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Title: Narratives of sex-segregated professional identities

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Abstract

This article highlights the significance of small story analysis for the identification of positioning acts which function as rhetorical warrants for career choices and trajectories. It analyses stories told by Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) investigating the tensions expressed in the negotiation and performance of their gendered professional identities. Identity work is achieved via accountability and orientation to: past and present self; interlocutors within the interaction; and “master narratives” about gendered work. Small stories act as a medium of professional identity construction, rapport-building and as a site of contestation, employed to (re)appraise the social order, particularly with respect to “women’s” and “men’s” work. Gendered discourses are shown to impact on the amount of men entering the SLT profession and the specialisms and progression routes that men and women pursue. The analysis points to the reproductive, pervasive and regulatory power of gendered discourses on individuals’ experience of their subjectivity and professional identity.

Key words: gender identity, narratives, professional identity, sex-segregated professions, Speech and Language Therapy, small stories, small story analysis, stance

Introduction

This paper reports on an analysis of six narratives (small stories) told by male and female Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) in a focus group discussing career choices and specialisations. Its aim is to explore how the identity/ies of SLTs and the SLT profession are created through the stances displayed by interactants and the consequent positioning of gender subjectivities. We investigate how participants, through story telling-in-interaction, simultaneously manoeuvre between alignment and distancing from established Discourses/master narratives¹ and “interpretive repertoires”² about being a male or female SLT. Master narratives are shown to offer a frame of reference for discussants with regard to actions and assumptions about the skills, traits and qualities of men and women. The study is novel in: applying small story analysis to the exploration of subjective and intersubjective positioning acts which function as rhetorical warrants for career choices and trajectories in an extreme sex-segregated occupation (an under-researched area); in enhancing small story analysis by the introduction of a staged analysis at each of the positioning levels (beginning with the identification of stance objects, followed by a description of rhetorical devices and a detailed linguistic analysis); and in drawing attention to the role of narratives in influencing individuals’ experience of their gendered subjectivity and professional identity.

Appropriating the stages of small story analysis, we explore at each level: the role of stance in evaluating, aligning and positioning subjects; the linguistic features used to encode

¹ Capital “D”-iscourses and “master narratives” are considered to be synonymous and are used interchangeably.

² The concept of “interpretive repertoires” is appropriated from the work of Potter & Wetherell (1987) and refers to “a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes (doxa)... [which] comprise members’ methods for making sense in [any] context - they are the common sense which organizes accountability and serves as a back-cloth for the realization of locally managed positions in actual interaction (which are always also indexical constructions and invocations) and from which, ... accusations and justifications can be launched. The whole argument does not need to be spelt out in detail. Rather, one fragment or phrase...evokes for listeners the relevant context of argumentation – premises, claims and counter-claims.” (Wetherell, 1998, p.400-1).

these acts; and their role in indexing, reproducing and contesting discourses of gender-segregated professional identity. The rationale for the study is three-fold:

1. to contribute to recent investigations of minority/contested identity construction and negotiation in narratives (e.g. see Ladegaard, 2012, 2015) and critical analyses of professional identity and practice (e.g. Norton & Early, 2011; Vasquez, 2011);
2. to explore how gender discourses, especially in the rare accounts of minority groups within a profession (SLT), affect identity construction and maintenance and motivations for entering into professions/specialisms;
3. to contribute, theoretically and methodologically, to research which attempts to straddle both narrative inquiry and narrative analysis concerns.

We begin with a brief introduction to theoretical and methodological influences, including recent accounts of sex-segregated professions and the discursive construction of gender identity; the concept of “positioning” in identity research; and small story analysis. This is followed by a methodological description and analysis of six small stories and a discussion of findings.

Sex-segregated professions & gender discourses

“Occupational sex segregation” (Gross, 1968; Williams 1993, 2013) refers to the non-proportional distribution of men and women in occupations. *Sex* segregation refers to a large concentration of male or female employees in specific (often referred to as “masculinised” and “feminised”) occupations, where sex is the particular demographic marker for segregation. Sometimes “gender segregation” is used interchangeably with “sex segregation”. However, gender, as typically understood in sociolinguistic and gender and language work, refers to a broader, non-binary concept that encompasses a range of social perceptions, roles, relations and practices by/around/ about men and women, and – for the purposes of this study

- about what is typically seen as “men’s work” and “women’s work” (e.g. Cameron, 2006; Litosseliti, 2006).

Occupational sex segregation is often seen as a problem faced by women entering traditionally “masculine” professions (Jacobs, 1993) but is rarely discussed in relation to men entering traditionally “feminine” professions. The latter is an area in dire need of attention and research and a gap that this paper intends to address. In the UK context, a clear picture of sex-segregated professions emerges from the Labour Force Surveys of the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2009), which show a high concentration of men in “skilled trade occupations” (90%) and of women in “caring leisure and other service” occupations (82%). Speech and Language Therapy (SLT), where the data for this paper come from, is one of the most extreme sex-segregated occupations, with only up to 2.5% male SLTs (McKinson, 2007). This statistic has barely changed over time (ONS, 2009).

