

A Struggle for Legitimacy: Russian Women Secure Their Professional Identities in Public Relations in a Hyper-Sexualized Patriarchal Workplace

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This qualitative study seeks to understand a process of identity negotiation by female public relations practitioners in the workplace in transitional hyper-sexualized societies, such as Russia, where public relations is a relatively young field. Using a framework of positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) and concepts of multiple identity negotiation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and body disciplining (Trethewey, 2000a, b), the study reveals how female public relations practitioners in Russia engage in a constant process of securing their professional identities, specifically disciplining their bodies and controlling their physical presence. The results demonstrated that dress code self-enforcement helped to underscore the professionalism for female public relations practitioners. Disciplining contributed to specific negotiating strategies women utilized to emphasize advantages that, according to the participants of this study, female public relations practitioners have over men when they engage in public relations practices in Russia. Further analysis, however, suggested that these strategies might lead to reproduction of stereotypical understandings of the role and place of women in a hyper-sexualized, patriarchal environment, such as the Russian workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Russian saying goes: at first, people assume they know you by your dress rather than by your intelligence. Russian women are reminded of these views on a day-to-day basis as they creatively assert their legitimacy and professional potency to be successful in a hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace. This study examines how Russian women negotiate their professional identities and the tensions and professional challenges that arise for them in the transitional and fastest growing professional field of public relations.

The study sheds light on the private, nuanced challenges and opportunities that women experience in gaining and attaining legitimacy in this emergent field in Eastern Europe. This research expands upon previous works on female identity construction in the Russian professional environment (Kay 2002; Plotkin-Amrami, 2008; Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2005). This is a particularly relevant topic as the majority of the workforce in public relations in Russia are women. Female practitioners occupy most positions in public relations around the world and this is also true in Russia (RACO, 2007; Tsetsura, 2010a, 2011; Brunner, 2006; Cline, Toth, Turk, Walters, Johnson, & Smith, 1986; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Sha & Toth, 2005; ; van Ruler & de Lange, 2003; Wu, 2006),. As there is a growing number of management positions worldwide occupied by women (Andsager & Hust, 2005; Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001), then it is even more critical to

understand how female professionals claim legitimacy and equity in patriarchal contexts like Russian society.

This article first provides the context to understanding current Russian public relations practices. Then, it offers a theoretical framework for studying multiple identity negotiations among female practitioners, based on the notions of social construction and positioning. Finally, study findings and their implications for practicing public relations in patriarchic societies, such as Russia, are discussed to enrich understanding how everyday identity negotiation and positioning might reproduce stereotypes and influence how female public relations practitioners see themselves in these hyper-sexualized societies.

Context for Understanding the Roots of Public Relations in Russia

To understand the context in which Russian public relations developed one should first recognize two issues that might have influenced the contemporary perception of the field and of female public relations practitioners in Russia:

- 1) prejudice toward female professionals in patriarchic Russia, and
- 2) the commercialization of the female body in post-Soviet Russia.

Prejudice Toward Female Professionals in Patriarchic Russia

Discrepancy between the citizens' rights on paper and in real life was a quintessential characteristic of life in the Soviet Union. Equality between men and women was promised by the constitution; however, in reality, few women enjoyed a true equality in the workplace, including equal pay and promotion (Motiejunaite & Kravchenko, 2008; Temkina, 2009). Despite the Soviet past that promised equality to men and women on paper, today's Russia has a very strong patriarchal society (Kay, 2002; Metcalfe & Afanassieva, 2005; Tsetsura, 2010a). According to Schwartz (1979) and Motiejunaite and Kravchenko (2008), the reason women were subordinate to men in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia was the cultivation of a dual role of women as mothers and workers with emphasis on women's role as *family and beauty keepers*, whereas men's role was to be only the bread winners. This distinction is typical not only for Russia, but also for many other patriarchal societies (Mamonova, 1984; Motiejunaite & Kravchenko, 2008; Wu, 2006). As a result, women find themselves in a disempowered position and as a result must follow patriarchal rules of the society in order to succeed in any profession. Often, female professionals end up in situations where they have to control their actions and appearances (Motroshilova, 1983; Popkova, 2005).

