

Constructing public relations as a women's profession in Russia Construyendo las relaciones públicas como una profesión de mujeres en Rusia

Katerina Tsetsura¹
tsetsura@ou.edu
University of Oklahoma, USA

Recepción: 09/08/2014 Revisión: 17/09/2014 Aceptación: 09/10/2014 Publicación: 30/10/2014
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5783/RIRP-8-2014-06-85-110>

Abstract

This study examines how public relations can be understood, perceived, and ultimately constructed as a profession through professionals' everyday discourses. The article explores what it means for public relations practitioners to be considered professionals in the field that is actively developing in many parts of the world. The goal was to expand the understanding of what constitutes the profession of public relations through a qualitative analysis of work-centered discourses of practitioners. The results demonstrated that, specifically in Russia, similar to many other countries, public relations is often seen as a profession that is better suited for women than men due to historical, socio-economic, and societal factors as well as due to pre-conceived notions about public relations. This study contributes to a new theoretical understanding of public relations as a socially constructed profession and demonstrates how construction of this profession can both propel and slow down the development of the practice.

Keywords: public relations, profession, women, Russia

Resumen

Este estudio examina cómo las relaciones públicas pueden ser entendidas, percibidas, y en última instancia, construidas como una profesión a través de los discursos cotidianos de los profesionales. El artículo explora lo que significa para los profesionales de las relaciones públicas ser considerados profesionales en un campo que se está desarrollando activamente en muchas partes del mundo. El objetivo de trabajo era ampliar la comprensión de lo que

¹ Dr. Katerina Tsetsura is a Gaylord Family professor of strategic communication/public relations in the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma (USA). Is a chair of the PRSA Global Affairs Committee and a member of AEJMC, EUPRERA, ICA, NCA, and PRSA.

constituye la profesión de las relaciones públicas a través de un análisis cualitativo de los discursos de los profesionales. Los resultados demostraron que, específicamente en Rusia, al igual que muchos otros países, las relaciones públicas es a menudo vista como una profesión más adecuado para las mujeres que para los hombres debido a factores históricos, socioeconómicos y sociales, así como a la pre-concebida noción de las relaciones públicas. Este estudio contribuye a una nueva comprensión teórica de las relaciones públicas como una profesión socialmente construida y que demuestra cómo la construcción de esta profesión puede tanto impulsar y frenar el desarrollo de la práctica.

Palabras clave: relaciones públicas, profesión, mujeres, Rusia

Summary

- 1.- Introduction
- 2.- Theoretical Framework
- 3.- Methodology
- 4.- Findings
- 5.- Discussion and Conclusion
- 6.- References

Sumario

- 1.- Introducción
- 2.- Marco teórico
- 3.- Metodología
- 4.- Resultados
- 5.- Discusión y conclusión
- 6.- Referencias

1. INTRODUCTION

Women have been making up a disproportionate percentage of public relations practitioners in the United States and an even greater percentage of undergraduate students (Andsager & Hust, 2005; Brunner, 2006). This is true for many other countries as well (Fróhlich & Peters, 2007; van Ruler & de Lange, 2003; Wu, 2006), including those of Eastern Europe (Braun, 2007; Tsetsura, 2011).

Similar changes in the number of women working in public relations have occurred in Russia (Sinyaeva, 2000; Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2004) and in other emerging democracies in Eastern and Central Europe (Braun, 2007; Verčič, 2003); however, little research has focused on studying public relations practitioners in these nations (Tsetsura, 2011); instead, research about

these countries has analyzed strategies and tactics of the public relations practice (Kent, Taylor, & Trucilo, 2006).

Understanding the challenges and opportunities that practitioners face when working in countries where public relations is still developing can enrich our knowledge about global public relations theory and practice as well as help practitioners from other countries to analyze the dynamics of newly emerging public relations markets. In addition, studying global public relations helps to answer a broader question about what constitutes the profession of public relations.

During the past two decades, scholars and practitioners have been working to situate public relations in a functional perspective (Grunig, 2006; J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Hon, 2007). These researchers have relegated public relations as a strategic management function (Grunig, 2006) and as a business-oriented field that uses a variety of tools and means to achieve organizations' ends (Botan & Taylor, 2004). Yet, public relations practice outside of the United States suggests that this construction of the identity of the field may not be complete and comprehensive because global research and observations have revealed that professionals in their everyday practices face complex, multi-layered, society-defined, and culture-bounded gendered realities (AlSaqr, 2008; Fröhlin & Peters, 2007; Molleda & Ferguson, 2004; Morimoto & Wrigley, 2003; Terry, 2005; Wu, 2006).

This research builds on the body of previous scholarship on the notions of "a professional" and "a profession" in communication and public relations (Boynton, 2002; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Tsetsura, 2011) to answer the question whether public relations is perceived as a profession in a country where public relations is a relatively new field, and, if so, how this profession is seen by those who practice it. For this purpose, the study examined practitioners' discourses from a critical theory perspective that is particularly abundant for studying how organizational and societal realities are created and how organizational and societal actors influence social institutions (Aldoory, 2005; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007). In other words, a theoretical contribution of the study examines how society, culture, and gender manifest

themselves through work-centered communication of practitioners to illustrate how any profession, particularly public relations, is socially constructed.

