patterns of explanatory resources (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 149).³ This concept is a distinct analytical tool used in the

process of discourse analysis and, since it has been developed specifically as a way to understand contradictions in participants' accounts, I suggest that it is a useful tool to make sense of how women construct varying accounts of masculinity and explain the lack of reflexivity. In this paper then, interpretative repertoires are viewed as units or patterns of explanations on which counsellors draw to construct masculinity in different contexts, and which are embedded in and constitutive of a broader discourse of gender and masculinity.

Russian gender(ed) rhetoric

No discourse is formed in a vacuum (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1972) and in order to situate individual accounts and repertoires in the broader cultural context, it is essential to point out that the official gender rhetoric in Russia has always been riddled with contradictory messages. During the Communist regime, the main gender discourse was that of equality. However, the large-scale entry of women into paid labour was driven mainly by the Soviet state's economic and (bio)political concerns (Attwood, 1990). Equality was mainly in policy and numbers whilst the deeper social constructions of masculinity and femininity remained rather traditional and were typically rooted in an essentialist biological discourse. Women were encouraged to take up 'men's jobs', yet they were not supposed to be like men (Gorsuch, 1996). Women were constructed as 'better halves', which effectively meant that they were imbued with a responsibility to work *and* to 'nurture', i.e. to take care of men, children and the household. Men, on the other hand, continued to be viewed as a 'strong shoulder', needing to be 'manly' and 'virile' although, with the State occupying the dominant 'paternal' position in society, research has argued that men were largely emasculated under the Soviet regime (see Ashwin, 2000, 2006).

As a result of the failure to redefine the traditional gender roles, the state-driven agenda of equalizing the number of men and women in the workforce came to be associated with 'masculinization' of women: women should do men's jobs, women should work as hard as men, etc. After its collapse, the Soviet regime was condemned for distorting the 'natural' gender order, i.e. for the 'over-emancipation' of women and the emasculation of men (Ashwin, 2000). Hence, the early 1990s saw the resurgence of essentialist gender ideologies of difference and patriarchal male breadwinner ideology, as well as increasing gender discrimination (Kozina and Zhidkova, 2006). Emphasis on the idea of gender complementarity resurfaced, encouraging women to cultivate femininity and find a 'virile' man to make their life complete (Salmenniemi and Adamson, 2014). As the analysis below will reveal, masculinity constructions were deeply embedded in the context of these broader social discourses of gender. But before I proceed to the analysis of data, the next section briefly outlines the context of counselling psychology in Russia and describes the sample.

Context, data and method

Psychological counselling was banned in Soviet Russia for ideological reasons, but started to develop rapidly in the early 1990s. The demand for counselling was driven significantly by the need to deal with the severe anxiety and distress caused by adverse economic conditions and the breakdown of social norms and routines. Thus, in just under ten years, the number of counselling psychologists grew from a handful to 10,000 in Moscow alone (Ivanova, 2009). Today, counselling services continue to be in high demand, but the professionalization process is proceeding rather slowly (Karepova, 2010).

Since its emergence, counselling has been highly female-dominated, with over 70% of counsellors in the late 1990s being women (Karepova, 2010). After the fall of the Soviet Union many industries collapsed, and psychology was a very popular choice for professional retraining. However, in the context of the prevailing male breadwinner ideology (Ashwin, 2000), the high cost of education and establishing private practice meant that it was mainly middle-class women who could 'afford' to

become counsellors. The salaries of practitioners are slightly above the national average level, but earning high income is challenging and is only possible by holding multiple jobs. Years later, counselling remains highly female-dominated. For instance, in 2011, women constituted 73% of graduate students in psychology.⁴ Counselling is still viewed as a 'woman's job' owing to the 'caring' nature of the service provided, the predominantly female clientele, and the level of wages (Griffin and Karepova, 2011).

This paper draws on 23 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with female psychological counsellors in two Russian cities: Moscow (the capital) and Vladivostok (a provincial city in the Far East). There is no official directory or register of counsellors in Russia, so although they are highly visible there is no sampling frame and they remain a hard-to-reach population, which determined sampling procedure. Two sampling techniques were used: personal e-mail invitations sent through professional websites (13 participants, a response rate of 16%) and snowballing (10 participants). The combination of these techniques was a way to counter one of the main drawbacks of snowballing — the issue of a limited range of respondents (Heckathorn, 1997). Yet, the sample reflected the characteristics of the general population of counsellors in Russia. All the interviewees were Russian, white and middle-class, aged between 28 and 64 years (average age 42). The majority (19) were married. Interviewees had a range of different backgrounds and work experiences: some worked in private and some in public sector organizations, they had different levels of expertise and work experience (from early career counsellors to directors of psychological centres); they also practised a range of therapeutic approaches (e.g., family therapy, cognitive therapy, psychodynamic therapies).