In Russia, a newly emerging field of public relations was developed at the price of a previously constructed reality of what is understood as public relations (Tsetsura, 2010b, 2011). For instance, those who practiced public relations in the late 1980s could construct their own reality of what public relations is, which may be incommensurable with today's more sophisticated and developed view of the field. For many years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, public relations has been suffering from patriarchal, anti-women ideas which were still very much alive in the Russian society. Take, for example, the work by Arnold (1997) about the nature of public relations practice in Russia. The scandalous book by Arnold combines his description of early

days of nonsystematic public relations in Russia with his analysis of tactics for successful transformation from a journalist to a public relations practitioner. In one disgustingly shocking chapter titled “Women in PR” (filled with personal encounters about women’s betrayal) Arnold showed why women could not and should not work in public relations. His open anti-feminist arguments are weak and populist and do not deserve much discussion: among negative qualities of women, for instance, Arnold noted constant assessments and calculations by women in the name of a profit and their inability to separate personal and work problems. However, this book has generated some discussions about the nature of public relations practice in Russia (Shishkina, 1999). Today, such outrageous arguments cannot stand any critique, and no researcher in public relations would use this book as a serious source. The book is occasionally referred to as a populist manifest, but it is not as a scholarly study. However, the very existence of this book demonstrates how deep the patriarchal roots are within the Russian society.

Today, Russian public relations practitioners and educators discuss the field in different terms and in no way do they blatantly discriminate against women. But the current studies are overwhelmingly descriptive and prescriptive (e.g., Mintusov & Egorova-Gantman, 2002; Pocheptsov, 2001; Vasilenko, 2001). The question remains: can actual changes of attitude toward women be found in the contemporary public relations practice, particularly in the way how female professionals are perceived in the Russian patriarchic society?

Commercialization of the Female Body and Sexual Harassment

Another issue that might have influenced the contemporary perceptions of the field and identity negotiation among female public relations practitioners in Russia is the commercialization of the female body in post-Soviet Russia, which is closely related to the notion of sexual harassment. The idea of commercialization of the female body in post-Soviet Russia was originally offered by Lissyutkina (1993), “Commercialization of the female body is perceived as an element of the transition to market relations in which society sees its salvation” (p. 281). For a long time, the topic of sex was tabooed in Soviet Russia (Rotkirch, 2004), and the post-Soviet sexual revolution was a result of rejection of everything Soviet, including rejection of the lack of discourse about sex. Perhaps, the best illustration of this rejection was the following phrase that became widely used during perestroika as an exemplar of discrepancies between the official Soviet discourse and the actual life in the Soviet Union, the phrase that once aired during a popular TV talk show in the end of 1980s, “There is no sex in the Soviet Union.”

In 1990s, free love and free sex have become widely accepted and celebrated, but at the same time, they were in direct contradiction with the established notion of what is moral and appropriate. However, the newly introduced notion of open sexuality created new societal pressures for many women in the post-Soviet male-dominated society (Rotkirch, 2004; Temkina, 2009). As a result, for instance, Russian women faced contradictions in their sexual lives (Haavio-Mannila, Rotkirch & O.Kontula, 2005). Additionally, sexual freedom was now associated with many new freedoms of the post-

Soviet society, including freedom to engage in commercial activities. Now sexual desires became legit, and men felt they could and should encourage open sexuality. Many argued that women too should openly embrace sexuality. This put women into a difficult position: on one hand, they should have continued to be family and beauty keepers, as the patriarchic society expected them to be; on the other hand, they should have embraced sexual emancipation, which was juxtaposed against the traditional family values.

Lissyutkina (1993) argued that because the pleasure principle was to a great degree oppressed in the name of communist demands for social stability and public good, the beginning of the *erotic boom* in Russia after perestroika received an entirely positive meaning, especially in the eyes of men. Open representations of prostitutes, for instance, in the post-Soviet pop culture were “the emancipation from the desexualization of life under communism, the recognition of one’s bodily self as an inseparable part of one’s identity” (p. 284). It was the way of overcoming the totalitarian identity that portrays prostitution not as the underworld as it was the case in the West, but as a counterculture to the degree that prostitutes’ work was ideologized.

But in any patriarchic society, where men have power over women in many different ways, encouraging sexual emancipation can easily lead to encouraging sexual promiscuity. And soon, in the post-Soviet Russia, it became ok for men to openly voice their sexual desires, in public and in the workplace. For many men in power such emancipation has legitimized their behavior of a concept of sexual harassment has been almost absent in the post-Soviet Russian discourse as a result of legitimization of open sexuality.

