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NEGOTIATING PROFESSIONAL AND LEADER IDENTITIES IN INTERVIEWS WITH FEMALE INDIAN PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract
Existing research on women's construction of professional identities and, more specifically, on leader identities in the workplace, has traditionally focused mainly on western contexts. This article aims to extend this focus by investigating the position of women in the workplace in India. We do this by discursively analyzing audio-taped semi-structured interviews with women who are working in the corporate sector in India. The aim of these analyses is to present a number of case studies about the unique challenges that women face at the workplace in the urban Indian context, especially when they take up leadership positions. The issues they grapple with are the collision of the traditional dominant discourses on appropriate female behavior and the new professional identities that these women wish to embrace. This paper discusses how these female professionals mainly construct two quite diverging identities: either as nurturing mentors or as aggressive professionals who are involved in activities traditionally viewed as 'a man's domain'. Conclusions are then drawn regarding how these professional identities acquiesce to, counter, or, – as is the case in one interview – carefully mould, hegemonic discourses of femininity in India.

1. Introduction

In discourse studies, it is widely accepted to take a social-constructionist approach, looking at "communication as a process that is instrumental in the creation of our social worlds, rather than simply an activity that we do within them" (Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011: 21). From this anti-essentialist perspective, then, and "directly contrary to what appears to be its settled semantic career" (Hall 2000: 17), the concept of identity does not refer to a stable core of the self (Hall 2000: 17), but it emphasizes "the constantly changing and developing nature of social identities" (Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011: 21). So this means that people construct several – "more or less compatible" – identities that "intersect and/or contrast with each other in different ways and in accordance with changing social circumstances and interlocutors" (De Fina 2006: 353). Hence, it is the researcher's aim to look into this dynamic process of interlocutors moving in and out of different identities as they are "performed, enacted and embodied through a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic means" in discourse (De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006: 3).

Thus, in any given interaction, individuals may draw on any of the different aspects of their social identity, which are potentially relevant anytime and anywhere (Zimmerman 1988: 426), and they often do so in highly fluid ways, swiftly shifting from making relevant one facet of their social identity to the next. Furthermore, if one of these facets is interactively highlighted, this does not happen in a categorical way either, since "we may act more or less middle-class, more or less female, and so on, depending on what we are doing and with whom" (Schiffrin 1996: 199). Since one of an individual's important pastimes in life is his or her professional activities, it is thus not surprising that a person, both when he or she is at the workplace and elsewhere, draws on these activities as a resource for identity work, for example by highlighting one's membership of an organization (Van De Mieroop 2005) or one's professional status (Holmes, Stubbe and Vine 1999), possibly as a leader.

Leadership is regarded here also from a social constructionist perspective. It is considered as a "dynamic, transformational process or activity that draws on a range of discursive strategies in order to integrate different aspects of effective communication in everyday interaction" (Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011: 7). As such, the importance of language in the fluid process of doing leadership is strongly emphasized, and thus the term *discursive leadership* is often used. This can be characterized as an approach that views leadership as "a language game in which meaning is managed" (Clifton 2012: 149) and this management of meaning is done interactionally, in constant negotiation with the other interlocutors present in the interaction (see also Smircich and Morgan 1982). This, of course, also implies that the identity of leader is not established in any pre-discursive way, "attributed to the hierarchically established superior" (Clifton 2006: 209), or that it

is the "property" of a person, rather "it can be distributed and it is open to challenge" (Clifton 2012: 150). Many studies, for example focusing particularly on co-leadership (Schnurr and Chan, 2011) or distributed leadership in leaderless teams (Choi and Schnurr forthcoming), have demonstrated the locally negotiated and extremely fluid nature of leadership and leader identities.

Also in the workplace, these professional and/or leader identities interact with other facets of an individual's social identity, as for example with gender (Holmes and Schnurr 2006) and/or ethnic identities (Van De Mieroop and Clifton 2012a), thus again resulting in a highly complex myriad of intersecting resources an individual can draw on, both in and outside of the workplace. Especially regarding leadership, gender and leader identities are closely intertwined, since much research on leadership traditionally took "an authoritarian and 'masculine' perspective on the way it is accomplished", a tendency which feminist analysts have summarized as: "Think leader, think male" (Holmes 2005: 1780-81). It has been argued that this masculine perspective on "what defines an effective leader" has lead to the fact that a woman is "less likely […] perceived as potential leader" (Holmes 2005: 1781). So on the one hand, there is a "masculine bias of the concept of leadership" (Schnurr 2009a: 129) and an interrelatedness of "doing leadership" and "doing gender" (Schnurr 2009a: 128), while on the other hand, many studies have also emphasized the importance of relating leadership and gender to the discursive norms of the particular working group under study, or, in Wenger's terms, the community of practice (Wenger 1988). These norms may be related to specific "gendered speech styles" and they may invite the members of a particular community of practice to "display discursive behaviors indexed for masculinity or femininity" (Schnurr 2009a: 129) regardless of their own gender. Studies about workplaces around the world have demonstrated, to a greater or lesser extent, that both – traditionally named – *feminine*, more indirect and relationally oriented, as well as *masculine*, more authoritative, interactional styles are drawn upon by male leaders, as well as by female leaders (see e.g. Holmes 2005; Ladegaard 2011; Saito 2011; Takano 2005; Troemel-Ploetz 1994 for diverging studies on this issue). As such, gender is sometimes, but not always, made relevant. However, in spite of these similar styles, Ladegaard found that female leaders are challenged more often and that their authority is questioned more frequently by their male colleagues (Ladegaard 2011). This shows that gender is a differential in the orientations of the other interlocutors to their leaders in the workplace. So, even when interlocutors do not make a certain facet of their social identity, such as gender, relevant in an interaction, it may be interactively made relevant in implicit or explicit ways by the other participants. So gender and professional identities, and in particular leader identities, often prove to be interrelated and this results in a complex myriad of identity claims that are constantly negotiated among interlocutors in the workplace.