Global public relations can be studied from many different perspectives. Previous research, for instance, has examined how public relations is practiced and what public relations practitioners do in different countries by applying four models of public relations, ranging from publicity/press agency to two-way symmetrical communication (J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, Sriramesh, Yi-Hui, & Lyra, 1995), and by interrogating these models (Holtzhausen, Petersen, & Tindall, 2003; Kent & Taylor, 2007; Toledano, McKie, Roper, 2004; van Ruler, 2004). Scholars also have investigated whether practitioners in other parts of the world perform technical or managerial work and to what extent these public relations practitioners are strategic thinkers and planners who provide input to actual organizational policy decisions (Dozier & Broom, 1995; Van Heerden & Rensburg, 2005). Many researchers have investigated how political, socio-economic, and cultural particularities influence global public relations practices (Gaither & Curtin, 2008; Molleda & Moreno, 2008; Van Ruler, Verčič, Bütschi, & Gerhard, 2004).

This study, however, scrutinizes public relations as work and as a profession *per se*. Its goal is to offer a theoretically new understanding of public relations as a field that has been constructed through communication among those who practice it. This study argues that practitioners in a country in which the phrase “public relations” had been first used to describe certain communication practices only about twenty years ago have contributed to defining public relations by sharing and constructing meanings of the field through discourse—by describing and explaining what practitioners do to themselves and to others.

In Russia a comprehensive understanding of public relations as a field is still developing. Some may argue that in Russia, as well as in many other countries, public relations has existed for a long time because persuasive communication practices, including propaganda, have been around for many centuries; however, the vast majority of communication and public relations scholars and practitioners in Russia and abroad clearly distinguish public relations from propaganda (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Ihlen, 2010; Taylor, 2010; Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2011) and argue that the field of public relations in a modern, strategic sense has been actively developing

in Russia only in the last 30 years (Minaeva, 2012; Sveshnikoff, 2005; Tsetsura, 2003). Although public communication activities have been utilized overtime in many countries to gain media attention or manifest a political position, most scholars refer to them as PR-like activities or pseudo-events as they certainly are limited in their scope, short-term, and tactical to be referred to as public relations (Kent, Harrison, & Taylor, 2006). Many agree that not all persuasive communication can and should be called public relations although persuasion is an intrinsic function of public relations (Pfau & Wan, 2006) and that in its modern sense public relations is defined as a long-term strategic process, which clearly separates it from PR-like activities of the past centuries (Taylor, 2010).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The next section examines how the concepts *profession* and *professionals* have been discussed in communication and public relations scholarship.

Professions and Professionals

What constitutes a *profession*? Behrman (1988) identified several criteria for professions, including a formed, recognized body of knowledge, a selective process or entry, and testing and licensing. In other words, the access to any true profession (e.g., medicine, law, and even some trades such as cosmetology) is controlled. But Behrman also proposed that someone can be a "professional" without necessarily being a member of a true "profession". Thus, his definition of a "professional" is semantically different from a traditional understanding of the term "professional" as being a "member of a profession".

Following Behrman, Tsetsura and Kruckeberg (2009) applied this definition to public relations and argued that there are very few true professions. Accordingly, public relations is not a profession in that sense; however, public relations could indeed be among those occupations whose members can be "professionals". So what defines a *professional*?

A professional identity shows first and foremost how one identifies with the profession and defines oneself as a professional (Russo, 1998). Because the professional identity is a part of the

individual's identity (Marks, Scholarios, & Lockyer, 2002), this identity contributes to identity construction by an individual. Previous studies have shown that professional workers gain part of their identity from their work (Knights & Willmott, 1999). Others have noted that even decisions on how to act in certain situations were often connected with one's professional — and not organizational — identification (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). In public relations, a professional identity becomes salient as practitioners define and debate the status of public relations as a profession (Boynton, 2002).

Other scholars have argued that public relations is and should be considered a profession (Neijens & Smit, 2006). Those who study public relations in transitional countries have argued that understanding public relations as a profession helps the field to develop and to gain respect (Gupta, 2007; Kirat, 2006; Wu, 2006). But many agree that, when discussing public relations, discursive representations of the profession by professionals and professional organizations should be considered (Pieccka, 2007).

A communicative approach to understanding the term "professional" helps to understand meanings, functions, and consequences that surround the professional discourse (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). Saying that an individual is "a professional" or that an occupation is "a profession" can elevate one's status or add credibility and value to one's work as well as to the field. In the pursuit of public recognition, the term "professional" embeds what Cheney and Ashcraft called the principal set of meanings: the division of labor in modern society, a claim to authoritative expertise for a class of individuals, and a normative-ethical dimension.

The division of labor can be rather minimal in public relations as practitioners perform a variety of tasks at the workplace (DeSanto, Moss, & Newman, 2007). Moreover, appeals to authoritative expertise of a class of individuals can be challenging (Gupta, 2007). But many have insisted that professionalism and professionalization are the only ways to ethical and successful public relations in many countries around the world (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001; Minaeva, 2012).

Women-dominated Professions

For the purpose of this study, *women-dominated professions* are those in which women represent the majority of the workforce. However, it does not necessarily mean that female professionals in these fields exercise *power* in the workplace (Aldoory, 2005; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). Such power is traditionally associated with masculinity (Ashcraft, 2005; Buzzanell, 1995; Strives, 2002). Previous research suggests that many professions not only impose masculine characteristics, such as task or bottom-line orientation (Klubock, 1996), and traditional masculine gender roles, such as “defender,” “leader,” and “team-builder” (Thiel, 2005, p. 30), but also acquire certain feminine characteristics, such as a “natural sustainability” to service occupations (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007: 251); orientation to care, friendliness, and willingness to cooperate (Hardin & Shain, 2006); and traditional feminine gender roles, such as “humanitarian,” “facilitator,” “listening post” (Thiel, 2005: 30), and “natural born communicator” (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007: 233; Tsetsura, 2011). Women who pursue careers in fields with both masculine and feminine characteristics face “the fundamental inconsistency between what is expected of them as women and what is expected of them as professional experts” (Strives, p. 56).