The result of this *erotic boom* thinking was especially evident in the workplace. In the beginning of 1990s, women who worked in marketing, economics, advertising, and public relations (the newly emerged market-oriented professions) constantly faced sexual harassment. Being one of the market-oriented professions, public relations may well be one of those fields in which Russian female professionals could have experienced sexual harassment as a result of what Lissyutkina (1993) called *erotic boom*.

The next section discusses notions of identity negotiation and positioning used in this study.

A Framework For Studying Multiple Identity Negotiation

This study utilized a theoretical framework for studying socially constructed identities based on works by Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Davies and Harré (1990). The framework assumes that multiple identities are products of social construction and identity negotiations, in which individuals engage during the construction process, can help one to understand how and why practitioners perform their professional duties. This framework is based on several major assumptions about the social construction of reality. First, there is no one true reality because reality is constructed through individuals’ interactions. Second, social institutions are created in society through

construction and maintenance of the sum total of value-dependent roles of individuals directly connected with institutions as laborers, and thus individuals influence construction of social institutions in society. Third, there is a dialectical relationship between individuals and socially constructed reality of social institutions in which such reality affects and is affected by individuals' interactions with one another. Fourth, since multiple socially constructed realities exist, multiple identities of individuals also exist in this dialectical relationship and must be analyzed.

The idea of multiple identities comes directly from the social construction of reality. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued, "Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality, and like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society" (p. 159). Multiple identities exist because identities can be formed, maintained, and reshaped by multiple interactions. Berger and Luckmann argued that any theorizing about identities has to occur within the framework of theoretical interpretations of socially constructed realities in which identities are located.

Members of various communities often engage in identity negotiation at different levels, including societal, communal, and organizational. Identity negotiation happens in established societies, habitual communities, and in the traditional workplace. However, for the societies in transition identity negotiation becomes especially relevant as it contributes to the process of transitioning to a new state, uncovering hidden forces that may bring change to organizing processes and shaping the next reality (Castor, 2005; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). In these societies, studying identity negotiation among practitioners in newly emerging professions can lead to better understanding of how certain professions develop and how practitioners contribute to constructing meanings of the professions.

In addition, this study utilized *positioning* (Davies & Harré, 1990) as a concept which helps to understand how discursive practices can define professional speakers and listeners in particular ways and, as a result, how female professionals can negotiate their new positions and manifest their identities. Positioning allows us to understand how disconnect in the production of multiple identities is created and how the interpretations of particular practices are negotiated by professionals as they engage in conversations. Positioning helps to account for flexibility of ever-changing identity negotiation process as identities are not static and are always in flux. Following the poststructuralist research paradigm, Davies and Harré (1990) argued that discourse is a "multi-faceted public process through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved" (p. 46). As such, the force of discourse and discursive practices is particularly evident as people are capable of exercising choice in relation to those practices, in real time (Davies & Harré). At the same time, positioning within the process of discourse may limit the choices available as a conversation develops through joint actions of all participating in discourse because people try to make actions socially defined and appropriate. Thus, positioning allows us to account for a continuous change and reflection in the identity negotiation process that otherwise may be hidden.

The next section highlights previous research on body disciplining and control by women to provide additional context for studying positioning by female public relations practitioners.

Women in a Disempowered Position: Discipline and Control

Previous critical investigations of body disciplining and the work roles women play (or asked to play in the workplace), particularly in the financial world, showed that women are often forced to follow a certain set of business rules determined by male managers, to neglect their womanhood, to undermine their integrity, to exercise masculinity, and to make tough choices between the career and the family (Eleff & Trethewey, 2006; Fisher, 2003; McDowell, 1997; Meisenbach, 2008, Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). Feminist scholars use the ideas of control over one's physical representation to pose questions about inequality and disempowerment of women in the workplace (Buzzanell, 2001a, b; McDowell, 1997; Trethewey, 1999, 2000a, b). Trethewey (1999), for instance, developed an idea of discipline and control in relation to the primary interest in identity construction in a specific field. She argued that female professionals in multiple industries, including business, often face additional power pressures and are often required to discipline their female bodies and control the way they present themselves as professionals (Trethewey, 2000a). Others argued that historical, cultural, societal, and organizational factors may too influence how professionals are perceived in the workplace. For instance, Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney (2005) argued that individual workers are often led to believe they are responsible for the success or failure of organizations.