The sociological literature on occupational sex segregation (e.g. Siltanen et al., 1995; Jenson et al., 2000; Blackburn et al., 2002) has focused on how occupations become divided along gender lines, for example how industrialisation has set up the conditions for women to be paid less by subdividing jobs into tasks that require more technical skill to use new technologies (tasks allocated to men) and more routine and repetitive tasks (tasks allocated to women). Sociologists have also critiqued the widespread devaluation of women’s work (see for example, Hakim, 2000; Reskin & Roos, 1990; although also see footnote³ below). In addition, considerable attention has been paid to the “gender typing” of occupations, which is even evident in the early school years, where subject choices are inextricably bound with gender identity; young people (especially boys) are reluctant to violate what they perceive as

³ This is not to ignore the poorly-paid “masculinised” occupations, especially in the context of a neoliberal global economy (Williams, 2013); but it is to draw attention to the disproportionate detrimental effects on ‘feminised’ occupations. In addition, a valuable dimension is provided by intersectionality studies looking at complex interrelated aspects of gender, status, class, age, race and so on (Williams, 2013; Huppatz, 2012).

gender appropriateness of professions by considering a career that is traditionally viewed as appropriate for the opposite sex (Francis, 2002; Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997). Even with women's increased access to STEM professions, gender typing and gendered perceptions of professions (e.g. engineering as "a career for men") and of specialisations within them (see below) remain very strong (Times Higher Education, 2014; The Observer, 2015). Moreover, once a job or specialisation is "sex typed", it is very difficult to change that perception, to the extent that people prefer to enter a career of less status within their same "sex type" than one perceived as "opposite sex typed" (see Byrne, 2008, for a discussion).

Theorists have problematised both *horizontal segregation*, i.e. women and men being clustered in different occupations, and *vertical segregation*, i.e. men progressing to the top/management posts in each occupation (Williams, 1993, 2013; Hakim, 2004). Much discussed are the notions of a "glass ceiling" for women in "masculinised" occupations, a "glass escalator effect" for men in "feminised" occupations (i.e. "invisible pressures to move up in their professions", Williams, 1992, p.256) and the concept of a "revolving door" (men being pushed out into more "masculine" fields, Jacobs, 1993). In terms of vertical segregation – notwithstanding the various complex reasons for this - male secretaries (Pringle, 1993) are more likely to move to senior posts and earn more than their female colleagues, and in primary school teaching men make up 14% of all teachers, but 41% of all head teachers (Lupton, 2006). Within the same occupation, male nurses are concentrated in psychiatric and mental health nursing (Muldoon and Riley, 2003), while female nurses are concentrated in paediatric nursing and the care of the elderly; within surgery, women are found mostly in paediatric surgery and plastic surgery (Greatorex & Sarafidou, 2011); and 80% of doctors in obstetrics and gynaecology are male while midwifery is an almost entirely "feminised" profession (ONS, 2009).

The implications of sex-typed or segregated occupations for the economy, workforce and society are far reaching. A reduction of gender gaps in labour force participation has been linked to increased economic growth (e.g. Klasen & Lamanna, 2009) and reduction of poverty (e.g. Costa et al., 2009). “Feminised” occupations, in particular, suffer disproportionately to “masculinised” ones: the more “feminised” an occupation, the lower its pay, benefits, training and promotion opportunities; and the more likely it is to employ workers part time and part year (see Blackburn, et al., 2002; Reskin, 1993; Jenson et al., 2000).

While acknowledging the importance of the socioeconomic implications, in this paper, we focus on the persistent gender discourses that help shape (support, contest, negotiate, change) sex segregated workplaces. In line with social constructionist thinking, we posit that discourses at the same time “represent and constitute a web of social themes, voices, assumptions, explanations, and practices – in short, ways of seeing the world, manifested in texts. [They] create specific subject positions for people and groups, and they also constitute and re-constitute ideologies which in turn shape a whole range of broader social practices” (adapted from Litosseliti, 2006, p.67). In particular, gendered discourses may “represent, (re)constitute, maintain, and challenge gendered social practices” (Litosseliti, 2006, p.67). For example, a “gender difference Discourse” may reinforce or contest the distinction of “masculine” and “feminine” professions, or the idea that certain skills (e.g. caring, communication, people skills) are more “natural” to women. Wetherell et al., (1987) have also shown how “equal opportunities” and “practical considerations” discourses can co-occur in the same stretch of talk, effectively constructing female employees as a risk through their assumed responsibility for childcare, and serving to maintain a *status quo* within some workplaces.

A social constructionist lens allows us to identify both the language/discourses that position women and men in certain ways in professional settings *and* the ways in which people take up particular gendered subject positions that constitute gender more widely. For example, when men enter non-traditional or “feminised” occupations such as occupational therapy, nursery/primary teaching and social work, enacting gender appropriately becomes crucial; men in those contexts often use “hegemonic masculinity” Discourses (Connell, 1995) to maintain and even exaggerate a masculine identity (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Simpson, 2004; Francis and Skelton, 2001). Bradley (1993) further argues that while “compromised” femininity is still a possible female identity in the context of “male” jobs, a “compromised” (i.e. non-heterosexual or non-hegemonic) masculinity is perceived as more of a threat. It is clear that the gender identity work that people *do* through language/discourse is “a dynamic process of negotiation and restatement, [...] influenced by the enabling and constraining potential of doing gender appropriately” (Litosseliti, 2006, p.67). In other words, whilst able to reproduce dominant or hegemonic discourses, individuals may also repudiate, confront or resist them (e.g. Sznycer, 2013). However, we also need to acknowledge that often they become naturalised and remain unchallenged, thus maintaining the “gendered work” status quo (e.g. see Ashcraft’s, 2007 discussion of gendered representations of commercial airline pilots). For these reasons, it is important to ask what identities are created as a result of different *positioning* of individuals in relation to different discourses, as well as what gender inequalities are created or maintained as a result (Litosseliti, 2006; Baxter, 2010). We turn to the notion of “positioning” in more detail below.