Interviews lasted between an hour and 90 minutes. All interviewees were anonymized. The interviews were conducted in Russian and translated into English by the author. Translating the interview data was challenging, as some idiomatic expressions and grammatical structures have no exact equivalent. Wallmach (2006, p. 2) argues that translated text is never identical to the original; rather, translations are just 'texts on their own'. I share this view, but during the analysis I still went back and forth between Russian and English transcripts to ensure that interpretative repertoires were identifiable in both languages. Interviewing in a language native to both the researcher and the respondents enabled a high awareness of cultural and linguistic norms and allowed the meaning of the original text to be conveyed with minimal disruption.

Following Wetherell and Potter (1988), my analysis aimed to identify 'interpretative repertoires' relating to men and masculinity in women's accounts. Wetherell and Potter (1988, p. 177) offer little guidance on how such analysis should proceed, suggesting that it is 'not a matter of following rules or recipes'; rather, it 'involves hunches' and trial and error. Following one of their suggestions — to be thoroughly familiar with the data — all passages of text in which interviewees talked about men and masculinity were re-read multiple times. Following Eadley (2001), the goal was to identify particular metaphors, descriptions, definitions and systems of terms used when talking about masculinity in different situations (e.g., '*men go to business counselling ... they have to earn ... be the breadwinner*'). These were coded, and after several reads, clearer contextual patterns for describing masculinity started to emerge. The sample size was relatively standard for a discursive study of this kind (Wetherell and Potter, 1988) and, although there was no intention to generalize these findings to all populations, a deep understanding of the cultural context and the in-depth nature of the interviews made it possible to map a consistent range of regularly occurring interpretative repertoires. At least two of the three identified repertoires were found in each of my participants' accounts, and most contained all three.

Female counsellors constructing masculinities

This section discusses how different discursive repertoires were present in women's accounts and why they were not reflected on. The analysis revealed that the women constructed three 'kinds' of masculinities drawing on three common patterns of explanations or 'interpretative repertoires':

psycho-biological, drawing on gender conceptions accepted and described in psychological theories; *structural*, drawing on an understanding of typical gendered workplace structures; and *relational*, in which masculinity was described in relation to traditional stereotypes of gender roles and gender relations. The data are presented as follows. To demonstrate how all three repertoires occurred in a single interview, two accounts (MF11 and VF3)⁵ continue *throughout* the three sections below. However, Wetherell and Potter (1988) advise that one or two accounts are insufficient to demonstrate that these are the most prevalent regularities. In order to address this, quotations are drawn from a range of other interviews.

Psycho-biological repertoire: masculinity as biological sex

When asked what they thought about the current gender composition in counselling, the majority of interviewees said that 'men are desperately needed in this profession' (MF1) and that 'the lack of virility can be felt very acutely' (MF12). Such accounts of the need for 'balance' are found in other female-dominated occupations (e.g., Sevier and Ashcraft, 2009; Simpson, 2011). In this case, they also partially reflect the typical post-Soviet rhetoric of gender complementarity, but a closer scrutiny shows that the main explanation for the 'need for men' drew largely on what I call the *psycho-biological repertoire*.

When talking about why men are 'needed', female practitioners explained that there are situations in counselling which require a specific sex-role transference/identification⁶ as part of the therapeutic process:

There are transferences in the therapeutic process. They let you work on many things with the client. Obviously, men have their transferences ... (VF7)

Sometimes in a counselling process I understand that for a particular client it would be preferable to visit a male therapist ... if we deal with some really 'male' problems there is a need for a client to identify with therapists' sex ... (VF3)

As the quotations suggest, the counsellors were adamant that there were specific 'male problems' and situations in which working with a male counsellor was beneficial for a client, so when masculinity was discussed in relation to the therapeutic context its constructions reflected the conceptions of psychological theories. For instance, the belief about sex-role transference discussed by most interviewees was rooted in the tenets of psychoanalytic theories (Maguire, 1995; Racker, 1982). Lišková (2011) argues that therapeutic discourses authoritatively enact gendered norms and assumptions and have great persuasive power. This is evident from my data, since even those who did not practise psychoanalysis held these beliefs about the role of the therapist's sex and its importance in a counselling relationship (e.g., interviewee VF7 cited above practised family therapy; VF3 practised Gestalt).⁷