Strives (2002) found that the profession of public administration official is socially perceived as being masculine and is “embodied in the self, the knower, the actor, the subject, while the other, that which is known, what which is acted on, the object,” is feminine (p. 50). At the same time, women who hold these positions are trapped in what Young (1987) called “an essential part of being a woman,” which means that there is always a possibility that “one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject’s intentions and manipulations, rather than as living manifestation of action and intention” (Young: 66).

Many professions have historically been positioned as feminine. Because of this, service-oriented professions such as social workers, nurses, teachers, and secretaries were sometimes referred to as *semi-professions* (Etzioni, 1969). Many of them became women-oriented in that they emphasize “caring” qualities associated with female workers (Andsager & Hust, 2005). As a

result, women were encouraged to occupy these semi-professions, and members of the society expected to see female workers in these positions.

It is possible that the social and service-oriented nature of public relations has contributed to an understanding of public relations as a semi-profession. However, a caring quality is only one of many characteristics that may contribute to defining the occupation as a semi-profession. Public relations may also fall into the category of a semi-profession because the majority of people who work in public relations are women.

Because of the growing number of female professionals in many different fields, the traditional understanding of male and female-oriented professions has changed (Andsager & Hust, 2005). However, perceptions of certain professions as women's or non-women's (i.e., men's) still exist (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007). Gender stereotypes prevail in public relations where women are often labeled as great natural communicators whereas, in fact, their skills are just learned socialization strategies (Tsetsura, 2011). New ideas or values, together with any "special traits" that female practitioners may have, are just a result of the reinforcement of traditional gender role socialization (Wrigley, 2002), which are imbedded in the structures of society and male status quo (Rakow, 1989). Consequently, public relations is often considered to be a gendered profession (Aldoory & Toth, 2002) and woman's work (Creedon, 1991; Tsetsura, 2010).

This emerging understanding of public relations as a gendered profession contributes to a power struggle that female professionals are experiencing throughout the world (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Wu, 2006). Previous research showed that despite the fact the vast majority of women work in public relations in the USA and in many other countries around the world (Simorangkir, 2011; Vanc & White, 2011), women still occupy a relatively small number of top management positions (Grunig, 2006; Wu, 2010), get paid less than their male counterparts (Grunig, Toth, Hon, 2001), and perform mostly technical public relations jobs, such as writing news releases, organizing conferences and special events (Wu, 2006). However, they rarely participate in the strategic decision-making within organizations, and as a result, public relations is often considered a *women's work* (Creedon, 1991; Tsetsura, 2010). This may be especially true in Russia, where the Soviet and post-Soviet system have clearly defined and

continues to dictate the place of women in society (Metcalf & Afanassieva, 2005; Motiejunaite & Kravchenko, 2008; Tsetsura, 2011). The following section situates the study in the specific cultural environment and provides a historical insight into understanding of women's occupational roles in modern Russia.

Women in Russian Society

It is difficult (if not impossible) to comprehensively study Russian female professionals without understanding the roles and status of women in the former Soviet Union. Practically no research has been done on female professional occupations in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia during the past decade (Motiejunaite & Kravchenko, 2008; Popkova, 2005). The little research that is available about Soviet female professionals may seem outdated; however, today it nevertheless provides the most useful and comprehensive insight into the social roles and occupations of women who were in Soviet Russia.

Although equal rights for men and women had been recognized in Soviet Russia, it was truly difficult for women to present themselves as leaders in any professional occupation (White, 2005). Traditionally, women in the Soviet Union occupied lower-level positions, and traditional women's jobs were in school education, nursing, office administration, social welfare, and sales (Schwartz, 1979). Feminization of some fields, such as teaching, lowered the prestige of these professions, and low economic rewards in those professions reduced the desirability for men to enter certain jobs, including teaching and nursing (Beliaeva, Gorshkova, & Kostikova, 2001). The presented context of women in Russian society provides an additional dimension for this study as pre-conceived socially constructed roles of women as workers and women as mothers are both historic and reproductive.

Research Question

Based on the analysis of the extant literature, this study poses the following question:

RQ: In what ways do Russian public relations practitioners construct public relations as a women's profession?

Narrative analysis (Walker, 2001) was utilized to explore occupational narratives that are “stories that people tell at and about work that are not tied exclusively to a particular organization” (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004: 277). Through narratives, people shape their own identities and may influence the construction of identities of others (McLaren, 1993) and realities at large, such as understanding what constitutes the profession of public relations and what it means to be a professional in the field (Tsetsura, 2010).

3. METHODOLOGY

Eighteen in-depth semi-structured one-on-one and three discussion-group interviews were conducted with 30 Russian female and male practitioners from eleven public relations agencies in Moscow, Russia. One-on-one interviews lasted anywhere between 40 and 120 minutes, and discussion-group interviews lasted 30 to 50 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in a comfortable conference room.

Leading public relations agencies in Moscow were chosen because they account for about 75 percent of all public relations business in Russia (Russian Public Relations Society, 2012). All participants were university-educated women and men (two women and one man held advanced post-graduate degrees), were anywhere between 23 and 55 years old, and had an average public relations work experience of 5.6 years. Participants can be broadly classified into three groups: a) women who own agencies and/or hold senior executive positions (n=14); b) women who work in the agencies on the middle- and entry-level management positions (n=11); and c) male leaders (owners and partners) of agencies (n=5).

Interviewing is one of the most popular qualitative methods used in communication research (Dougherty, 2001). In addition, such interviews are among the most effective techniques to collect narratives from participants and allow researchers to collect rich data and uncover central themes the participants manifest in their everyday lives.