Identity & positioning in narrative research

“Positioning” has become a significant analytic category in studies of identity construction (e.g. see Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). It was first introduced in social-psychological accounts of

self and identities in “narratives in interaction” (Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999 and Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999) and has since been extended to socio-cultural/linguistic accounts of (agentive) discursive processes of identity construction (Korobov, 2013). Positioning analysis offers a performative, relational, and action-oriented⁴ approach to identities, focussing on the *process* of positioning through the situated enactment of identity in talk in interaction. It can illuminate how speakers exploit discursive resources to build and negotiate versions of social reality and self in the moment and also, via iterativity and accretion, more stable renderings of the self and social reality over time.⁵

Bamberg (1997, 2004, 2006, 2011b) has been instrumental in developing a theory and analytic framework of positioning applicable to the analysis of identity construction in narratives. Both he and Georgakopoulou (e.g. 2007) argue that a privileged site of identity investigation is in “the way stories surface in everyday conversations (small stories)... the locus where identities are continuously practiced and tested out.” (Bamberg, 2011a: 10). A “small story” is defined as a narrative activity “such as tellings of ongoing events...allusions to (previous) tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell.” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p.381). Unlike “big story research” which focusses on the representations of identities, small story research examines how speakers “*construct* a sense of who they are” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p.382).

Bamberg suggests that there are “three practical challenges that self and identity formation processes are facing” (2011a, p.3). These are dealt with within “dilemmatic

⁴ Language is seen as “social action”, used to achieve interpersonal goals (e.g. to take or attribute responsibility; blame; to persuade etc.).

⁵ This approach is in contradistinction to static views of self and identity as fixed pre-discursive biological, psychological or cognitive “states” or “traits”. Rather identity is seen as complex and ephemeral, emergent in and through interaction. Talk is therefore seen as a rhetorical site of identity construction; a site of offensive and defensive action.

spaces” (Bamberg 2011b), in which subjects position themselves with respect to social categories and values:

- a. “a successful diachronic navigation between constancy and change”
- b. “the establishment of a synchronic connection between sameness and difference (between self and other)”, and
- c. “the management of agency between the double-arrow of a person-to-world versus a world-to-person direction of fit.” (p.3)

In order to analyse the positioning process, Bamberg (1997) and Bamberg & Georgakopoulou (2008) propose a minimum of three analytic levels:

Positioning Level 1: “*How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events?*” This level of analysis focuses on “the linguistic means that do the job of marking one person as, for example, (a) the agent who is in control while the action is inflicted upon the other; or (b) as the central character who is helplessly at the mercy of outside (quasi “natural”) forces or who is rewarded by luck, fate, or personal qualities....” (Bamberg, 1997, p.337).

Positioning Level 2: “*How does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience?* Does, for instance, the narrator attempt to instruct the listener in terms of what to do in [the] face of adversary conditions or does the narrator engage in making excuses for their actions and in attributing blame to others?” (Bamberg, 1997, p.337).

Positioning level 3: “*How do narrators position themselves to themselves?* Analysis here focuses on how language is employed to make claims that the narrator holds to be true and relevant above and beyond the local conversational situation. In other words, linguistic devices point to more than the content (or what the narrative is “about”) and the interlocutor;

the narrator transcends the question of: “How do I want to be understood by you, the audience?” and constructs a (local) answer to the question: “Who am I?” (Bamberg, 1997, p.337). At this level of analysis the investigator considers how the interactants draw on Discourses or “master narratives” which index belonging to particular socio-cultural categories.

Within small story analysis, the exploration of identity construction is viewed emically, with the analysis focusing on what people “do when they tell stories” (Bamberg, 2005, pp.213, 215) - the dilemmas that they face in constructing a referential (storied) world whilst in interaction with others. Different accounts are relayed to different informants in different contexts for different functions, demanding different (re)tellings and positionings. Through these events, the speaker indexes a sense of self. As noted by Bamberg (2011a, p.10) “this groundedness of sense of self and identity in sequential, moment by moment interactive engagements [...] is at best undertheorized and at worst dismissed in traditional identity inquiry...”. Small story research therefore encourages an exploration of how story characters and narrators are linguistically and spatio-temporally developed, and how they express stances and evaluations with respect to: other characters, the listening audience, and master narratives (including social stereotypes and ideologies about social groups).