Much of studies on body disciplining were based on the ideas developed by Foucault (1977/1995) who claimed that discipline is a necessary outcome of the society development. Critically analyzing societal power relations, Foucault examined a human body as “the object of the control” (p. 137). At first, the human body was “a machinery of power” (p. 138) in a rapidly industrializing world, which could easily adapt and operate in the environment. But soon it was transformed by increasing forces of discipline into a “docile” body, in order to control the process of utility in economic forms and obedience in political terms (p. 138). Thus, discipline associated power with the body. Foucault gleaned, “We are entering the age of the infinite examination and of compulsory objectification” (p. 189). Examination situates an individual in the environment of constant surveillance. The mechanisms of discipline create a disciplinary framework, in which the human being does not have a luxury for exercising his or her freedom of expression. Foucault's work on discipline has served as a starting point for investigating the process of identity negotiations (see, for instance, Trethewey, 1999, 2000a, b among others). But Foucault denies a sense of agency and does not recognize the power the agent has in contributing to an overall construction of reality. It seems that the Foucault's notion of disciplining is rather static and, in its classical sense, does not provide enough flexibility to examine how the process of discourse can determine actions and interactions of individuals.

Thus, this study proposes to reconsider disciplining of the body in relation to positioning within the process of social identity construction. As Bergman and Luckmann and

Davies & Harré argued, discursive practices themselves may indeed define actions, regardless of the societal structures. As a result, identity negotiations and societal roles that women choose to enact through discursive practices can be at the center of investigation rather than Foucault's notion of subject-position as a way to emphasize the power of discourse and the presence of agency in defining and negotiating identities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After reviewing the relevant literature, the study posed the following research questions:

RQ1: In what ways do female public relations practitioners in Russia engage in identity negotiation? Specifically, to what extent, if any, do the women say they engage in disciplining the body and controlling their physical appearance while practicing public relations in Russia today?

RQ2: In what ways, if any, does commercialization of the body influence women's positioning and disciplining the body discourse and how, if any, did this notion affect female public relations practitioners' discourse about controlling their physical appearance in the workplace?

Because no previous studies on multiple identity negotiation and positioning among female practitioners were identified, the researcher went to the field with an open mind, trying to identify identities that are present and then understand and interpret how these identities are negotiated. As a result, the researcher was probing for *multiplicity of identities* in and the process of negotiation and positioning. Afterwards, during the analysis and interpretation of the data, the researcher went back to the extant literature trying to locate appropriate theoretical approaches which could help interpreting and understanding the results.

METHODOLOGY

Two qualitative methods were used to gather data in the study: one-on-one and group interviews. Interviews helped to uncover how practitioners negotiate identities in their everyday lives as professionals. Participants were encouraged to tell the researcher about their experiences and provide many examples. Utilizing two methods of data collection also helped to triangulate the data. Triangulation is a process of checking the reliability of qualitative data, when two or more qualitative methods are used to gather information and to crosscheck data analysis (Patton, 1990). Multiple interviews allowed the researcher to achieve a point of saturation, when no new information is identified (Dougherty, 2001). This guaranteed that the data were collected in the best possible and most detailed way.

After careful examination of membership lists and other materials available on official websites of two leading professional organizations in Russia, RACO and AKOC,

seventeen leading public relations agencies in Moscow were identified. Practitioners from ten agencies agreed to participate in the study. Within the agencies, they were identified through conversations with owners, executive partners, and managers of each agency and through cross-reference by interviewed practitioners.

All female practitioners from the 17 agencies were invited to share their thoughts, but only 25 female public relations practitioners from ten agencies agreed to participate. Eleven women were individually interviewed and 14 joined one of the three discussion group interviews. All confidential interviews took place either at the agency in which practitioners work (some individual and all discussion group interviews) or at a neutral territory, such as a café. Although the workplace has been used as an environment to collect the data, the researcher did not record any discomfort expressed by participants vocally or otherwise. In-depth one-on-one interviews with 11 practitioners lasted anywhere between 60 and 120 minutes. Three discussion group interviews with 14 practitioners lasted anywhere between 30 and 50 minutes. The data for this study were gathered as a part of a larger project.