Based on these convictions, women justified the need for men in the profession:

[Family counselling] requires both men and women. It's better when your co-therapist is a man ... It shows some additional behavioural patterns. Men have other energetic potentialities, other transferences, other ways of thinking. (VF4)

As is clear, the tenets of psychological theories dictate an essentialist view of gender and reinforce the discourse of biological difference and psychological complementarity typical in both Soviet and Russian contexts (Ashwin, 2000; Gorsuch, 1996). In relation to therapeutic work, men were seen to have a 'unique male perspective' inaccessible to women because they were seen to be related to biological sex.⁸ This ability to have unique transferences was not linked to experience, as exemplified by this interviewee:

I have eight women working for me and I really want to employ at least one man, well, a young man because for this salary I won't find an experienced specialist. So [even if] he is a rubbish specialist ... I still really need a man ... for instance to work with incomplete families [i.e. single

mother] so there could be at least some male role model there ... So I will be gender-biased [when hiring] ... (MF11)

The above quotation suggests that masculinity here comes to mean biological sex of a therapist which in turn is seen almost as a clinical tool in its own right. Thus, the ability to serve as a 'male role model' is possible purely through inhabiting a particular biological sex. This was also a recognized explanation for an (acceptable) male advantage in some cases, as exemplified in this instance of hiring. It is not clear how this young man would be able to treat clients simply by virtue of being a male. The interviewee above clearly did not reflect on this rather apparent issue. But the explanation made sense to the person constructing this account because in this particular context, based on the psycho-biological repertoire, masculinity was conceptualized as a therapeutic tool, as an asset linked to biological sex.

Structural repertoire: masculinity a gendered social construct

Another 'kind' of masculinity was constructed drawing on a socially situated, *structural repertoire*, articulated largely in relation to the status of the profession. Female counsellors were not happy that the profession was dominated by women and were confident that the 'injection of masculinity' would improve the status of counselling and attract more clients:

I mean that the increase in the numbers of male counsellors would influence the prestige of this profession ... Then the number of men clients would increase ... And people would treat psychology more seriously. (VF3)

A man usually has more authority ... They [men] often have a more systematic approach ... A male trainer is often preferred to a female to attract clients. (MF11)

The quotations indicate that men are constructed as 'serious' and credible; hence, having more of them was seen as a way for the profession to gain trust and legitimacy — attitudes also found in other female-dominated occupations (Sargent, 2000; Sevier and Ashcraft, 2009). In this context, constructions of masculinity seemed to draw on a structural repertoire underpinned by the stereotypes generated by the gendered work structures. Gendered workplace and professional structures render men, masculine characteristics and work done by men more valuable, even in female-dominated occupations (Bolton and Muzio, 2007; Cejka and Eagly, 1999). Several interviewees gave the example of Dr Kurpatov, a male therapist who featured in a popular TV show and who, they argued, has elevated the image and popularity of counselling:

Our society is paternalistic. You know, when our people saw 'Doctor Kurpatov'⁹ on TV ... we witnessed a breakthrough of interest in counselling ... because [the belief is] if a man does certain work — a man is not expected to work for little money or do nonsense ... With men it's more serious ... So more men in this profession would improve its image. (VF8)

This quotation indicates that there was an almost reflexive recognition of the gendered social context of Russia in which men have *higher social value* when it comes to work, echoing the context of the Russian patriarchal gender ideology in the labour market (Ashwin, 2000, 2006). However, there was no challenging of this status quo; rather, in explaining the role of men in the wider profession, the meaning of masculinity was firmly related to the (stereo)typical higher social worth of men at work. Masculinity in this context was seen as a kind of symbolic social asset which could be used to improve the image of counselling.