2. Women in the workplace in India

That a woman's economic situation influences her empowerment and her status in the society is no hidden truth. Equal access to education and to opportunities for employment is necessary for women to live with self esteem in today's competitive world. However, the statistics of India do not seem to be favorable for women. India is still pretty much struggling to grapple with challenges of social evils against women, like female feticide and an increase of crimes against women.[1] The sex ratio in some of the states of India is as low as 618 (per thousand males)[2] and the sex differential between the number of male and female workers in India in the total workforce is huge. Females constitute only 31.6% of the total workforce in India out of which a major proportion of females (87.3%) are working as cultivators, agricultural laborers and laborers in household industries. As per the latest data released by the National Sample Survey Organization[3], the labor force participation rate (LFPR) is significantly lower for females than for males in both rural and urban areas: while this LFPR is 56% for rural and urban males, it is only 27% for rural females and 15% for urban females.[4] If more and more women are brought into the mainstream occupations of India, it is expected that the gross domestic product of India would rise steeply. Based on data from 2000-2004, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) estimates that if India's female labour force participation reached parity with that of the United States (86%), its gross domestic product (GDP) would increase by 4.2% a year and a growth rate of 1.08% representing an annual gain of $19 billion (Lahoti and Swaminathan 2013). With this broader picture of the social and economic reality of women and the labour force in India in mind, the discussion now proceeds to focus on the issues faced by women at the Indian workplace.

At this point, it remains unsure whether the work environment in India has become favorable for women after decades of attempts to break through the glass ceiling, during which, as Nath (2000: 50) mentions, "women were unequivocal in wanting to be evaluated on their performance and did not want any special treatment". Studies about the current situation of women in the workplace show mixed evidence. As mentioned by Singh and Hoge (2010: 1) "though women are contributing enormously to the social and economic product at national and global levels, they remain at the bottom in the hierarchy of power and rewards in the workplace". According to People Matters-TCS Gender Inclusion Survey (2010), which collected data from 116 companies in India belonging to the IT-ITes sector, finance and manufacturing sector, there is an under-representation of women at senior management positions and at corporate board level. A patriarchal corporate culture as well as lack of flexible work solutions, of work-life balance policies, of re-entry opportunities, of parental leave and of benefits were cited as some of the

major barriers to the career progression of women in the workplace which has lead to a concentration of women at entry-level positions.

Furthermore, according to a study done by Gupta, Koshal and Koshal (1998) on 162 managers (63% male and 37% female) from the service and manufacturing sector in India, only about one third of male and female managers felt that their organizations were making efforts to increase the number of females in the senior management positions. Their survey also showed that women perceived that they had to work much harder than men and prove their mettle all the time. They were expected to acquire management styles which were more comfortable to their male colleagues and yet, they were paid less compared to their male counterparts despite doing the same work and possessing equal qualifications. So discrimination against women in the workplace has not vanished, but has only taken 'subtle' forms (Klenke 1996). Finally, in their study on women in management in India, Budhwar, Saini & Bhatnagar (2011) argue that after overcoming the traditional and cultural inhibitions which parents and society create for women, they also have to face gender and role stereotyping whereby women are considered fit only for softer roles and occupations like human resources or personnel relations. Next to this, a dualism is expected from them in terms of managing the household and their children, which is considered to be their sole responsibility in addition to their job outside the house. This orientation to family and the household is in line with the findings by Naqvi (2011) on women managers in the public sector: family support is first on the list of competencies women found necessary as an external factor for performing successfully at work. So it is between a tussle of these multiple forces, that women in India try to carve out their position in the workplace, while facing a number of, sometimes conflicting, identity challenges.