Individual and discussion group interviews data were fully transcribed, partially translated in English (only data relevant to this study were translated), and later back-translated for accuracy. The data were analyzed according to a thematic analysis technique, as this identifies recurring themes within the data and scrutinizes them against the participants' explanations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This analysis is particularly useful in qualitative research when recurring themes might lead to a grounded theory approach to further understand participants' narratives and systematically analyze the reasons behind accounts of these narratives (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). After the data were gathered and analyzed, member-checking was performed to validate the findings. Five women agreed to discuss the preliminary results of the findings and validated the participants' explanation analysis. The following section presents the data from the study matched with accounts of previous literature to identify the reasons and propel understanding how identity negotiation was manifested through women's discourses. Direct interview quotations, presented below, were back-translated for accuracy and minimally edited for readability.

FINDINGS

The research question one asked, in what ways do female public relations practitioners in Russia engage in identity negotiation? Specifically, to what extent, if any, do they engage in disciplining the body and controlling their physical appearance while practicing public relations in Russia today? The results demonstrated that strong patriarchal roots of the society and the hyper-sexualized workplace forced women to protect themselves from sexual harassment by emphasizing their professionalism and disciplining and controlling their physical appearance.

Female Physical Appearance and Dress Codes

Results showed that one of the outcomes of negotiation between the identities of female and professional for Russian public relations practitioners was a continuous necessity to

discipline and control their own bodies (Foucault, 1977/1995; Trethewey, 1999, 2000a, b). These practitioners chose to exercise discipline and control by downplaying their female identity, on one hand, and by putting forward their professional identity, on the other, as a way to fight against prejudice toward female professionals. One participant said:

On one hand, it helps: you can smile, and a question would be solved quicker, but on the other hand, possibly because of these exact smiles, you are looked upon not as seriously. So you have to keep yourself well in certain settings so to speak and show that you are a professional first and foremost and not a woman.

Another professional pointed out, “I think a disadvantage lies in the idea of feminism, really; in other words, it is always difficult for a woman when she, beautiful and striking, comes somewhere and no one knows that she is also capable of doing something useful. [They think] she is most likely a pretty dummy.” Previous studies of American women’s identity negotiations in the workplace revealed similar findings (Trethewey, 1999, 2000a, b).

The Previous studies confirmed that studies confirmed that the U.S. women often rely upon exploitation of their femininity (Bordo, 1992; Buzzanell, 2001b). . This research identified some of the reasons why female public relations practitioners in Russia choose to control their physical appearance in the hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace.

According to one respondent, one of the biggest problems female practitioners face is a constant necessity to emphasize their professionalism over their physical appearance: “Appearance rather hurts. I remember when I was starting my work in public relations, I only started in political public relations, but I dreamed to defend [a candidate of political sciences graduate degree] soon because I was not perceived seriously... so I could have those extra letters after my name on the business card.” In order to battle the hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace, women chose to put forward their professional identities and minimize their female identities. Control over one’s female identity started with disciplining oneself through establishing and following the dress code rules.

Even though these women indicated that they often try to match clients’ styles by not dressing too conservatively, they agreed that the very first meeting with a potential or new client implies the necessity to look “professional” in order to “receive [a contract] or create a positive image.” Results showed that many public relations agencies enforce dress codes and clearly communicate the dress code rules to female employees. If for some reason an employee does not have appropriate clothing, she would make sure to provide an excuse for not following the code, even in a casual conversation with a co-worker or an external researcher:

Yes, we try to follow [dress code]; today is our more or less flexible day, but it is very difficult in the summer, for example, be in the office when

there is no air conditioner, and it would be worse if I were sitting here sweating, it would not have been a good etiquette.

Another young woman noted that the hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace can define the interaction despite body disciplining:

You can dress up for a presentation very conservatively in a suit without any accessories, but that could lead to other sexual thoughts, and you also can dress up in a very open clothes, but in principle it is not professional and is not recommended because such clothing gets attention away from the subject of your presentation. I very often think if a person with whom you are working is adequate and does not have any prejudices and stereotypes, and if this person is a man and some sympathy arises [between the two], it actually helps [to get business], but again in that situation you must position yourself as an absolute professional and then this first impression would stay at the level of sympathy, not harassment.