The researcher performed methodological and investigator triangulation of the data by collecting (interviews, discussion-group interviews, and surveys) and analyzing the data via multiple methods (Denzin, 2006). All collected interviews were recorded in Russian, completely

transcribed, and then analyzed to identify all relevant statements for inductive analysis of identifying emerging themes through multiple readings. All data were translated from Russian to English and back translated for accuracy. Finally, a member check was performed to enhance the credibility and confirmability of the study. After the initial analysis, the researcher shared the main findings with some interviewees, who described the results as both revealing and reflective of reality.

A three-step qualitative narrative analysis of finding reduction, identifying participants' explanations, and approaching grounded theory through researchers' data sense-making was applied (Lindlof, 1995). This method includes three parts: finding repetitiveness in open-ended responses, identifying participants' explanations of the phenomena in these responses through a systematic close reading of the written narratives, and grouping responses through the reflective analysis of the data. The transcripts are read and re-read to ensure that the meaning of each unit is understood and to identify preliminary categories to identify and to scrutinize recurring themes within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This three-step analysis is particularly useful in qualitative research when recurring themes might lead to the analysis of the data beyond participants' interpretations and to identify systematic reasons behind accounts of the narratives.

4. RESULTS

Research Question asked: In what ways do Russian public relations practitioners construct public relations as a women's profession? All participants described the field of public relations as "definitely a profession," "a developed set of practices," and "a growing professional field". One male owner of an agency said that public relations is, "of course, a profession" because so many universities and colleges in Russia teach public relations and because the Russian Ministry of Education has recognized public relations as a major. As one woman put it, "of course, it is [a profession] because so many people work in it and make money".

Further analysis demonstrated that, although interviewees referred to public relations as a profession, they contributed to forming perceptions of public relations as a women's

profession, or semi-profession, by positioning this profession as the one that (1) is a convenient women's work and (2) is a profession suitable for women's self-expression. As a result, such positioning allowed top managers to hire and retain relatively cheap, high quality female labor, which contributed to further portrayal of public relations as a woman's profession.

Public Relations as a Convenient Women's Work

The majority of interviewed professionals, both men and women, agreed that the profession of public relations is better suited for women. Only two participants said that they did not consider public relations a gender-oriented profession. However, one of these two, a male owner of an agency, argued that women "deserved" to be in this profession:

Yes, I think women have deserved the right to be in this profession, and I know many successful women who started working in our agency and have continue working here or elsewhere, so I believe this profession is just as much *woman's* as *man's*.

This practitioner alluded to the fact that public relations might not have been seen as woman's work in the past because men occupied the majority of positions in political public relations, the earliest area of practice in Russia. But now, with more women entering the profession, public relations welcomes both female and male practitioners.

However, several female practitioners pointed out that, although they would not want to label this profession "woman's work," nonetheless, "(W)omen feel very comfortable in this profession." One female manager directly stated that public relations has formed as a woman's profession in Russia:

Public relations has formed as a woman's profession. Why? Because to persuade, to engage in a conversation, is a woman's prerogative first and foremost. To listen to a man is in a female mentality – this is an extremely rare men's quality... Secondly, any woman can identify a man's type because it is a woman's nature to always bend to men's ideas, and this is an essential quality in public relations. Men cannot do that – they never forget their pride, they never forget who they are, and they can rarely compromise. Women are much better negotiators as they

can compromise without yielding their position and, at the same time, can allow other people, especially men, to feel undefeated.

This woman specifically referred to the negotiations that female professionals pursue when pitching a new business account because most of the potential clients' representatives who make these decisions are men.

A male owner described public relations as a "convenient profession" for women because it is "lively and interesting." He concluded that the excitement of the profession explains why the vast majority of his employees are women. Another male owner argued:

I think this is woman's work. First, women are great communicators; in addition, this work requires attention to detail and a step-by-step ability to follow through with a plan, the woman's qualities. That is why, even if we look at the Western countries, women are the majority in public relations, just like in Russia.

But one female interviewee in a focus group was convinced that certain areas of public relations, particularly political public relations, are not suitable for female practitioners. Here is how she explained her argument:

Objective reasons explain this phenomenon: here, on these positions, one should have experience, network, etc. Historically, men started practicing [political PR] earlier and started working in the government structures earlier and thus formed more connections. This is why now many of them have top-management positions in large Russian companies.

Another interviewee agreed:

I think it is realistic in principle [to achieve a high level position], but it is much more difficult to do in reality especially if a woman practices political [public relations] or lobbying... these areas have traditionally been male-dominated, and the woman will have a hard time moving up. On the other hand, it is good to be a woman in a foreign company because there, in my opinion, the approach is more democratic and your sex does not matter.

Another male interviewee was a bit apologetic but quite dismissive of a possibility for women to succeed in the top-management positions:

When one occupies a serious, high-level position, one should demonstrate qualities that... hm... [here the interviewee took a pause] not that these qualities are not met often [in women], but, in all honesty, men nonetheless have them more often because these qualities are the decisiveness, hardness, ability to withstand the blow, and the skill of being tough enough with people. In principle, it is more difficult for women to show these skills, and one cannot manage at the higher level when one does not have these skills.

And finally, one more woman provided her side of the story as to why women have a hard time achieving top-level management positions:

Yes, I think it is disadvantage of everywhere in the world to be a young woman. Because well... first of all, when someone is young, everyone with experience wants to kind of put you down. Number two, [everyone wants to] exaggerate the fact that you are woman. So I think it is difficult sometimes getting older men to listen to you.