3. Research focus and data

In this article we investigate the ways in which the Indian women in our case study construct their professional – and possibly leader – identities in the workplace when they take a step back from the daily routine of everyday life, and discuss their life and more specifically professional experiences during research interviews. As such, the focus is shifted away from the interactional negotiation of professional or leader identities on the spot, so to say, but rather, a more reflexive dataset is obtained, characterized by a greater amount of distance between the interviewee, as the narrator of the story, on the one hand, and the – usually morally acceptable – version of him/herself, as the protagonist, that is constructed in the story on the other hand (Linde 1993). Because of this high degree of reflexivity, life stories are often criticized as the object of analyses, since they are said to contain a less dynamically shifting myriad of identities (see e.g. Georgakopoulou

2006). However, narrators also have to take into account different – local and global – contextual factors, such as the demands to tell a good and reportable story (e.g. Van De Mieroop 2009), and have to interact with the interviewer as well, whose questions often contain a great deal of categorization work (e.g. Bartesaghi and Perlmutter Bowen 2009) and of orientations to particular master narratives which the interviewees can then discursively acquiesce to or counter (e.g. Van De Mieroop and Clifton 2012b). Hence, and in line with the view of interviews as interactively-negotiated and contextually-situated communicative events that need to be investigated as such (see Cicourel 1964), we look into the way the interlocutors, both interviewees and interviewers, discursively negotiate the identities constructed in these interactions. In particular, this study analyzes how the interviewees' professional identities are talked into being and how these identities can be related to dominant discourses (De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006: 7) about women in the workplace in India.

For the purpose of this study, more than ten women working in the corporate sector in three cities of India were approached for interviews. However, only four women gave their consent to audio-tape the interviews, which were then transcribed by the researchers. The other women we approached for these interviews felt that this topic was too sensitive and personal for them and that the disclosure of their feelings about their workplace may hamper their career progression. Some women agreed to talk to the researchers though, but they did not give consent to audiotape their interview and since this kind of analysis requires support of recorded conversations, we did not include these interviews in any of the analyses.

For this article, we draw on data from three interviews since all these interviewees were (or had been) in management positions in the companies they worked for. All interviewees were raised in metro cities in India and they all shared the same wish, namely to remain professionally active and to make careers for themselves.

- Interviewee 1 is in her late fifties and is due for retirement in a couple of years. She has more than thirty years of experience of working in the corporate sector in a northern Indian metro city. She has risen from the position of secretary to being the head of administration for the same company she began her career in.
- Interviewee 2 is in her early thirties and belongs to a well educated family. She has studied in co-education schools and has been living in cities throughout her upbringing. She has earned a postgraduate degree in management and has six years of professional experience in sales in various companies across India as well as in different sectors such as fast moving consumer goods, telecom, media etc. A few years ago, however, she decided to move towards academia because she "got bored of sales" (as she

explains herself in the interview) and she is currently pursuing a doctoral degree.

- Interviewee 3 used to work in the administration of an educational institution in a tier II city situated in central India. She is presently employed in another educational institution, where she is head of finance and acts as registrar in charge. She has about 20 years of experience.

The interviews were carried out by one (and in one case, two) of the authors of this article. So these interviews can be characterized as interactions between women, thus sharing this aspect of one's social identity.

4. Analyses

In this section, we will first discuss how two interviewees clearly co-constructed their professional identities as leaders, and in particular as mentors, with the interviewer. Then we shift to interview 2, in which the interviewee's workplace is clearly defined as a very masculine community of practice, and how this affects the way the interviewee constructs her professional identity. Finally, we go back to one of the mentor identities and discuss in one lengthy story by interviewee 1 how she makes gender relevant in male dominated communities of practice.

4.1 Negotiating leader identities

In interview 1, the interviewer explicitly projects the categorization of 'the boss' upon the interviewee in her question (line 74), while opposing this to a 'group' (hence the plural references in lines 73-75) of 'subordinates' and 'juniors'. She thus constructs a hierarchical dichotomy based on professional criteria and foregrounds the interviewee's leader identity without making gender explicitly relevant in this question:

Fragment 1, interview 1

```
73   IR     So you must be having subordinate (.) e:rm juniors also
74          who for whom you are the:: boss (.)
75          How is thei:r behavior towards you?
76   IE     I am having more than 60 percent staff reporting to >me=
77          =they are all males< (.) and erm (.) they are very (.)
78          I am getting (.) ve::ry (.) e::rm
79          I have got very good rapport with them.
80          a:nd very respectful behavior from them
81          and I am like a mentor to them (.)
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82	so: whenever there is any problem
83	they always come to me:
84	"madam give us e::r solution"
85	so that sort of (.) e::r respect I am commanding (.)[5]

Initially, the interviewee responds by giving more details on the extent of the 'boss versus group-of-subordinates'-dichotomy that was set up in the question (line 76), but then she immediately latches on a categorization of these group members as 'all males', thus making gender relevant herself in her answer. After a few pauses, hesitations and reformulations (lines 77-78), the interviewee describes the relation between herself and her male subordinates in boosted (cf the repeated 'very' in lines 79-80) positive terms. She closes this description by self-categorizing as a 'mentor' (line 81) and this categorization is then illustrated by means of a mini-narrative about a problem-solving situation. Given the temporal indications suggesting the frequent nature of such instances (line 82: 'whenever', line 83: 'always') and the diversity of the problems the interviewee has to deal with (line 82: 'any problem'), this mini-story can be characterized as a *habitual narrative* emphasizing the typicality (Carranza 1998) of the events, which are then linked to the respect the interviewee receives from her subordinates (line 85). Interestingly, this respect is also briefly enacted in the utterance delivered by means of direct reported speech in line 84, in which the subordinates are given a collective voice (hence 'us' in line 84), begging the interviewee, who is addressed by means of the formal term of address 'madam', for a solution. So in this fragment, the interviewee self-categorizes as a mentor, which is then mainly linked to the activity of problem-solving, and this, in turn, is framed as an activity that commands respect in the interviewee's subordinates.

The topic of gaining respect is also explored in another interview, in which the interviewer asks a fairly similar question (line 200: 'So does this mean that the employees who are under you [sic] at present, or in the organization before, they had any issues reporting to you?'). Given the context, this question implicitly points to the fact that the interviewee, as a woman, is in a superior position, and that this hierarchical difference may cause issues with men who are in junior positions. The interviewee answers this question by saying that she never had any problems with the juniors, but receives a lot of respect from them (line 222-223: 'There are people who respect you, they respect your knowledge'). So this initial part of the interviewee's answer is very similar to the previous fragment. However, she then continues to explain how she earns this respect:

Fragment 2, interview 3, turn by the interviewee

| 229 | The juniors always, but but ya, |
| 230 | what (.) precaution you have to take being a female |

231   <that you have to talk to them> very sweetly,
232   very nicely, you have to first win over them.
233   If you start bossing over them,
234   nobody would accept you. >That is what I think.<

In the first line of the fragment, the interviewee follows up on her preceding statement about the respect she receives from the junior staff, but then breaks off and by means of a repeated contrasting conjunction (line 229: 'but but'), she mitigates the general applicability of her initial statement – as indicated by the Extreme Case Formulation (Pomerantz 1986) 'always' (line 229). This mitigation is explicitly linked to the gender of the superior (line 230: 'being a female') that requires some 'precaution' (line 230) to be taken. The interviewee then describes in general terms of what type of behavior this precaution for female leaders exist, namely that they have to 'win over' their juniors (line 232) by talking to them 'very sweetly, very nicely' (line 231-232). The alternative behavior, that can be characterized as a more authoritarian leadership style of 'bossing over them' (line 233), would inevitably lead to general non-acceptance according to the interviewee (line 234). Even though in lines 229-234, the interviewee had formulated this non-authoritarian approach by female leaders as a general rule, she ends this initial description by framing it as her personal opinion (line 234).

The interviewee then continues to illustrate the potential problems a female 'boss' can encounter by inserting a brief anecdote about a junior male employee who was one year older than his female superior:

Fragment 3, interview 3, turn by the interviewee

235   Initially, like there was one junior at that same place
236   where I am talking about the work harassment,
237   who would not accept you because he was one thing
238   he was one year elder to you,
239   and then he would not expect a lady as a boss.
240   But <u>then</u> slowly and slowly (.)
241   like if the female (.) you know, talks to them nicely,
242   tells them, asks them, "what is the problem",
243   "come and we will do it together",
244   you sit with that person and you try to <u>sha</u>re.
245   Always you are smiling, always you are helping them,
246   ↑<u>then</u> they feel comfortable,
247   ↑<u>then</u> they feel like
248   "↓Yes (.) she is a good boss and I can now accept"
249   and then they work with you very cordially.

This anecdote has the form of a typical event narrative following the structure as identified by Labov and Waletzky (1966), even though it remains unclear whether this is a narrative of personal experience of the interviewee. On the one hand, she suggests personal involvement in the anecdote by indicating that she was familiar with this workplace in the orientation phase of the story (line 235-236), but on the other hand, the person deixis points in a different direction. Throughout the anecdote, the interviewee uses the generic you-form for the protagonist (instead of the typical first person singular form) or the generic formulation 'the female' (line 241), and opposes this to the antagonist who is either referred to by means of the third person singular (e.g. line 235-239: 'that person', line 244) or the third person plural pronominal form (line 241-242; 245-249). This use of generalizing actors (Baynham 2006: 383) gives the anecdote a wider scope than would be the case for an individualized event narrative and, especially through the use of this generic you-form, it potentially also involves the listener since it "brings about a sense of shared agency or experience" (O'Connor 1994: 47).

Next to this generic nature, the anecdote is characterized by quite a high degree of performance features, since the intonation is sometimes emblematically marked (e.g. lines 240-241: a slower speaking pace by means of the insertion of pauses when talking about how slowly this acceptance by the junior came about) and the insertion of direct reported speech gives "veracity and authenticity to [this] descriptive account" (Stokoe and Edwards 2007: 339) through the seeming re-enactment of the boss talking gently to the employee (line 242-243) and the reported thought of the employee as the resolution of the complicating action (line 248).

Throughout this lively narrated anecdote, the interviewee constructs the identity of the boss as a mentor, who is a facilitator of the content of the job (e.g. line 242: problem solver, line 245: helper) but also of the well-being of the employee (line 246), thus highlighting the importance of relational practice, which is typically related to a feminine leadership style (Holmes and Schnurr 2006). The latter is constructed as being pampered by being talked to nicely (line 241), by being smiled at all the time (line 245) and by being guided gently and patiently when problems arise (line 243). All this pampering then finally results in the acceptance of (line 248) and co-operation with (line 249) the female boss. Given the fact that the interviewee is describing the actions of this female boss in detail and through the emphasis on the caution that needs to be displayed when interacting with juniors, the interviewee actually draws on activities typically associated with nurturing, which, of course, "has obvious associations with women" (Holmes 2005: 1796). As such, she links this feminine, relationally oriented, style of leadership to motherly activities, while projecting the identity of small children upon the employees. Moreover, since throughout her description, the interviewee not only emphasizes the considerable effort female bosses have to put into the

establishment of a workable relation between themselves and their juniors, but also the obligatory nature of displaying such caution instead of being able to *simply* 'boss over your juniors' (cf. line 233), she also implicitly expresses a certain degree of resentment about this situation. It is thus framed as not being a matter of personal character or preference for a particular leadership style on the part of the woman, but rather as an additional effort that female leaders have to invest in so that they gain acceptance from their juniors. This interviewee thus frames the taking up of this specific type of a relationally oriented, motherly mentoring role as a female leader as normatively expected in the Indian workplace.

4.2 Women in an explicitly 'masculine' community of practice

In the second interview, there is not much talk about leadership styles. The discussion focuses more on the interviewee's career in sales and her choice to change careers even though she was rising on the corporate ladder. She explicitly claims that the 'nature of the work remains the same' when rising 'higher in the ladder', which she names as the main reason for her career change to academia. So there are not many discussions about people management, but much more emphasis is put on how the interviewee felt, as a woman, and possibly encountered any problems in her specific area of business. So in this section, we discuss how this interviewee negotiates gender and professional identities in her particular community of practice. In the following fragment, we see that the interviewer explicitly categorizes this community of practice (line 35: 'sales') as 'a manly domain' (line 35), thus making gender explicitly relevant in her question, and this categorization is also immediately (by means of latching and overlapped by the interviewer) confirmed by the interviewee (line 36).

Fragment 4, interview 2