Even when some participants said they did not have dress or makeup codes in the workplace, they made sure to point out that it is important to self-discipline the body:

You just have to look at the level let's say bank personnel or some conservative structures' personnel; in other words, it is known that in banks or in investment companies no one can allow herself to come without pantyhose even though there is +30C [+86F]. But here at the agency the atmosphere is more or less democratic, and everyone acts upon her personal understanding of what the professional can wear, what [it means] to be a professional.

But the way how the public relations professional has to look at this agency was clear: as the researcher looked around the agency, all female professionals had quite conservative clothing and did not wear any make-up.

A theme of "looking as a bank employee" came up in several different discussion groups. A separate, further examination of disciplining body in the banking industry in Russia can be a valuable pursuit. It was interesting to see that participants compared their physical appearance with those who work in the banking and financial sector, the ultimate free market economy profession.

It seems that among those interviewed, younger women and those who occupied lower positions within each agency were especially vocal about the importance of controlling their physical appearance. One woman sighed when she answered the question. She said the focus should be on strict, classic clothing style, but the golden middle is hard to achieve and not everyone has to look boring: "They have to look like bank employee, conventionally speaking, if their salary allows them to buy designer clothing, but [they

should wear] something closed and without hints for sexuality and other things—then it is likely a good [clothing] option [for work].”

Interestingly, women who held senior positions and older women did not emphasize the importance of dress codes as much. In contrast, some of them even defended their freedom to choose how they dress up and do makeup. For example, one interviewee shared that one of her clients at the first meeting perceived two female public relations managers as “dolls, with overdressed looks and overused makeup” even though, in her own words, there was nothing that could provoke such thinking:

And again, he perceived us as such [dolls] even though I had a business suit on me. Yes, I have blond hair and I can't and don't want to do anything about [changing] that... yes, I use make-up as any normal woman does, but in his eyes I was overdressed and I overused make-up... But I looked exactly as I do now.

At the time of interview, this woman had a conservative yet contemporary business pant suit of a light beige color and a minimal, natural light make-up. She continued that that client, after an hour-long discussion, was quite surprised to discover these women knew what they were talking about and agreed to work with their agency.

The results demonstrated how positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) could help to recognize the role of agency in constructing realities through discourse (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This role became central in identity negotiation discourses of women interviewed for this study. The paradoxical ability of women to constantly and continuously create, control, and distance themselves from stereotypes through their positioning as professionals on one hand and through their continuous desire to reproduce patriarchal expectations in order to achieve professional goals on the other hand, highlighted agency-driven and society(system)-driven elements within identity negotiation. Consistent with previous research on positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) this identity negotiation process allowed for flexibility in negotiation; at the same time, it limited the choices available for female professionals and trapped them within the realities of their hyper-sexualized patriarchal environment as they developed their conversations through joint actions of other discourse participants, such as male co-workers, clients, and others.

Commercialization of the Body and Sexual Harassment Prompt Disciplining of the Body
The research question two asked, in what ways, if any, does commercialization of the body influence women's positioning and disciplining the body discourse and how, if any, did this notion affect female public relations practitioners' discourse about controlling their physical appearance in the workplace?

The results showed that the issue of commercialization of the body was also present in women's discourses. However, only two participants talked about their own experiences in that regard. One of the mid-level managers referred to her past experiences working

in public relations where she was often perceived not as a professional but as an object of sexual desire:

This aspect of perceiving a woman as a product of sexual consumption is now rare in Russian [business]. For instance, I am 37 years old, and I clearly remember how, when I was 22 or 19, it was completely unbearable and intolerable – it was just disgusting. In any company you were perceived just as like well... [she stopped for a little before she continued, and I could see that she was not comfortable with her comment] a whore... and it was impossible to prove anything.

This comment was the only direct reference to the sexual commercialization of the female body in public relations. But despite the fact that the vast majority of participants indicated they strictly follow high professional standards, further analysis showed these women discussed techniques for oppressing their femininity and sexuality to avoid the connection between the existing perception of women as objects of sexual desire (which was popular during the early days of public relations business in Russia) and the sought perception of women as professionals. Social construction of public relations as a service profession (Tsetsura, 2010) could influence the way female public relations practitioners were perceived and have been defined by the same ideological baggage as the context for other newly emerging free market fields and professions (Lissyutkina, 1993), including marketing, economics, management, advertising, and public relations. For instance, one woman commented:

For a client, a specialist in public relations is a service-oriented [worker]. So when you come to the client, you are a server. In other words, they perceive you as a servant – even though smart, educated, nice – but a servant. It is much easier for a woman to position herself in this situation because clients are men and because in this situation there is no power struggle or clash of interests. I do not have to prove that I am a cool lad; it is enough for me to say that I am a specialist. And a man is more loyal toward a woman [than a man] anyway.