Applying positioning as a methodological and analytical tool helps to explore the norms and practices of a community and consider these as participatory sites of learning and socialisation. As with personal narratives, however, narratives within a Community of Practice (CofP) are also subject to recontextualisation, reappraisal, negotiation and change and “[i]n this respect, it is important to recognise [their] place ... in a trajectory of interactions as temporalized activities and also in networks of practices which they are part of, represent and reflect on.” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p.384). Examining similarities and or differences in the storied life of CofP members can expose the enduring

and contested sites of community identity and social order which they draw on, and are embedded within – the historical and contextual frames determining actor rights and obligations.

Methodology

Data Collection, Sampling and Analysis

Due to space limitations and the need for an in depth qualitative analysis we focus on a data set extracted from a large corpus collected as part of a research project in the UK (see Litosseliti & Leadbeater, 2013a and 2013b), which explored gender as a factor in SLTs' choice of career and in their understanding of enablers and barriers at work. The initial study adopted a qualitative design, appropriate for eliciting views and experiences from a sample of key individuals: SLT graduates/students, practising SLTs, teachers of SLT and careers advisors. The entire data set consisted of semi-structured interviews with newly qualified SLT graduates (n = 9; 4 male and 5 female); semi-structured interviews with practising SLTs (n = 9; 4 male and 5 female); questionnaires by 32 undergraduate SLT students (female); and 6 focus groups with a total of 33 participants – from which the data presented in this paper is derived. Of the six focus groups, two were held with SLTs (n = 11; 8 female and 3 male), two with teachers of SLT (n = 10; 9 female and 1 male) and two with careers advisors (n = 12; 9 female and 3 male). The mix of methods allowed for obtaining a range of perspectives on the same topic, in participants' own words, but also in a focused group situation, where participants engaged in and responded to detailed accounts. It also helped use input from earlier datasets to design the focus groups.

The sampling method used followed qualitative research principles (Curtis et al., 2000): samples were small and intensively studied; sample selection was driven by the conceptual framework and the research questions, rather than statistical probability; samples

generated rich descriptions/explanations of the phenomena studied against wider theoretical constructs.

The SLTs participating in the focus group under examination in this paper were practising in different NHS trusts, Local Education Authorities and schools in London; they were male and female, aged 25-60 years (but with smaller representation of men overall, as anticipated); and they had varied levels of experience, between 2-35 years. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from City, University of London.

The focus group was led by a researcher who was a qualified SLT⁶ with rich ethnographic knowledge of the practitioner context. The focus group followed a protocol of open-ended questions around the factors, skills and qualities involved in a SLT career and the potential expectations, advantages and challenges in a “gendered” profession (see Litosseliti & Leadbeater, 2013a for details). Focus groups were recorded, transcribed and anonymised.

The data were coded and iterative patterns/ thematic analysis was followed (ibid.). The analysis was executed at three levels of positioning: character, narrator and ideological frame, taking into account the approach of Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) and Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann (2004a, b). We also enhanced this analysis by introducing a staged analysis at each of the positioning levels (as noted above): beginning with the identification of stance objects (Du Bois, 2007; McEntee-Atalianis, 2013), followed by a description of rhetorical devices and a linguistic analysis of their realisation. In this way “positioning” was not simply “read off” the text but analysis proceeded in a step-wise replicable fashion (cf. Georgakopoulou’s, 2013 description of narrative stance which differs from our approach by referring to metapragmatic processes of story-signalling).

⁶ The authors would like to thank and acknowledge the help of Claire Leadbeater in the collection of the focus group data. Thanks are also due to Alexandra Georgakopoulou, and two anonymous reviewers for having read and offered valuable comments on the text.

For the purposes of this paper, six small stories (identified using criteria established in Bamberg & Georgokopoulou, 2008) arising from one focus group discussion between an interviewer and three SLT practitioners were selected for analysis. These stories were chosen as exemplars of a repeated motif (30 realisations in total) running throughout the focus groups with regard to male and female roles and the specialisations expected of men and women (adult and paediatric respectively) within the SLT profession. The tell-ability of these narratives is made salient by the under-representation of male SLTs in the profession and therefore the first story told by a male SLT forms both the basis for the other stories and the three-level analysis.

Analysis

The six extracted small stories are numbered and highlighted in italics below (some embedded in the extended frame of the conversation for the purpose of contextualisation and interpretation). The stories were employed to support arguments for the greater proportion of male SLTs working in adult specialisations. Certain topics are prevalent across the data set, used as rhetorical devices by informants in their negotiation of pervasive ideologies and experiential “reality”. These include: adult work as “medical” and more serious; work with children as less demanding and less important; women as natural carers and prepared to engage in “less serious work”; and men as potentially sexually threatening to children. These topics are presented as “accepted truths” but become stance objects to be resisted and challenged via self and distal-evaluation (using other-report/story characters). These stance acts are used to mediate and challenge dominant ideologies at two levels, through the double temporal indexicality of the referential and interactional frames. Through story-telling in interaction a dilemmatic space is established in which opposing positions are engaged with. It is in this space that the negotiation and struggles of professional identity become evident as interlocutors engage with imposed/ascribed subject positionings, employing epistemic stance

to present themselves as knowledgeable, experienced and trained professionals. However, as also illustrated in analyses of narratives about the ethnic Other (Galasińska & Galasińska, 2003), it becomes evident that in tackling gendered professional discourses, SLTs engage in a form of *oracular reasoning* (Mehan, 1990) in defense of their career choices and in constructing group identity.