```
34   IR     Like during the selection process, or erm during your work
35          also at sales, it's e:r ↑considered to be a manly domain=
36   IE     =°y[es°
37   IR        [where it is you have to do front end work and all that,
38          so any kind of problems, the challenges
39          you may have faced which you felt you could ·h
40   IE     From the point of the selection, ↑I think
41          they specifically took me because they found my personality
42          to be very aggressive (.) and they thought that
43          although it's a:: job which requires (.) >you know< (.) °a°
44          ↑traits which are more considered to be in a ↓man (.)
45          but they still considered me for m- for that role
46          because <I guess> during the >selection process
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| 47 | I came across as someone very aggressive and |
| 48 | someone< who ↑could do those kinds of jobs. |

In her answer, the interviewee topicalizes the way she was selected for the job, rather than the way she handled the job itself (both options were given by the interviewer in line 34). Interestingly, instead of drawing on her extensive knowledge or skills as reasons for being selected, the interviewee relates her success in the selection process to only one feature, of which the importance is highlighted by means of the booster 'specifically', pronounced with extra emphasis (line 41). This single feature is the recruiters' perception of the interviewee's personality as 'very aggressive' (line 42). The interviewee then continues with how this is related to her being selected (line 42: 'they thought that'), but then breaks off to formulate a sort of aside, as framed by the conjunction 'although' (line 43), in which extra information is given about the typical requirements of the job. Again, the interviewee breaks off, pauses, hesitates and reformulates (end of line 43). Then finally, she states in general, impersonalized terms that the requirements for the job are, in a way, gender-based. Through the impersonal formulation, focusing on male traits (line 44) rather than on the choice for men instead of women, as well as by means of the mitigation that is created by the statement that these traits are 'more' considered as masculine (line 44), thus hedging their absolute nature, the interviewee downplays the gender-bias in the selection process. Actually, when looking closely at the reformulations preceding line 44, and taking into account that "the replacement cannot excise all traces of the word that was initially said or starting to be said" (Schegloff 1979: 263), one can even hypothesize on the basis of the softly spoken indefinite article (end of line 43: '°a°') that the job requirement would initially have been described as explicitly sexist ('a job which requires a man'). And thus this reformulation in line 44, in which all the mitigating words are pronounced with intonational emphasis ('↑traits' in a '↓man', 'more' considered), can definitely be considered as downplaying these sexist requirements to a more politically correct formulation. This interpretation is further confirmed by the fact that the following statement, namely that the interviewee was 'considered for that role' (line 45), is framed as contrasting with this requirement (hence the combination of the contrasting conjunction 'but' and the modal adverb 'still' in line 45). This contrast emphasizes the fact that she, as a woman, did not meet the real – sexist – job requirements. This is then accounted for (hence the causal conjunction 'because' in line 46) in a mitigated way (line 46: 'I guess') by the interviewee's alleged aggressiveness in the selection process (line 46-47), which is then linked to professional ability (line 48). This aggressiveness and the interviewee's ability to get 'those kinds of jobs' (line 47) done through this, talks into being a more transactional orientation and a discursive behavior typically indexed for masculinity.