This Profession Allows to Hire and Retain Relatively Cheap Female Labor

The second characteristic was manifested in several interviews with both men and women. One male agency owner candidly shared:

Traditionally in Russia, men require higher pay and salaries for any kind of work, and, when I am faced with a question about whom to hire, a man or a woman, I would have, of course, hired a woman in the past because I would have got a better, more-qualified employee for less money. Now, the situation is changing a bit, not only because women have become high-level professionals, but also because there are too many women working in my public relations agency, and I need to make sure I have some men to balance the organization's environment.

Female entry- and mid-level employees at the interviewed agencies agreed that they do not make much money and cannot support themselves. Nonetheless, they were proud of earning

some income, which allowed them to be a little less dependent on their parents and husbands. At the same time, those women who occupied higher positions at the agencies said they made enough money to support their families and did not feel they were “cheap laborers.” The same female owners and top managers also admitted that they would often hire female practitioners for entry-level and mid-level positions because of “the high quality of this cheap labor.”

Another agency owner stated that the Russian market’s “normal practice” is to offer smaller salaries to female practitioners in the beginning of the career and to promise these women multiple opportunities for growth. She continued that the ability to earn higher salaries in the future attracts women much more so than men with the same professional level of experience. Another male manager reflected, “Public relations salaries are not high at the entry-level, and women are more inclined to accept these offers. Very few men would work in public relations for this money.” And one more female interviewee confirmed that male practitioners are more likely to go into political consulting rather than in corporate public relations because they previously thought that the job there would pay more and would be more “real.” However, now they changed their opinion about the corporate public relations, particularly in large companies, and many men want to work in corporate public relations of large Russian companies because they see this work as “more energetic and more rewarding.”

Discussion

The narrative analysis has demonstrated that interviewed women and men considered public relations to be a profession, just as do many of their colleagues around the world (Gupta, 2007; Kirat, 2006; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Wu, 2006). Through their everyday occupational narratives, these practitioners positioned this profession as emerging, dynamic, and necessary, and they have found ways to explain what they do to others.

However, as the further analysis has demonstrated, interviewees saw public relations as a women’s profession. They described public relations as a convenient women’s work, as a victim of societal stereotypes, and as a profession that attracts women who want to express themselves through work. At the same time, a large number of female workers in public relations mostly perform tactical work and as a result do not get paid as much as men do. These

notions only contribute to further conceptualization of public relations as a women's profession and to the perception of public relations in Russia as a *semi-profession* (Etzioni, 1969), a concept which could be helpful in future analysis of public relations practices in countries like Russia. The results supported the previous research about the status of public relations as a profession conducted in other countries, such as Bahrain (AlSaquer, 2008), Indonesia (Simorangkir, 2011), Romania (Vanc & White, 2011), and Taiwan (Wu, 2006). The Russian society sees public relations as a semi-profession for several inter-related reasons, which lead to this work being perceived as women's work (Creedon, 1991; Tsetsura, 2010, 2011). The results demonstrated that some Russian public relations professionals in this study have downplayed the success of female public relations practitioners. This finding supported previous research on discursive reproduction of gender roles by other women in the post-Soviet Russia (Metcalf & Afanassieva, 2005; Motiejunaite & Kravchenko, 2008).

In addition, how participants talked about their work and about the way they thought it was being perceived by their colleagues and the public-at-large also influenced their understating of public relations as a *semi-profession*. Many mentioned that it was difficult for women to move up the corporate hierarchy within one organization and to succeed in certain areas of public relations practices, such as political public relations and lobbying due to the construction of public relations as woman's work. Although female practitioners may have experienced the glass-ceiling effect, they had a hard time describing it. This is consistent with previous studies of women in public relations in other countries, including Bahrain (AlSaquer, 2008), Japan and Korea (Morimoto & Wrigley, 2003), Mexico (Molleda & Ferguson, 2004), and the USA (Wrigley, 2002). Male participants did not seem to articulate more complex gender-related problems such as the patriarchal characteristics of Russian society, the gender discrepancies that are salient through the glass-ceiling effect and by reproducing gender stereotypes in their discourse, and many female participants chose not to talk about these discrepancies. Oakley (1998) argued that it is often in the silences or in such struggles to articulate the ideas that researchers can learn the most about women's experiences in patriarchal culture. What cannot be said easily in patriarchal culture, such as Russia, is perhaps a feminine knowledge. Although the data in this study did not reveal any silence patterns or signs of linguistic and cognitive

struggling among these women, an additional investigation is required to uncover and to understand the nature and impact of this feminine knowledge on the development of perceptions about public relations as a semi-profession in Russia.

In addition, this study offers an insight into how public relations is constructed as a women's profession in Russia and offered a new way of understanding the construction of public relations as a *semi-profession*. These findings confirmed the struggles of Russian women are similar to those of female public relations professionals in other countries where the field of public relations is still developing (AlSaqr, 2008, Simorangkir, 2011; Vanc & White, 2011). Future investigators should further explore whether the concepts of *semi-profession* and a *women's profession* can be applied to the field of public relations in other countries around the world, in which ordinary public relations practices can contribute to further alienation between women and men in public relations.

Interviewed women and men perceived public relations to be a profession well-suited for women by attaching feminine characteristics and traditional feminine roles to those who were working in this field. For instance, these women and men submitted to traditionally feminine professional roles such as "facilitators," "listening posts," and "natural-born communicators" and thus reproduced those roles, just as professionals in the field of journalism (Thiel, 2004) and public relations professionals in Germany (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007).