The commercialization of the body was connected with the discussion of sexual harassment in the workplace. However, understanding and interpretations of sexual harassment by interviewed women was rather peculiar. Many of these women noted that sexual harassment as a legal concept is largely underdeveloped in Russia. There are no enforceable laws that guide and protect female employees in the workplace. But sexual harassment is widespread, and many of the interviewed women saw the resistance and prevention of sexual harassment as their obligation. As a result, these women felt guilty for any acts of sexual harassment and were unforgiving if someone claimed she was sexually harassed. One woman argued:

In my view, the majority of men, even when they offer some development of sexual relationships at some level [in the workplace], with a sign of relief accept the situation when a woman says, "Sorry, I do not need it, thank

you.” Men do not have to worry about their men’s dignity and do not focus on the fact that they were rejected by a woman. And women should say no if they want to be perceived as professionals.

Interviewed women shifted this responsibility from men to women and even protect men from accusations of sexual harassment:

This all depends on the behavior of a woman; for instance, all female practitioners who work for me have precise, direct understandings starting from their clothing style because it is clear that if you dress up openly, it is a nonverbal invitation to a man to somehow develop this line [sexual harassment]. That is why skirts of a certain length and frankness of clothes are not welcome.

Another participant explained:

If I come in a see-through blouse, with open arms and open shoulders, whether I want it or not, I communicate to a man, “I came to do business but I want you to pay attention to m[y sexuality].” As a rule, those female practitioners who are oriented toward work understand it quickly and accept with gratitude that other options exist so they do not have to deal with [sexual harassment].

One woman simply put, “In Russian [business] organizations this [casual] style of clothing is not accepted.”

As it was mentioned earlier, a generation gap between younger and older female public relations practitioners in this study was clear: younger professionals were much more involved in the process of self-disciplining. This finding contrasted the argument made in the *Wall Street Journal’s* article by Pollock (2000) and critically analyzed by Buzzanell (2001b): the article stated that younger American female professionals do not resonate with early feminist agenda because they are free enough to wear whatever they want. Young Russian women, on the other hand, demonstrated a high consciousness about the importance of dress code and the overall impression they should convey through the clothing. Russian professionals choose to control their physical appearance, including the way they dress, the way they wear makeup, and the way they position themselves. In other words, this study revealed women’s conscious, continuous, and vocalized effort to discipline their bodies through physical appearance in order to dismiss or at least minimize any sexual harassment in the hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace.

The notion of commercialization of the female body (Lissyutkina, 1993) can help to understand the reasons for such self-control by female public relations practitioners. It can be argued that the sexual revolution served as a breaker from communist ideals to the free market in the mid-1980s in Russia and that it was actively exploited by new market-driven fields in the early developing stages of Russian business. Professions established in Russia in the early days of the free market were manifestations of freedom, power and independence, and they were closely connected to everything post-Soviet, including the desire for open sexuality. At first, the market economy ideas carried the ideological baggage and aimed to revive the pleasure principle which in turn produced objectification of a woman, in everyday life and in the workplace. To succeed in business, women were inadvertently (and sometimes openly) forced to consciously exploit their bodies: understanding the details of the subject matter of the profession was not enough. The patriarchal culture of Russia contributed to this process: traditional understanding of *good women* as selflessly devoted and followed men and *bad women* as predators and manipulators (Lissyutkina, 1993) created a unique situation in which *good women* who worked in these newly emerging free market professions (specifically those women who work in public relations) were expected to follow the newly formed ideological standards and sacrifice themselves in the name of newly developing businesses through strategic positioning and identity negotiation. But as public relations got established and recognized as the professionalized occupation, the importance of being a *professional* became salient, and soon women started positioning themselves as professionals first and foremost by consciously controlling their appearances and disciplining their bodies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study explored identity negotiation and positioning by female public relations practitioners in the hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace. Data gathered through one-on-one and group interviews in Russia revealed a strong sense of discipline and control, which female practitioners exercise every day. The results showed that female practitioners engaged in constant identity negotiation and positioning while they performed their duties as public relations professionals. This study offered a fresh perspective on unique challenges female practitioners face while practicing public relations in the traditionally patriarchal, hyper-sexualized societies. Specifically, the results demonstrated that practitioners positioned themselves through discipline and control discourse, constantly negotiating their female and professional identities. Previous studies showed that female professionals engaged in similar negotiation processes in the USA (Buzzanell, 2001a, b; Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001; Trethewey, 1999, 2000a, b). The results of this study also demonstrated that women were concerned about the presence of sexual harassment in the workplace, but the Russian hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace forced women to constantly utilize body disciplining and professional identity positioning and negotiation so that they can protect themselves from such harassment. Women discussed how they emphasized their professionalism by disciplining and controlling their physical appearance, particularly through choosing conservative clothing and makeup.