A crucial observation regarding this fragment, and its relation to how this interviewee positions herself as a professional in the workplace, is that she does not criticize the potentially sexist nature of this recruitment process, but she actually aligns with it by emphasizing aggressiveness as the most important criterion for her selection. However, throughout the fragment, the interviewee does not explicitly align with this personality trait of aggressiveness, it is always framed as a perception of the recruiters (line 41: 'they found…', line 47: 'I came across as…') rather than a trait she attributes to herself. This may be related to its face threatening nature, especially since implicitly, she frames aggressiveness as a more masculine trait (line 44) which may thus be generally considered as not only atypical, but possibly also inappropriate, for a woman. Throughout the rest of the interview, the interviewee further emphasizes the need to display masculine traits, for example by not shying away from, and even enjoying, 'their parties', which, she explains, are characterized as typically for a masculine audience given the presence of bar dancers; or by carrying heavy loads of samples while meeting clients, of which the interviewee remarks that her bosses 'did not maintain any kind of differentiation between me and my male counterparts'.

So in this case, the interviewer and interviewee jointly construct the area of business (sales) as a 'manly domain', thus characterizing it as a sort of overarching community of practice with certain normative communicative behaviors (see e.g. Schnurr 2009b) which are, in this case, explicitly framed as masculine. Both interlocutors do not question the legitimacy of these norms, but rather, they align with them and the interviewee's performance of masculine traits is thus used as an important explanatory factor for her success in this domain. As such, the latter carefully extends the limits of appropriate gender behavior and implicitly counters the hegemonic discourse of Indian femininity. However, the acceptability and feasibility on a personal level of a woman's constant fight against these hegemonic gender expectancies of Indian society may be questioned, especially if this is hypothetically related to the interviewee's drastic career change, which she herself, however, only blames on boredom with the same type of work that needs to be done regardless of a professional's position on the hierarchical ladder.

4.3 Female leadership in a male dominated environment

Instead of enacting a normatively prescribed motherly mentoring role (cf. interviewee 3) or – typically male – aggressive behavior in masculine communities of practice (cf. interviewee 2), interviewee 1 cites as one of the key moments of her career a lengthy story about a workers' strike in which she explains how she managed everyone into a position of sufficient agreement with one another so that a particular problem could be solved, which she then relates to her feminine

approach in this masculine environment. Given the length of the story (over 100 lines), we cannot fully show how the interviewee describes her way of 'doing leadership' at that point, but a few crucial fragments are presented here that illustrate the interaction between gender and leader identities in these masculine communities of practice. First of all, the interviewee describes the context, which she clearly frames as a situation of conflict in which aggression may arise.

Fragment 5, interview 1, turn by the interviewee

103   the workers were in a very agitated mood.
104   militant mood rather.
105   and they were looking for a::: moment.
106   to attack the e:rm management e:rm staff.
107   so I took it as a challenge
108   and I offered my services to handle the situation (.)
((4 lines omitted in which the interviewee says she got full authority from the management to try to solve the problematic situation))
113   however, there were e:r instructions from
114   my management not to move alone (.)
115   "don't come by::: your car, don't park it
116   i:n the basement area, they may hurt you."

In the initial lines of this fragment, the interviewee describes the mood of the workers, and actually reformulates the initial, still relatively neutral, adjective 'agitated' (line 103) to 'militant', thus emphasizing the discordant nature of the atmosphere. This is further elaborated upon in the next two lines, in which this 'militant mood' is made more concrete by framing it in war-terms, in which one party is trying to attack the other (line 106). So the interviewee sets the scene of a war-like situation and as such implicitly frames it as one of the most typically masculine environments. However, she then reframes it as a challenge for her, thus constructing her identity as a fearless leader who voluntarily 'offers' to solve the situation (line 108). This is accepted by the management, but on the condition that she follows safety instructions. These are not only summarized (line 114: 'not to move alone'), but also enacted by means of utterances in direct reported speech that take the form of imperatives (line 115-116) which, by making the situation more concrete and vivid, further emphasize the dangerous nature of this conflict.

So, on the one hand, this situation itself is inherently masculine. On the other hand, the interviewee also makes her gender relevant as being marked in other settings, as such characterizing these also as male dominated environments. This can be seen in the following fragment, in which the interviewee describes that in order to solve the strike-situation, she had to ask for help from the police and physically go to the police station a number of times.