In the case of Russia, social and institutional consequences of professional practices in public relations supported traditional roles of men and women in society. Russian professionals in newly emerging fields, including public relations, have suffered from continuous reproduction of these traditional roles, even as rapid changes overtake society as a whole.

As a profession in transition in Russia, public relations has unique opportunities for women; it is more open and is not constrained in terms of traditional Russian professional occupations. It does not have the baggage of the Soviet definition of a profession because the social institution of public relations was formed after the collapse of the Soviet system (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2009). Practically speaking, today's women can and should realize their potential in public

relations and are comfortable working in the field of public relations, especially if they work for public relations agencies. Public relations offers many opportunities to women in Russia to succeed in a professional career; at the same time, women must be aware of the drawbacks of positioning public relations as a profession suitable for women and should pay attention to the ways they discuss public relations with the colleagues and with the clients as their everyday discursive practices may contribute to constructing public relations as a women's profession in Russia (Tsetsura, 2010).

5. CONCLUSION

This research has offered a new understanding of public relations as a women's profession and as a socially constructed field in the countries where public relations is a relatively young discipline. The results of this study have demonstrated that socially constructed characteristics of Russian public relations have defined the profession as better suitable for women than men. The study has argued that practitioners in these countries contribute to defining what public relations is and what public relations professionals do by constructing meanings through their everyday discourses. How they talk about public relations and what they say about public relations often define what public relations is for those who do not have knowledge about the field, but who interact with these professionals within or outside of their work environments. Understanding the advantages and challenges that practitioners encounter in their everyday work can unveil how practitioners perceive public relations and why they delineate the field in a certain way. More broadly, a theoretical approach to public relations as a socially constructed profession allows scholars to answer a question of what constitutes public relations in different parts of the world by studying professional discourses of people who engage in practices to which they refer as *public relations*. The results of this study have demonstrated that this socially constructed profession is defined as *a profession which is better suited for women than for men*. This notion already has helped to constitute public relations as a women's profession in Russia, a country in which this field is still young. Because this research was only conducted among practitioners in Moscow, future research should also investigate whether practitioners from other regions of Russia and from countries, in which the field of public relations is

relatively young, similarly construct their understandings of public relations as a women's profession. Finally, further investigation of how different professions can be socially constructed would be best served by examining discourses among professionals in other relatively young professional fields (e.g., marketing) throughout the world as well as by interrogating the terms "profession" and "professional" per se – as communicative constructions that are entrenched in the principal set of meanings (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007) and are informed by gendered idiosyncrasies.

6. REFERENCES

- Aldoory, L. (2005). A (re)conceived feminist paradigm for public relations: A case for substantial improvement. *Journal of Communication*, 55, 668-683.
- Aldoory, L., & Toth, E. (2002). Gender discrepancies in a gendered profession: A developing theory for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14, 103-126.
- AlSaqer, L. (2008). Experience of female public relations practitioners in Bahrain. *Public Relations Review*, 34, 77-79.
- Andsager, J. L., & Hust, S. J. (2005). Differential gender orientation in public relations: Implications for career choices. *Public Relations Review*, 31, 85-91.
- Ashcraft, K. L. (2005). Resistance through consent?: Occupational identity, organizational form, and the maintenance of masculinity among commercial airline pilots. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19, 67-90.
- Ashcraft, K. L., & Mumby, D. K. (2004). Organizing critical communicology of gender and work. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 166, 19-43.
- Behrman, J. N. (1988). *Essays on ethics in business and the professions*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Beliaeva, G.F, Gorshkova, I. D., & Kostikova, I. V. (2001). University women: Sketches for a portrait. *Russian Education and Society*, 43, 6-27.
- Botan, C. H., & Taylor, M. (2004). Public relations: State of the field. *Journal of Communication*, 54, 645-661.
- Braun, S. L. (2007). The effects of the political environment on public relations in Bulgaria. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19, 199-228.

- Brunner, B. (2006). Where are the women? A content analysis of introductory public relations textbooks. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 51, 43-47.
- Buzzanell, P. M. (1995). Reframing the glass ceiling as a socially constructed process: Implications for understanding and change. *Communication Monographs*, 62, 327-354.
- Cheney, G., & Ashcraft, K. L. (2007). Considering “the professional” in communication studies: Implications for theory and research within and beyond the boundaries of organizational communication. *Communication Theory*, 17, 146-175.
- Creedon, P. J. (1991). Public relations and “women’s work”: Toward a feminist analysis of public relations roles. *Public Relations Research Annual*, 3, 67-84.
- Denzin, N. K. (2006). *Sociological methods: A source book (methodological perspectives)*. Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction.
- DeSanto, B., Moss, D., & Newman, A. (2007). Building an understanding of the main elements of management in the communication/public relations context: A study of U.S. practitioners’ practice. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84, 439-454.
- Dougherty, D. S. (2001). Sexual harassment as [dys]functional process: A feminist standpoint analysis. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 29, 372-402.
- Dozier, D. M., & Broom, G. M. (1995). Evolution of the manager role in public relations practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7, 3–26.
- Etzioni, A. (1969). *The semi-professions and their organizations*. New York: Free Press.
- Everbach, T., & Flournoy, C. (2007). Women leave journalism for better pay, work conditions. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 28, 52-64.
- Fitzpatrick, K., & Gauthier, C. (2001). Toward a professional responsibility theory of public relations ethics. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 16, 193-212.
- Fröhlich, R. (2004). Feminine and feminist values in communication professions: Exceptional skills and expertise or “friendliness trap?” In M. de Bruin & K. Ross (Eds.), *Gender and newsroom cultures: Identities at work* (65-77). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Fröhlich, R., & Peters, S. B. (2007). PR bunnies caught in the agency ghetto? Gender stereotypes, organizational factors, and women’s careers in PR agencies. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19, 229-254.