Research suggests that the entry of men into this female-dominated profession does not lead to the elevation of the status of all professionals but only of men (Evans, 1997). There was also no evidence that men were more qualified or credible than women. Even more paradoxically, when later in the

interview women discussed individual men (e.g., their colleagues), they did not believe that the latter were more valuable as specialists; even the highly-praised Dr Kurpatov was considered a poor specialist:

There were many female counsellors on TV and then Mr. Kurpatov appears who is mumbling the same rubbish ... not very professionally ... So it may not have been the main factor, but one of the factors that influenced the change of public opinion [to psychology] was that he was a man. (MF5)

Similarly to the above interviewee, other participants who mentioned Kurpatov also doubted his professionalism. Yet despite this rather apparent contradiction, all interviewees articulated a link between the rise in popularity of counselling and having a *male host* (although a simpler explanation might be that this programme was the first major counselling talk show, which in itself may have stimulated the public's interest). There was no reflection on how such 'unprofessional' or insufficiently qualified men (see previous section) were supposed to elevate the status of the profession which, on the one hand indicates the deep-seated nature of traditional gender ideology. On the other, it indicates that in explaining the question of professional status, the meaning of masculinity was again contextually constructed drawing on a structural repertoire of gendered work stereotypes. Masculinity in this explanatory framework reflected the ideas of men's higher social value, thus seeing it as an asset to improve professional status, causing no dissonance and making sense to speakers.

The 'relational' repertoire: masculinity as a (traditional) gender role

The third construction of masculinity rests on what I call the *relational repertoire*, in which masculinity was articulated in terms of traditional Russian gender roles and relations. As previously discussed, the stereotypical gender role requires a 'real man' to be strong, virile and able to provide for the family. Predictably, jobs are also sex-typed (see Cejka and Eagly, 1999): some are seen as more 'appropriate' than others for a 'real man'. In stark contrast to the two 'valuable' kinds of masculinity discussed in the previous sections, when women talked about male counsellors as *men*, they were completely denied masculinity:

A lot of men who come into this profession are very effeminate, so to say, they have a lot of 'female' in them. (VF3)

You know there is this famous saying — a woman psychologist is not a psychologist, a man psychologist is not a man. (MF11)

I think that the therapeutic space is initially female gendered ... I think that a man's function is to conquer new space, do something active. And here you sit in the room and engage with the inner space of a client — it is a naturally feminine function! If a man does it ... in Jungian theory they are called 'men with breasts'. (MF2)

The last quotation clearly demonstrates that the construction of masculinity (or lack of it) in this case was underpinned by traditional views of gender roles and relations. As was made clear, based on the nature of the job this was not the kind of work that would be suited to a 'real man'; hence, men doing this 'woman's job' were denied masculinity. 'Non-traditional' male workers in feminized professions experience the greatest prejudice from outsiders and public opinion (Williams, 1995). Interestingly, in my sample there was quite a strong prejudice from *within* the profession, with many strong opinions regarding the worth of masculinity in men doing 'women's work' suggesting that it is not 'the right thing for a man to do' (MF13).

This denial of masculinity was further reinforced due to the fact that, in addition to the nature of the work, counsellors do not earn very much, thus making men 'unable' to fulfil the other expectation of their gender role — of a primary earner and provider:

This profession is not considered manly ... because it's not too profitable ... Men are expected to occupy those spheres which allow them to earn more money. (VF1)

It's just not a masculine profession ... It's the women who are always willing to lend a helping hand ... As for men, they should be pragmatic enough to see that psychology doesn't allow one to make big money ... to provide. (VF3)

As is clear from the quotations, masculinity here was constructed in relation to the traditional gender role of being a breadwinner, earning money and preferably doing so in a man's job (Ashwin, 2000; Kozina and Zhidkova, 2006). Thus, drawing on this relational interpretative repertoire, masculinity came to mean the ability to comply with this expected gender role. So on the basis of the perceived 'feminine' nature of the profession and the inability to make good money, men who did counselling were 'denied' masculinity in the context of gender relations. None of the interviewees, however, reflected on how these 'effeminate' men might be masculine role models in a therapy context, or how they were supposed to elevate the status of the profession, because again, this masculinity was contextually constructed. Different masculinities drawing on different repertoires and invoked to explain different contexts effectively came to mean different things. Thus, these constructions did not overlap and caused no dissonance, making it possible for these contradictory accounts (clearly apparent to the outside observer) to go unnoticed by the interviewees.

Discussion and conclusions: some reflections on discursive reflexivity work

This article has aimed to explore mechanisms of (non)reflexivity in the process of the discursive construction of masculinity in female counsellors' accounts. I have argued that this issue is critical, since language and discursive constructions inevitably constitute gendered realities and affect gender(ed) practices. As I have demonstrated, when discussing masculinity and men, female interviewees produced a complex and contradictory narrative. How can a man be expected to be a valuable specialist and improve the image of the profession if he is hired only for his 'maleness' which, incidentally, is denied him later in the conversation? I have demonstrated how identifying the interpretative repertoires on which these masculinity constructions are based helps make sense of how contradictory accounts 'coexist' unnoticed in women's conversation.