This study applied the notion of *positioning* (Davies & Harré, 1990) to demonstrate how it can contribute to studying identity negotiation in the workplace. Because positioning allows to account for flexibility in the identity negotiation process, this study gleaned that female professionals positioned themselves and others through continuously changing discourse—and as a result demonstrated flexibility in defining advantages and disadvantages of being a female public relations professional as they discussed expectations of their employers and their own expectations toward work.

Practical implications of this study call for further examination of the role of women in public relations in patriarchal societies such as Russia and for re-evaluation of perceptions of female professionals in the hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace. This study showed that practitioners who enter the profession of public relations in newly emerging markets need to realize which stereotypes and perceptions exist about the profession so that they can effectively manage them. At the same time, many female practitioners find themselves trapped in the process of disciplining and constant negotiation. Although some professionals in this study believed this disciplining worked to their advantage, previous critical studies demonstrated that this may be a wishful thinking on part of female professionals (Buzzanell, 2001 a, b; Trethewey, 1999, 2000a, b).

The study showed that the development of a free market economy and sexual manifestations of freedom in countries with transitional economies may have created a situation for commercialization of the female body in the workplace and, as a result, forced female practitioners to engage in body disciplining and positioning. The free-market nature and business orientation of public relations in the early days of its development in Russia have projected commercialization of the body onto women working in public relations and shaped the ways today's women discursively position themselves by negotiating their identities as women and as professionals. A similar dynamics might be found in other countries which have gone or are still going through similar economic transformations, particularly the ones with strong patriarchal traditions.

Studying self-disciplining and control in identity negotiations by female professionals in countries other than Russia will be a fruitful pursuit. Although this study did not focus on examining the actual manifestations of female practitioners' professionalism in the workplace, future studies can investigate how self-disciplining is enacted in practice. Researchers, for instance, can observe how practitioners reinforce the professionalism by following dress codes in various work situations (such as during meetings with clients). Such study might help researchers and practitioners understand whether female professionals truly know how and why they are controlling their bodies by following the dress codes—or whether these professionals just exploit a popular discourse. Argyris and Schön (1974) referred to it as a difference between *espoused theories* and *theories-in-use* pointing out that often people say they would do something but in fact do not act upon what they said. This study provided some evidence that body disciplining is truly present in Russia as the researcher shared notes on the physical appearances of interviewees at the time of interviews, which took place during regular work hours. At the same time, additional investigation can enrich our understanding how

and why female professionals engage in self-disciplining. Future researchers thus should employ methods of partial participant observation and ethnographic narration to answer this question.

Results of this study indicated that it might be particularly interesting to study processes of disciplining body and the ways identities are constructed by female professionals in the banking industry and other similar developing areas in Russia and other countries. Moreover, comparative research might be conducted in the USA and other countries in regard to the banking industry and other free market economy businesses to update and expand studies of female professionals in finance and other male-dominated industries, which were previously conducted in Great Britain and the United States (Fisher, 2003; McDowell, 1997). It will be beneficial to conduct research on body disciplining and professional identity negotiation by professionals in the field of banking in the hyper-sexualized patriarchal workplace to extend previous research on female professionals' body disciplining in the banking industry in the developed, traditionally progressive countries, such as Denmark (Holmgreen, 2009; Lassen, 2009). To answer these questions, researchers should engage in more extensive investigations using a variety of methods, including unstructured interviews, ethnographic narratives, and observations.

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