- Gaither, T. K., & Curtin, P. A. (2008). Examining the heuristic value of models of international public relations practice: A case study of the Arla Foods crisis. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 20*, 115-137.
- Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., Sriramesh, K., Yi-Hui, H., & Lyra, A. (1995). Models of public relations in an international setting. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 7*, 163-186.
- Grunig, L. A. (2006). Feminist phase analysis in public relations: Where have we been? Where do we need to be? *Journal of Public Relations Research, 18*, 115-140.
- Grunig, L. A., Grunig, J. E., & Dozier, D. (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organizations: A study of communication management in three countries*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gupta, S. (2007). Professionalism in Indian public relations and corporate communications: An empirical analysis. *Public Relations Review, 33*, 306-312.
- Hardin, M., & Shain, S. (2006). "Feeling much smaller than you know you are": The fragmented professional identity of female sports journalists. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 23*, 322-338.
- Holtzhausen, D. R., Petersen, B. K., & Tindall, N. T. (2003). Exploding the myth of the symmetrical/asymmetrical dichotomy: Public relations models in the new South Africa. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 15*, 305-341.
- Hon, L. (2007). How public relations knowledge has entered public relations practice. In E. L. Toth (Ed.), *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: Challenges for the next generation* (pp. 3-23). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ihlen, O. (2010). The cursed sisters: Public relations and rhetoric. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *The handbook of public relations* (2nd edition) (59-70). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kent, M. L., Harrison, T. R., & Taylor, M. (2006). A critique of Internet polls as symbolic representation and pseudo-events. *Communication Studies, 57*, 299-315.
- Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2007). Beyond excellence: Extending the generic approach to international public relations: The case of Bosnia. *Public Relations Review, 33*, 10-20.
- Kent, M., Taylor, M., & Trucilo, L. (2006). Public relations by newly privatized businesses in Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Public Relations Review, 32*, 10-17.

- Kirat, M. (2006). Public relations in the United Arab Emirates: The emergence of a profession. *Public Relations Review*, 32, 254-260.
- Klubock, T. M. (1996). Working-class masculinity, middle-class morality, and labor politics in the Chilean copper mines. *Journal of Social History*, 30, 435-463.
- Knights, D., & Willmott, H. (1999). *Management lives: Power and identity in work organizations*. London: Sage.
- Lindlof, T. R. (1995). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lucas, K., & Buzzanell, P. (2004). Blue-collar work, career, and success: Occupational narratives of *sisu*. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 32, 273-292.
- Marks, A., Scholarios, D., & Lockyer, C. (2002, July). *Identifying a profession: The creation of professional identities within software work*. Paper presented at the 18th Egos Colloquium, Barcelona, Spain.
- McLaren, P. (1993). Border disputes: Multicultural narrative, identity formation, and critical pedagogy in post modern America. In D. McLaughlin & W. Tierney (Eds.), *Naming silenced lives—personal narratives and the process of educational change* (pp. 201–236). New York: Routledge.
- Metcalfe, B. D., & Afanassieva, M. (2005). Gender, work, and equal opportunities in central and eastern Europe. *Women in Management Review*, 20, 397-411.
- Minaeva, L. V. (2012). *Vnutricorporativnyje sv'azi c obshchestvennost'u. [Internal Public Relations]*. Moscow: Aspekt-Press.
- Minaeva, L. V., & Sabirova, D. (2012). Challengers to PR educators in modern Russia. *Russian School of Public Relations*, 4.
- Molleda, J.-C., & Ferguson, M. A. (2004). Public relations roles in Brazil: Hierarchy eclipses gender differences. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 16, 327-351.
- Molleda, J.-C. & Moreno, Á. (2008). Balancing public relations with socioeconomic and political environments in transition: Comparative, contextualized research in Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 10, 115-174.
- Morimoto, M., & Wrigley, B. (2003, May). *Is it really a woman's world?: Experience of female public relations practitioners in Asia*. Paper presented at the International Communication Association annual meeting, San Diego, CA.

- Motiejunaite, A., & Kravchenko, Z. (2008). Family policy, employment and gender-role attitudes: a comparative analysis of Russia and Sweden. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18, 38-49.
- Neijens, P. & Smit, E. (2006). Dutch public relations practitioners and journalists: Antagonists no more. *Public Relations Review*, 32, 232-240.
- Oakley, A. (1998). Gender, methodology and people's ways of knowing: Some problems with feminism and the paradigm debate in social science. *Sociology*, 32, 707-731.
- Pfau, M., & Wan, H.-H. (2006). Persuasion: An intrinsic function of public relations. In C. H. Botan & V. Hazleton (Eds.), *Public relations theory II* (88-119). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pieczka, M. (2007). Case studies as narrative accounts of public relations practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19, 333-356.
- Popkova, L. (2005). Political empowerment of women in Russia; Discourses and strategies. *Sociologija. Mintis ir veiksmas*, 1, 96-109.
- Prikaz #686 (2000, 2 March). Spetsialnost svyazi s obschestvennostju (public relations) utverzhdena prikazom #686 Ministerstva Obrazovaniya Rossijskoj Federatsii ot 2 marta, 2000. [Order #686 of the Ministry of Higher Education of the Russian Federation to establish a major in public relations, 2 March, 2000]. Retrieved from <http://eduscan.net/standart/030602>
- Prikaz #221 (2010, 29 March). Federalnyj gosudarstvennyj obrazovatelnyj standart vysshego professionalnogo obrazovaniya po napravleniu podgotovki 031600 Reklama i svyazi s obschestvennostju. [Federal government educational standard for higher professional education with specialization 031600 Advertising and Public Relations]. Retrieved from <http://mgup.ru/public/files/388.pdf>
- Rakow, L. F. (1989). A bridge to the future: Re-visioning gender in communication. In P. J. Creedon (Ed.), *Women in mass communication: Challenging gender values* (pp. 299-312). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Russian Public Relations Society (2012). *Otsenka sovremennogo sostoyaniya i perspektiva rossijskogo rynka PR-uslug* [Evaluation of the current state and opportunities for the Russian market of PR-services]. Retrieved from <http://www.sovetnik.ru/research/?id=14342>.
- Russo, T. C. (1998). Organizational and professional identification. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 12, 72-111.