In the discussion prior to the first extract, Francis, asserts that many male SLTs (himself included) are expected to work with adult clients, choosing this specialization for their future career path. The interviewer enquires as to why this is the case.

1. **(F) Francis:** I think with a lot of men there's an expectation that and I think a lot of men do

2. end up working with adults and that for at least probably 3 years what I was studying,

3. I thought I'd come out and work with adults

4. **Interviewer:** and why is that do you think?

5. **F: (Small Story 1)** *I think partly because most of the male speech therapists I met did*

6. *work with adults not all of them erm and because I think it's that thing about it being,*

7. *seeming to be more medically minded than working with children which is...you think of*

8. *things like the Derbyshire activities, playing with teddies and dollies which I actually love*

9. *and er but when I try and describe that to people, especially male friends, they'll you*

10. *know they'll laugh. They'll find it very amusing and they won't really see that it's quite*

11. *a lot of academic stuff that goes on underneath that but when you work with adults –*

12. *you're working on things like adult swallowing or working with stroke patients it just*

13. *automatically seems to fall into a different area, people just assume it's much more*

14. *medical.*

1. **(A)nna: (Small Story 2)** *From Sam's point of view (that's my husband) he had I think*
2. *three or four hospital placements and I had none absolutely none and he always said "oh,*
3. *I think it's because I'm a man they just assume I'm gonna go and work in hospital". They*
4. *just kept putting him down for hospital placements and he hated them, he really just had*
5. *enough of it by the end.*

6. **Interviewer:** So there was an expectation for Sam, as a male student, that he would
7. likely to be going into adult neurology?

8. **A:** *Yeah, how can it be a coincidence? Some people had no hospital placements and he*
9. *had like four or five. I think that was a factor for him, an expectation of him, yeah I really*
10. *do.I suppose you get the stereotype of women working with children, doing*
11. *childcare, doing nursery work and you know looking after the children*

1. **F: (Small Story 3)** *my manager at X when I was there working with adults cos I had a*
2. *split post he actually said to me "oh you don't want to carry on working with teddies and*
3. *dollies!"*

4. **Interviewer:** are men moving in a different direction in their career?

5. **F:** I think that there is the expectation that men will take that direction into adults

6. **A:** do more medical stuff as well. That's kind of the impression. I don't think it's fair but

7.. I do think.....

1. **(D)eana: (Small Story 4)** *I'm the only one of my friends who went into paediatrics and*
2. *they have given themselves that importance. I had one mum of a friend say to me "Do*
3. *you work with children because you couldn't get a job with adults?" And I think my*
4. *housemate has a perception that all I do is sit in an office and put my teeth in front of my*

5. *bottom lip whereas she has to go off to take a trache out and...*

6. **Interviewer:** so do you think there is something about the status or prestige

7. **A:** Mmm, definitely

1. **F: (Small Story 5)** *You come across bigger words in adults (laugh), you do working with*

2. *children as well. I remember my brother's a lawyer and he picked up some sheets that I*

3. *had been writing on and he actually looked at me and said "This is work? This is what*

4. *you study?" It was all activities where I am playing with bricks but I think that's the*

5. *perception compared to someone who's had a left-sided infarct, it looks as though it's*

6. *not as important*

7. **A:** I don't think people know what paediatric therapists do cos 80% of my work is doing

8. *child protection and it is really important and really serious but it's not medical and*

9. *people don't understand it because they're not involved in it.....*

.....

1. **F: (Small Story 6)** *I still feel that people have perceptions about a male therapist.*

2. *Teachers would often say to me going into schools, "as you're a man we'd better leave*

3. *the door ajar if you're working with this child."*

We undertake an examination of these accounts below, building our analysis on the first story told by Francis which projects and shapes subsequent audience engagement/stance (dis)alignment. In this narrative, Francis sets up an argumentative sequence in which he attempts to justify his reasons for specialising in adult therapy. These include his contact and identification with other male speech therapists in adult clinics and the perception of adult work being more medically-oriented. He challenges the latter perception, however, offering

an extended account in defence of those working with children. In the following we examine how this is achieved at each narrative level.

Level 1: Positioning of characters in the story world & their relationality

The characters in this short extract include the speaker; male therapists; generic ‘people’ and male friends. These characters (and their different subject positions) are invoked to support a reasoned argument for Francis’s choice of specialisation. He initially hedges his response (“I think”, *line 5*) and presents himself as not completely agentive in his career trajectory; rather his past choices are influenced by contact with other male therapists and the opinions of friends/people with respect to the medicalisation of adult work.

Linguistically this is achieved in a number of ways. His rationalisation begins by reference to the influence of other *male therapists (line 5)* who are invoked as influential story characters within a causative construction (“...*because* most of the male speech therapists I met *did* work with adults” *lines 5-6*); the weight of this argument is further reinforced by the employment of the past tense emphatic verb “did”. Francis is at pains to present a balanced persona, qualifying his statement with the addition of the negative adjunct “not all of them” to reflect a rational assessment of his assertion.