Wetherell and Potter (1988, p. 168) suggest that one difficulty with talk is that contradictions featuring in people's accounts are generally 'separated into different passages of talk so that inconsistencies do not become a problem for participants to deal with'; they happen at different points of the conversation. As I have argued, another impediment to reflexivity was that each construction of masculinity was based on a different repertoire and therefore masculinity in each of these contexts had a slightly different meaning. When talking about men in the therapeutic context, women drew on the *psycho-biological* repertoire, in which the meaning of masculinity was almost synonymous with biological sex. When they talked about the need for more men to improve the status of the profession, they drew on the *structural* repertoire, in which masculinity was associated with the socially constructed higher value of men at work. Finally, when discussing counsellors as men, they denied them masculinity because in this scenario the counsellors tapped into the *relational* repertoire, in which masculinity meant the ability to be a 'strong shoulder' and a breadwinner. In addition to signifying different things, each of these masculinity constructions was contextual, i.e. each repertoire or set of explanations was mobilized only to explain a particular set of circumstances. Therefore, these competing constructions were not recognized by women as dissonant or contradictory, and therefore inspired no reflexivity and went unchallenged.

The three dominant repertoires exhibited in my interviewees' accounts were clearly embedded within contemporary Russian gender ideology, which itself is riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. Lack of critical scrutiny of these stereotypes indicates how deeply the ideology is ingrained in people's minds — even though counsellors are trained to reflect critically on clients' problems, they take the wider social context for granted. Martin (2006, p. 255) argues that 'an

improved understanding of non-reflexivity can reveal how and why well-intentioned, “good people” practise gender in ways that do harm’. My findings clearly illustrate that because the women were unaware of these constructions, they continued to perpetuate gender practices, stereotypes and inequalities within the profession. ‘Interpretative repertoires’ as an analytical lens also allowed me to pick up on the specificities of the cultural context of Russia. Yet, I suggest that this framework may be fruitfully used to explain contradictory constructions of masculinity elsewhere. For instance, it may be speculated that contradictory constructions of male primary school teachers as ‘masculine role models’ and as ‘lacking masculinity’ (see Allan, 1993; Sargent, 2000; Sevier and Ashcraft, 2009; Williams, 1993, 1995) draw on different repertoires and hence are not seen as conflicting.

So where does this leave us in relation to theorizing the possibility of reflexivity and its transformative potential? How does a focus on discursive reflexivity extend our understanding of the concept and the process? An important finding that requires emphasis is the difficulty of reflecting on one’s own conceptions and beliefs during the process of talk. Research shows that some aspects of *embodied* identities are more difficult to reflect on than others and that self-reflexivity does not always occur (Adkins, 2003; McNay, 1999). In the case of embodied reflexivity a number of studies have found different levels or thresholds of self-reflexivity (Archer, 2010, 2012; Brooks and Wee, 2008; Simpson, 2011). However, none of my 23 respondents reflected on the inconsistencies of how they talked about masculinity. This is despite the fact that they were highly qualified professionals whose job involves listening and reflecting on various complex issues. It seems that the principles of ‘reflexivity by dissonance’ may apply only conditionally to reflexivity in conversation as the nature of talk makes it easy for discursive contradictions to be obscured by different passages of talk.

However, I suggest that this difficulty does not necessarily mean that reflexivity itself is impossible or useless as a critical concept (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1997). Rather, these findings prompt questions about the kinds of mechanisms and processes that *can* stimulate reflexivity in the process of the discursive construction of gender. My data indicate that we often do not *attempt* to recognize or challenge contradictory gender constructions in everyday conversations. However, this does not mean that it is impossible to do so. When participants in Sevier and Ashcraft’s study (2009) were *confronted* about the meaning of the contradictory concept of a ‘male role model’, *consciously thinking* about it gave the interviewees at least a partial awareness that their narratives did not match. This suggests that presenting all contradictory constructions to the speaker simultaneously may stimulate dissonance and spark reflexivity. Challenging interviewees’ constructions was not my methodological intention, but the contradictions in participants’ accounts were apparent to me as an interviewer, so the question is whether and how they may be apparent to the person producing them.