Fragment 6, interview 1, turn by the interviewee

132   we had to take the: help of police also (.) I visited myself
133   (.) three to four times police station e:rm premises
134   (0.5)
135   <u>alone</u>
136   (2.0)
137   e:r but fortunately and fortunately SHO
138   and all those people were very helpful.
139   e:r and e:rm since I w- @ £I am a lady£
140   they were more than eager to help me (.) out (.)

Initially, the interviewee takes a collective perspective when stating that the help of the police had to be enlisted (line 132: 'we had to…'), but she then shifts to a personal footing and describes that she repeatedly went to the police station (line 132-133). Moreover, she underlines this personal footing, both by the emphatic pronominal form 'myself' (line 132) and by the intonationally marked (given the pauses in lines 134 and 136 and the use of a loud speaking volume) addition that she went there 'alone' (line 135). This is then contrasted (line 137: 'but') with the helpful behavior of the police officials, which the interviewee then, after a few hesitations, laughingly links to her self-categorization as a lady. As such, she not only stresses the unusual character of a woman visiting a police station on her own, but she also seems to cast herself into the role of the 'weak female' who requires male help. Interestingly, throughout the rest of the story, this is framed not as a form of disempowerment, but rather as a strategic advantage instead of a disadvantage, which helped her to get things done. This actually becomes the *leitmotiv* of her story, since she repeatedly stressed her exceptional position as a woman handling a strike and talking to the police (see fragment 8).

Furthermore, the interviewee also describes her approach when handling the situation, as can be seen in the following fragment, which is, in a way, quite dual.

Fragment 7, interview 1, turn by the interviewee

120   I was adamant (.)
121   e:r I was not afraid of anything (.)
122   because (.) I was clear in my mind (.) that
123   whatever >we are going to do we will do it<
124   in a very (.) amicable and e:rm (.) good manner
125   so that >nobody gets hurt
126   neither management nor workers<

On the one hand, the interviewee positions herself as a fearless leader, describing herself by means of Extreme Case Formulations (Pomerantz 1986) such as 'not

being afraid of anything' (line 121) and being 'adamant', which is a semantically extreme adjective (Edwards 2000), who has a clear approach in mind (line 122) that has to be followed by the entire team, as the switch to the we-form in line 123 indicates. On the other hand, then, this approach contrasts strongly with the situation of conflict (cf. fragment 5), since it is characterized by its gentleness (line 124: 'very amicable' and 'good manner') and respect towards all the people involved at both sides of the conflict (line 125-126). This very explicitly "signal[s] considerateness and positive affect" in her approach, which, as observed by Holmes and Schnurr, is typically "associated with femaleness and feminine identity" (2006: 36). In the given context of a conflict situation, this can be regarded as marked behavior within these communities of practice that were characterized by the interviewee as dominated by men (cf. fragments 5 and 6).

Furthermore, the interviewee herself frames her feminine identity, and hence also her feminine leadership style, as marked, as was already the case in fragment 6, in which this markedness was framed as an asset stimulating the policemen to be helpful. This *leitmotiv* is made particularly explicit in the coda of the story, as can be seen in the final fragment:

Fragment 8, interview 1, turn by the interviewee

187   this was a very challenging
188   and being a lady (.)
189   rather £I think I could manage all that£
190   being a ↓lady (.)
191   So: (.) sometimes it is very e:rm (.)
192   I am rather <u>proud</u> to be:: a lady
193   and had a: male member was there at my place
194   maybe he could not have managed
196   all that what I could do.

The interviewee concludes her story by evaluating it as 'very challenging' (line 187), which she then links to her gender (line 188). This could be interpreted as a mitigation of the challenging nature of the incident, since it could be seen as difficult for the interviewee only because she is a woman, and it would have been less challenging for men. However, after a brief pause, the interviewee disambiguates the reason why she adds this gendered self-categorization to the story evaluation by reformulating it (line 189: 'rather') by means of an interpretation of female empowerment. This is initially slightly downplayed by the smile voice that the interviewee uses in line 189, but this mitigation soon vanishes and is replaced by an empowered, though also hedged (line 192: 'rather') feminine-pride-statement (line 192), which is then accounted for by inserting a mini hypothetical story in which a man, instead of a woman, could (hence 'maybe' in line 194) have been less successful in managing this incident.

So in this story, the interviewee's self-categorization as a woman is really a theme that runs as a thread throughout the narrative. Both the exceptionality of a woman in such male dominated environments, and her gentle, relationally oriented, typically feminine leadership style are highlighted as reasons for her success in solving this situation of conflict, in which masculine styles are typically normatively required. Thus both her presence ('alone', fragment 5 and 6) in this situation, as well as her feminine style, are constructed as marked. On the one hand, they go against hegemonic expectations of conflict situations and which settings Indian women can act in on their own. On the other hand, however, this interviewee makes her gender relevant so repeatedly throughout the story, that it becomes a *leitmotiv* in which she constructs her femininity as the essential key to success. Hence this case forms an illustration of Holmes' observations that the construction of an effective leader identity is "increasingly compatible" with a socially coherent gender identity (2005: 1798).