His contact with male therapists only partially explains his decision to work with adults. A secondary influential factor is “that thing about it being, seeming to be more medically minded than working with children...” (*lines 5-7*). The reference to an understood indefinite noun –“that thing” alludes to a generalised ideology about adult work, which is first presented as a factual state but quickly qualified by the more equivocal assertion of it “*seeming to be*” (*line 7*) (rather than actually “being”) more “medical”. This statement

requires further qualification however, achieved by bringing into the account the perspectives of other story characters - his friends - who mock his “love” for what appears to be childish activities. This macro argumentative strategy of “other-perspectivisation” enables the speaker to contrast two world-views – his own professional perspective and those of other people – (his friends) - who are invoked as a rhetorical trope to represent the views of “people” at large. His friends are depicted as united and determined in their reproach - note the repeated negative references to “they will” (*lines 9 & 10*)- in which his friends are depicted through the syntactic appropriation of the historical present, as active agents in their scornful epistemic stance taking. His paediatric work is presented through their eyes; its importance diminished through the act and verb of “playing” (*line 8*) (rather than *doing* “serious” work) with “teddies and dollies” (*line 8*, in their diminutive forms). Despite attempts to explain the importance of the work (as expressed through the verb of intention “...when I *try*...” *line 9*), Francis meets with mocking evaluations which position him and his work with children as a “joke”. In response, he evaluates their perspective. His friends/”people” are positioned metaphorically as blind (“they won’t really see” *line 10*) and superficial, unable to understand the complexity of what lies “underneath” the apparent simplicity of the testing activities performed on children in clinics.

The impact of others’ perceptions is further reinforced in three subsequent small stories which introduce three more story characters into the unfolding conversation. The first (*small story 3*) introduces Francis’s manager who rebukes him for working with children in exactly the same manner as his friends. Here Francis shifts footing (Goffman, 1981) to animate and voice the words of his manager repeating and echoing the dialogic syntax (or “diagraph”, Du Bois, 2007) previously invoked in his account of his friends. We witness a parallelism of form and stance: “(play)ing with teddies and dollies” (*small story 1, line 8*)/ “(work)ing with teddies and dollies!” (*small story 3, lines 2-3*). These parallel syntactic

structures encased in an evaluative utterance serve to construct intersubjective alignment with the evaluations of his friends and manager. They accrete to reinforce a dominant negative stance toward working with children, a consequence of the repeated evaluation and positioning of Francis in the same vein by different story characters.

This positioning is further triangulated in his subsequent tale (*small story 5*) in which he extends the realm of his story characters to the familial, *his brother*, who is at pains to rebuke him for the superficiality of his work, in a similar manner to his friends. Once again we find parallelism in stance-taking and perspective expressed via similarities/repetitions in the syntactic structures (e.g. conversational historical present) and metaphorical forms, (e.g. verbs of vision “...it **looks** as though it’s not as important” (*small story 5*, lines 5-6) “..they won’t really **see**” (*small story 1*, line 10)). Francis animates the voice of his questioning authoritative brother, the “lawyer”, who by inference, works in a very important job and therefore has the authority to evaluate the comparative quality of his brother’s work, positioning the work and him as inferior to his own activities and status. However as in the first account, Francis is at pains to suggest that this perspective is superficial. Through structural analogy between pairs of successive stances Francis builds a unified, consistent and rounded picture of the perspective of “the other”.

A new stance object is however challenged in his final story (6), which brings into his account the perspective of another character, the *teacher*, who is constructed as taking a particularly negative stance towards Francis, in light of his gender. Invoking direct speech and adopting the voice of animator in bringing to light a past event, Francis distances himself from the implication that he may be responsible for inappropriate behaviour and a possible threat to children. His dis-alignment is indexed by the marked inclusion of the story in the interactional event and his use of reported speech.

To sum up, the identity of Francis emerges within the dilemmatic spaces evoked through each of these small stories and more particularly in his evaluation of specific stance objects. The dilemma facing the protagonist is instantiated through the constructions of the story characters and therefore via the distal attribution of thoughts/beliefs/attitudes/stances to others who act as role models (male therapists) and censors/conveyors of dominant ideology (friends/the general public/manager/brother/teacher). These characters are employed to mediate and bring to life Francis's incipient struggles. He illustrates the rocky passage that he has/d to navigate between the push (from mainstream ideology – “world to person direction of fit”) and pull (“the person to world direction of it”) towards adult work (see p? above). He articulates a desire to align with other male SLTs, whilst also acknowledging that he enjoys paediatric work (“...a synchronic connection between sameness and difference” with others, Bamberg, 2010, p.1). However the negative stances taken towards working with children, as expressed via the distal voices of his story characters, are hegemonic (albeit unfounded). He therefore finds himself subject to a “world to-person direction of fit” aligning with dominant social categories and values. It is in this tension, in the working through and processing of his identity in this third level dilemmatic space (see p? above), that he carves out and defends his professional choice to work with adults and to construct a masculine, professionally informed and rational identity.