- Schwartz, J. S. (1979). Women under socialism: Role definitions of Soviet women. *Social Forces*, 58, 67-84.
- Simorangkir, D. (2011). The impact of the feminization of the public relations industry in Indonesia on communication practice. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 5, 26-48.
- Sinyaeva, I. M. (2000). *Public relations v kommercheckoj deyatelnosti* (Public relations in commerce). Moskva: Unity.
- Stivers, C. (2002). *Gender images in public administration: Legitimacy and the administrative state* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Sveshnikoff, A. (2005, May 7). PR in Russia: Gloom vs. growth. *Weber Schandwick Outcomes*. Retrieved from <http://www.webershandwick.co.uk/outcomes/issue7/topstory.html>
- Taylor, M. (2010). Public relations in the enactment of civil society. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *The handbook of public relations* (2nd edition) (pp. 5-16). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Terry, V. (2005). Postcard from the Steppes: A snapshot of public relations and culture in Kazakhstan. *Public Relations Review*, 31, 31-36.
- Thiel, S. (2004). Shifting identities, creating new paradigms: Analyzing identities of women online journalists. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4, 1-36.
- Toledano, M., McKie, D., & Roper, J. (2004). Theorising practice: Public relations power, US symmetrical theory, and Israeli asymmetric campaigns. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 31, 59-69.
- Tompkins, P. K., & Cheney, G. (1985). Communication and unobtrusive control in contemporary organizations. In R. D. McPhee, & P. K. Tompkins (Eds.), *Organizational communication: Traditional themes and new directions* (123-146). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tsetsura, K. (2003). The development of public relations in Russia: A geopolitical approach. In K. Sriramesh, & D. Verčič (Eds.), *A handbook of international public relations* (pp. 301-319). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc. Inc.
- Tsetsura, K. (2010). Social construction and public relations. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *The handbook of public relations* (2nd edition, 163-175). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Tsetsura, K. (2011). Is public relations a real job? How female practitioners construct the profession. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 23(1), 1-23.
- Tsetsura, K., & Kruckeberg, D. (2004). Theoretical development of public relations in Russia. In D. J. Tilson (Ed.), *Toward the common good: Perspectives in international public relations* (pp. 176-192). Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.
- Tsetsura, K., & Kruckeberg, D. (2009). Corporate reputation: Beyond measurement. *Public Relations Journal*, 3(3). Retrieved from http://www.prsa.org/SearchResults/download/6D-030303/0/Corporate_Reputation_Beyond_Measuremen.
- Valentini, C., & Kruckeberg, D. (2011). Public relations and trust in contemporary global society: A Luhmannian perspective of the role of public relations in enhancing trust among social systems. *Central European journal of communication*, 4, 89-105.
- Van Heerden, G., & Rensburg, R. (2005). Public relations role empirically verified among public relations practitioners in Africa. *Communicare*, 24, 69-88.
- Van Ruler, B. (2004). The communication grid: An introduction of a model four communication strategies. *Public Relations Review*, 30, 123-143.
- Van Ruler, B., & de Lange, R. (2003). Barriers to communication management in the executive suite. *Public Relations Review*, 29, 145-158.
- Van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., Bütschi, G., & Flodin, B (2004). A first look for parameters of public relations in Europe. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 16, 35-63.
- Vanc, A., & White, C. (2011). Cultural perceptions of public relations gender roles in Romania. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 103-105.
- Verčič, D. (2003). Public relations in a corporatist country: The case of Slovenia. In K. Sriramesh, & D. Verčič (Eds.), *A Handbook of international public relations* (pp. 281-300). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Wakefield, R. I. (2007). A retrospective on *world class*: The excellence theory goes international. In E. L. Toth (Ed.), *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: Challenges for the next generation* (pp. 545-568). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Walker, M. (2001). "Engineering identities." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 22, 15-30.
- White, A. (2005). Gender roles in contemporary Russia: Attitudes and expectations among women students. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57, 429-455.

Wrigley, B. J. (2002). Glass ceiling? What glass ceiling? A qualitative study of how women view the glass ceiling in public relations and communications management. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14, 27-55.

Wu, M.-Y. (2006). Perceptions about male and female managers in the Taiwanese public relations field: Stereotypes and strategies for change. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 51, 36-42.

Wu, M.-Y. (2010). Gender and cultural influences on expected leadership styles in the Taiwanese public relations field: Transformational and transactional leadership styles. *China Media Research*, 6, 37-46.

Young, I. M. (1987). Impartiality and the civic public. In S. Benhabib & D. Cornell (Eds.), *Feminism as critique* (57-76). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Forma de citar este artículo:

KATERINA, T. (2014). Constructing Public Relations as a Women's Profession in Russia. *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas*, Vol. IV, Nº 8, 85-110. Recuperado el _____ de _____ de _____, de <http://revistarelacionespublicas.uma.es/index.php/revrrp/article/view/293/178>.