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this article three interviews with women who have – or had – leading positions in workplaces in India were analyzed. They all have their own story to tell, as became clear throughout the analyses. While interviewees 1 and 3 both construct their leader identities as feminine, interviewee 3 talks into being her mentor identity in nurturing, motherly terms and she also frames this identity as being expected by the norms of the Indian society. Hence, the enactment of such a motherly leader identity is framed as being socially imposed, rather than the result of one's personal choice. Interviewee 1, on the other hand, also constructs her leader identity as a mentor and explicitly highlights the feminine nature of her approach, as well as her identity as 'a lady' in male dominated communities of practice. Interestingly, this is framed in very positive terms, thus implicitly highlighting the compatibility between her leader and her gender identities, even when being involved in communities of practice with masculine discursive norms. Finally, interviewee 2 constructs her identity as an aggressive professional who can get the job done in a masculine community of practice. She explicitly constructs this professional identity as in line with the norms of this community of practice, but the incompatibility with her gender identity comes to the fore through the depersonalized formulations and the avoidance of explicit self-categorizations in these masculine terms. Given her drastic career change, one can hypothesize about the problematic nature of this incompatibility between professional and gender identities.

Of course, in order to investigate how Indian women actually 'do leadership' in their different workplace across India, one needs to tape naturally occurring

interactions and see how they negotiate their leader and gender identities on a turn by turn basis while executing their daily routines and interacting with various co-workers, both male and female. Such an insight into the local management of meaning, which leadership essentially is, can never be obtained through interviews alone, but they offer us a more reflexive window into how female professionals consider their position in the workplace and how they construct the intricate relations between their gender identities and their identities as professionals or leaders on the one hand, which happens in interaction with the interviewer on the other hand. These render some crucial observations which confirm the findings from the many studies done on language and leadership in the workplace (e.g. Schnurr 2009a; Holmes and Schnurr 2006; Marra, Schnurr and Holmes 2006; Clifton 2012). First of all, leader and gender identities are closely intertwined. Even when the interviewer did not make gender relevant in her question, the interviewees explicitly related their identities as leaders to those as women, to differing degrees of compatibility and incompatibility as well as to differing extents of the voluntary nature of their gendered leader identities (e.g. interviewee 3).

Secondly, leadership is explicitly constructed and framed in these interviews as an interactional accomplishment, which is in line with the view of leadership as the collaborative construction of meaning (Smircich and Morgan 1982). In most fragments that were discussed in the analyses, the interviewees highlighted the way they interact with others, and, in some cases (e.g. fragment 3) how they needed to mould their subordinates into a *cordial collaborative* position first before they could actually embark on 'doing leadership'. This not only emphasizes the collaborative nature of leadership, but it also demonstrates that leadership, indeed, is not "commensurate with hierarchy" (Clifton 2012: 161) or that leader identities are "epiphenomena of preexisting structures" (Clifton 2012: 160), but rather that they are accomplishments that require constant discursive work.

Finally, it is clear that the importance of the norms of the particular community of practice in which these women operate should not be underestimated. This seems especially crucial in the Indian context, in which women are only gradually gaining an important role in the workplace, both from a quantitative (in terms of absolute numbers) and a qualitative (in terms of the types of hierarchical positions they have) perspective. In an overarching environment that is still growing towards general acceptance of women in professional roles, it is particularly difficult for women to align with the norms of communities of practice that are characterized by a high degree of masculinity. The latter observation, of course, may be true for workplaces all over the world, but since the dominant discourses of Indian society on the acceptability of the professional role of women are still quite different from those in, for example, typical western societies, the incompatibility between professional and gender identities may be extremely difficult to cope with. Many

more aspects interact with these identities of course, as for example the importance of family support that is highlighted by all interviewees as well as by many studies about women in the Indian workplace (e.g. Hewlett and Rashid 2010; Kelkar, Shreshta and Veena 2002; Naqvi 2011), but which go beyond the scope of this article. So there are many different angles that call for scientific attention, especially regarding the way Indian societal views, as represented in dominant discourses, interact with how professional and gender identities are constructed and perceived both by men and women in, and beyond, the workplace.

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Notes

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[1] "These crimes have continuously increased during 2006 - 2010 with 1,64,765 cases in 2006, 1,85,312 cases in 2007, 1,95,856 cases in 2008, 2,03,804 cases in 2009 and 2,13,585

cases in 2010"(National Crime Records Bureau, 2010), see: http://ncrb.nic.in/cii2010/cii-2010/Chapter%205.pdf

[2] Census of India, 2011, sees: http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/economic_activity.aspx last accessed on 8/6/13.

[3] The sixty-sixth round (July 2009- June 2010), in which the usual status (principal activity status + subsidiary economic activity status) was investigated.

[4] http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/Key_Indicators_Emp_&_Unemp_66th_round.pdf

[5] The data were transcribed following conversation analytic transcription conventions (Jefferson 1984).