Francis's strategic manoeuvring mirrors the argumentative reasoning of other communities/individuals engaging with and invoking stereotypical views about “the other” in conversation in order to defend a position and reinforce an ingroup identity (e.g. see e.g. Condor, 2006; Condor et al., 2006; Galasińska & Galasińska, 2003; Ladegaard & Cheng, 2014). Francis engages in a form of *oracular reasoning* (whereby a “basic premise is confronted with contradictory evidence, but the evidence is ignored or rejected” Galasińska & Galasińska, 2003, p.849) in order to attend (interactionally) to the defence of his career

specialisation, whilst simultaneously establishing and maintaining group solidarity with his fellow SLTs. He presents a basic premise – i.e. stereotypical assertions about men and women - to which he presents contradictory evidence. However it is clear through his career choice and actions that the contradictory stance displayed towards this basic premise is ignored in practice/not enacted, in favour of alignment with dominant views about men and women's work.

ii) *Level 2: The positioning of the narrator with respect to the interviewer/audience.*

At this level of analysis we explore how the stories are embedded in the larger frame of talk. Analysis focuses on if and how the co-interactants linguistically co-construct events and subject matter, highlighting implied and explicit assumptions. It also focuses on issues of co-narration (including markers of parallel structure and evaluation indicating shared values and attitudes), of negotiation and/or the narrator's apparent autonomy in the telling of their story.

Francis's initial story is occasioned by the interviewer's prompt to elaborate on his reasons for specialising in adult therapy. She offers the floor to provide an extended response. This is taken up by Francis and, as described above, he explicitly takes a stance towards past events and his past self, thereby positioning his present self in relation to his evaluations and (dis)/alignment with other characters and their points of view.

His interactional alignment with his audience of fellow SLTs is achieved in his evaluation of the stance objects (paediatric v adult work) and marked by epistemic stance markers, such as the use of shared terminology (e.g. "the Derbyshire activities"/"split post"/"left-sided infarct" *small story 1, line 8, small story 5, line 5*); inclusive pronouns marking synthetic personalisation (e.g. "you think of things like", *small story 1, lines 7-8*); and humour. However as the only male in the conversation his account provides him with a

degree of autonomy and distinction and has the potential to be anecdotal. He is responded to positively by his fellow SLTs who sympathetically work to establish rapport, echoing his story by bringing into play the reported experiences of another male SLT, Sam, and also their own experiences as female SLTs who (are expected to) work with children. Through other-perspectivisation and a shift in footing, Anna (*small story 2*) recounts the experience of her husband who was training at the same time as her, animating his objection to being pigeon-holed as an adult specialist. She reinforces the view that there was an expectation for him as a man to work in adult neurology. In a contrary and yet parallel syntactic/semantic form used by Francis when admitting to “actually lov[ing]” (*small story 1, line 8*) working with children, she notes how Sam “hated” adult work (*small story 2, line 4* - note how these oppositional adjectives are used to evaluate opposing stance objects – child versus adult work). She also contrasts Sam’s experience with her own, noting through emphasis how she experienced no hospital work “none, *absolutely none*” (*small story 2, line 2*). By responding with their own stories, which mirror in content and form the stories told by Francis, Anna and Deana become co-authors of Francis’s account, aligning themselves with him through their shared evaluation of attitudes towards adult and paediatric work.

iii. Level 3: Positioning with respect to broader socio-cultural and ideological frames.

At this level we examine whether narrators draw directly or indirectly on common/implicit perceptions of themselves and the socio-cultural context ~~and a-~~Also, how they draw on other texts (intertextuality) commonly produced through social institutions and gatekeepers, and whether they align with or challenge these.

Discourses and ideologies about men’s and women’s work are directly invoked/ oriented to in this extract by interlocutors, as they account for their own or others’

perceptions/actions. Indeed the prevalence of similar stories in this extract (and in the larger database of interviews carried out with SLTs and teachers of SLT, see Litosseliti & Leadbeater, 2013a) permits a broader discussion about: the impact of these stories on male and female SLTs; and how discourses about gendered work are pertinent to an interpretation of Francis's professional and gendered identity.

Francis's story is one of 30 narratives in our data that reported on sex-differentiated work in SLT and the expectations for males or females to specialize in adult or paediatric SLT. These issues are highlighted: at the outset of this extract by Francis; taken up and elaborated upon by himself and his interactional partners; subsequently alluded to by the interviewer who interprets the inferences arising from the small stories told; and explicitly addressed by Anna who reproduces a dominant view about the role of women (*small story 2*). These repetitive and recurrent reports at the referential and interactional levels convey a common doxa which serves to position subjects within a "world-to-person direction of fit" – in which women are expected to work with children, men may be threatening in this regard and men are seen to be more suited to scientific/medical roles. These beliefs constitute pervasive "master narratives" around assumed gender differences and the gendered division of labour: women and men doing things "differently" or having "different" skills and competencies, which crucially are differently evaluated (some less positive than other). The interactionally defensive positioning, in Francis' story, towards working with children ("playing with teddies and dollies which I love" *small story 1, line 8*) is meaningful within this particular SLT community of practice but can only be fully understood in the broader social order where gender differences are seen to exist and to matter. Ideological presuppositions or assumed knowledge about "gender differences" are prevalent across the **entire** SLT dataset (and see Anna's account, *small story 2, lines 10-11* above): respondents typically evoke a "women as carers/nurturers" Discourse, which is based on the assumption

that caring for people is a “natural” skill that women possess and which often arises from their role as mothers. Participants further allude to assumed “gender differences” to discuss vertical segregation (see p? above), that is, inequalities in terms of career progression and promotion opportunities within this extreme sex segregated occupation. A notable way of doing this is by drawing on a perceived distinction between women as “emotional” and men as “rational” to account for men’s quick progression to SLT management positions or their choice of certain specialisations within the profession (such as adult neurology) and certain settings (such as hospitals). This perceived distinction or double standard is limiting for both the female SLTs who do not see their paediatric work as mostly “caring” and “emotional” neither as the end destination/ceiling in the profession, and for the male SLTs who do not wish to be pushed through “revolving doors” to the management side of the profession. As seen in the data extracts, master narratives about assumed, prescriptive and fixed gender roles not only work to reduce subject agency, but they also create dilemmas for those participants (such as Francis and Anna above) wishing to resist and contest them.