I would argue that there is a need for *systematic reflexivity work*, which I would define as a purposeful, systematic process of scrutinizing one’s ideas, *looking* for a ‘lack of fit’. In fact, Bourdieu and Wacquant define reflexivity as a ‘*systematic exploration* of the unthought categories of thought’ (1992, p. 40; my emphasis). One interpretation of this definition is that reflexivity may still be a tool of change, but one cannot expect it to work automatically on its own, especially in discourses in which it is cognitively easy to reconcile contradictions. This is not to suggest that one is completely free to avoid embodied habitus and rise above ideology. However, the constraints of habitus do not completely preclude the possibility of reflexivity work. For example, Brooks and Wee (2008, p. 506) demonstrate the possibility of change in social discourses through the wider-scale public/political *debate*. They suggest that change often comes from a *desire* for change, but this desire is formed through conscious and critical deliberations. Our own academic practice shows that, as researchers, we can be (at least partially) reflexive of our own gendered position and how it impacts on the construction of our research findings, exposing some underlying ideologies (e.g., Hertz, 1997; Martin, 2006; Pullen and Simpson, 2009). Given that counsellors, particularly those using cognitive therapies, routinely reflect on and point out inconsistencies in clients’ accounts in order to disrupt unhelpful thinking patterns, they are clearly capable of reflexivity. These examples indicate that reflexivity may operate as a critical tool when it is deliberate. It also means that being trained to use reflexivity as a

tool in one context does not mean that it will be used systematically all the time. It is therefore essential to continue to investigate whether and to what extent systematic reflexive work is possible in the context of the workplace, and how it may lead to change in practice.

Last, but not least, a very pertinent question is about post-reflexive choices (Adams, 2006). Clearly, one can reflect on a practice without a particular desire and/or capacity to change it. My methodology did not involve challenging my interviewees' constructions during the interview, so it is difficult to assess what the outcome of such critical deliberations might be. However, as Martin (2006, p. 255) suggests, 'by making gender dynamics more visible, clues about how to name, challenge and eliminate them can be gleaned'. Hence, finding ways to recognize inconsistencies might be seen as only the first step in the process of challenging inequalities, but it is nevertheless a step.

In conclusion, this article has argued the importance of reflexive scrutiny of our discursive constructions of gender. What we say matters. One of the main implications of the findings is that reflexivity in discursive constructions of gender does not come naturally. However, I have argued the difficulty of discursive reflexivity does not mean that the possibility of reflexivity being a critical tool should be rejected. Instead, continuing to theorize systematic reflexivity work, the capacity for critical deliberations in everyday talk and the relationship between embodied and discursive reflexivity mechanisms remains a fruitful avenue for further understanding of the transformative potential of reflexivity.

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Notes

1. By 'the other' gender, I mean gender that is not our own, for instance how female interviewees talk about men. I share the view that the binary of gender roles is a social construction and the term 'other' is used for analytical purposes only, to distinguish these constructions from self-reflexivity.
2. See Adams (2006) and Archer (2010) for further discussion.
3. Some may see a slight semantic difference between the concepts of 'discourse' and 'interpretative repertoire' (see Mulkay and Gilbert, 1982). The use of the concept 'interpretative repertoires' here is conditioned by the use of Wetherell and Potter's (1988) framework and the ability of the concept to draw attention to the way in which individual talk is organized.
4. Higher School of Economics <<http://www.hse.ru/primarydata/in2012>>, accessed 3 March 2014.
5. Abbreviations: M — Moscow interviewee, V — Vladivostok interviewee, F — Female.
6. The concept of 'transference' comes from psychoanalytic theory and is typically defined as the unconscious projection of a patient's feelings (often sexual), originally directed towards someone (e.g., mother, father), onto the therapist (Maguire, 1995; Racker, 1982).

7. Maguire (1995, p. 144) suggests that 'in classical psychoanalytic theory maternal and paternal transferences are equally likely to arise whatever the sex of the therapist'. It is not my intention to further question this, as I only focus on how the content of psychological theories may influence the construction of masculinity.
8. When speaking of the need for two therapists in family counselling, interviewees always presumed that they should be of opposite sex. There was no reflection on what happens when counselling same-sex couples, which illustrates the hegemony of heteronormativity in Russia (Salmenniemi and Adamson, 2014).
9. A TV talk show on Channel 1 Russian TV first aired in 2006, featuring psychotherapy sessions led by Dr Andrei Kurpatov <<http://www.1tv.ru/projects/si=5710>> (accessed 5 April 2013).

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