Discussion & conclusion

This paper adopted a small story approach to the analysis of gendered professional identity. It focussed on an investigation of the dilemmas expressed by male and female SLTs in the discursive negotiation of their professional identities and career specialisations. The analysis demonstrates how identity construction in conversational narratives is motivated by accountability and orientation to: past and present self; interlocutors within the interactional encounter; and “master narratives” about gendered work. It is evident that dominant gender discourses, in which women are positioned as carers and nurturers suited to SLT and more particularly to paediatric work, and men are positioned as potentially threatening to children in a professional environment and more suited to adult clinical posts, have the potential to

impact not only on the amount of men entering the profession but also the specialisations and progression routes that men and women are motivated to pursue. The SLTs apparently struggle to reconcile themselves with stereotypical gendered attitudes about their professional identity, instead constructing opposing representations of their status whilst acknowledging their influence on their career choices. This is a struggle similarly reported in analyses of intergroup prejudice and stereotyping (e.g. Condor, 2006; Condor et al., 2006; Galasińska & Galasińska, 2003; Ladegaard & Cheng, 2014).

The analysis also demonstrates how identity work demands rhetorical negotiation achieved through stance-taking and linguistic dexterity in which informants evaluate stance objects as they reflect on past encounters through distal positionings (reflections on and constructions of past representations of self and/or positions taken up by others as told through story characters and/or evaluative sequences) and via alignment to conversational interlocutors. The speaker is therefore multiply positioned and constructed as: narrator; actor/character; as a generalised category member and as interactant. Positions are taken up simultaneously at three narrative levels (referential, interactional and in relation to master narratives) and woven into subject accounts for the purposes of tactically managing the conflicting challenges of dilemmatic agency (Bamberg, 2010). We have argued that the act of negotiating and “entertaining” conflicting positions enables male and female SLTs to adopt shared epistemic and moral stances which perform as a rhetorical warrant in support of their career choices and trajectories, also enabling them to create interactional rapport in the local context. Positions of resistance are designed to elicit reciprocal rejection from others in the exchange. Moreover, the repetitive and recurrent realisation of similar stance acts by multiple informants at the referential and interactional levels accrete to index speaker and community (-of practice) identity. Stances often reproduce and challenge dominant Discourses/”master narratives” about gender “differences” more generally and about being a male or female SLT

in particular (Litosseliti & Leadbeater, 2013b). We witness in the data “self-positioned resistance”; “resistance to being positioned as complicit with stereotypical gender preferences” and “positioning by the other as resistant to stereotypical gender preferences” (Korobov, 2013, p.120). Moreover the strategic adoption of *oracular reasoning* enables subjects to enact a shared SLT identity by challenging the more stable narratives about men and women, even if succumbing to their power. These findings align with a number of other studies reporting on how group members enhance positive in-group identity whilst reinforcing in-group-out-group distinctiveness (e.g. Condor 2006; Condor et al., 2006; De Cillia et al., 1999; Ladegaard, 2011; Ladegaard & Cheng, 2014).

Through an analysis of stories told about different situations we are able to understand and deconstruct the reproductive, pervasive and regulatory power of dominant discourses on individuals’ experience of their gendered subjectivity and their professional identity. These discourses entail normative/restrictive projections of subject positions (e.g. women as carers) which have the potential to impact on career choice and specialisation (see Litosseliti & Leadbeater, 2013a and 2013b; also Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Fitzsimons, 2002). This study therefore draws attention to the potentially constraining influence of master narratives and the struggle for recognition that individuals experience within and outside of the profession when their role and status challenges preconceptions. It also reveals, however, that alternative interpretations and counter narratives are voiced and there is potential for them to be harnessed to empower those within the profession and encourage those outside it to enter in. In this endeavour, narrative studies of workplaces/professions, affords us the opportunity for valuable insights and interventions (Sarangi & Candlin, 2010).

Whilst limitations of space permit an in-depth analysis of a sample of the small stories elicited, preventing issues such as the impact of audience design or humour⁷ on speaker positioning to be tackled (e.g. offensive and defensive positioning), the paper calls for further research on this topic in addition to further work on narrative identity in (and about) other sex-segregated professions.

⁷ It is possible for example that Francis's defence of paediatric work was influenced by the presence of other SLTs who worked in this specialisation. Unfortunately we cannot corroborate this with complementary data in which he may have spoken about the topic exclusively to adult-focussed clinicians. Moreover the role of humour in defensive positioning may be seen in Small Story 5. See Litosseliti & Leadbeater (2013b) for a discussion of [such contextual issues](#) ~~humour~~ in the SLT workplace.

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