

**ELUSIVE MANLINESS: REAFFIRMING  
MASCULINITIES IN THE FIELD OF TRANSLATION  
STUDIES IN BELARUS**

By  
Yuri Pavlov

*Submitted to*  
Central European University  
Department of Gender Studies

*In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies*

Supervisor: Professor Vera Eliasova

Budapest, Hungary  
2015

## Abstract

The thesis is focused on men's experiences in a female-dominated environment of the Translation Studies department at Belarusian State University and the way they reaffirm their masculinities in that setting. Drawing on in-depth interviews, in which the men assert that their interpersonal relations with women and each other are based on full equality, I analyze whether men in actuality behave in harmony with that assertion. It seems that the minority status of men creates certain tensions for them. My research shows that the ways men negotiate their masculinities are subtle. I argue that men reaffirm their masculinities in several ways: (1) by speaking of their studies as an asset for their future profession, that is, they speak about interpretation, not translation, which means that the job will be performed in the public eye; (2) by avoiding participating in situations of conflict; (3) by constantly socializing with other men and women, but at the same time creating their own male "comfort zones" when men sit together in classes or form smoking cliques; (4) by clandestinely competing during physical training classes and being obsessed with their body image; (5) by developing a specific joking culture: Jokes in mixed groups are more politically correct than in male-only companies and homosocial jokes with other men serve to distance themselves from suspicion of homosexuality; (6) by combining studies and work and not being focused on grades as an index of their knowledge but rather as a way to get discounts on tuition fees. I argue that these evasive behavioral patterns serve as a mechanism to avoid the danger of possible emasculation. In the Translation Studies department, men reproduce hegemonic masculinity unreflectively; in light of that, the existing structure of gender hierarchies in Belarus is also reproduced.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis was made possible thanks to the people I met here at CEU. My deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Vera Eliasova for her unflagging support as my thesis supervisor and as an academic writing professional. I am grateful to my second reader, Dr. Miklós Hadas, an expert in the field of Men's Studies, who provided invaluable comments on how to enhance the thesis. I am endlessly grateful to Frank Karioris, a PhD student at the Gender Studies department, whose insights and suggestions polished my approach to conducting the research. Finally, I am thankful to my dear Filipino friend and Gender Studies classmate Marlon Lacsamana whose optimism inspired me throughout the year.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *1.1 Context of the research*

I studied at Belarusian State University majoring in Translation Studies in 2006–2012. It was a typical university environment and a standard learning process, as is the case in Belarus where the majority of institutions of higher learning are government-run. However, it was unusual in one tiny aspect that, to my mind, affected my experience tremendously there: It was a female-dominated setting, with men being the minority (nine men and fifty five women). I was cognizant of that fact before coming to study there, because in our country most of the students in language departments are women. I did not think this gender asymmetry would influence my communication with peers in any way, both men and women, but it did impact profoundly on interpersonal relations—more so with men than with women. I was the only man in my group of seventeen people, and I obviously did not represent the canon of masculinity: Being tall but skinny (almost skeletal), wearing long hair, disinterested in cars and sports, loving bell bottoms and skin tight jeans, having too many female friends, too immersed in studies, too in love with spirituality, too fond of eloquent speech, and too in love with Oscar Wilde. Too much to become a pariah right off the bat. But I was sure that university life was all about equality, diversity, and freedom of expression. Which it was, only, at one's own peril. With the benefit of hindsight, I cannot say that my studies were a nightmare; of course, they were great, enlightening, and very conducive to obtaining knowledge and networking. Nonetheless, it felt as though I had the mark of Cain on my forehead that scared the male peers away—or I myself was too scared of them, I do not know still.

I experienced name-calling only few times, from both men and women, but simply because I happened to be accidentally overhearing it from a group of smoking peers, where I did not belong. While female students were very kind to me, I wanted to tacitly prove to men that I maintain dignity, which for me was possible through academic achievement. Also, I enjoyed being the class representative and the hub of the latest news from the department. Reason and first-hand knowledge—after all, are these not very masculine qualities? It was all very unconscious, I did not

self-reflect on that, much less tried to develop strategies for reaffirming my masculine credentials. Little did I know that I was pulled into the structured power games where high status was the Holy Grail. Even less did I know that such was the structure of the Belarusian patriarchal society, and pretty much I did not have any other choice, and I was not the only one involved in that dynamics—in fact, all students were engaged.

All this encourages me today, years after graduation, to go back to that environment and see what it takes a man to study in the Translation Studies department, how other men reaffirm their masculinities in a female-dominated place. I strongly believe that this research can be representative of not only the Translation Studies department in that university but in other universities as well, and also for Russia and Ukraine, two other most connected countries of the former USSR.

### ***1.2 Literature overview, gap, and research question***

There has been extensive literature on the topics of masculinity as well as men in female professions (Heikes 1991; Williams and Villemez 1993; Williams 1995; Cross and Bagilhole 2000; Lupton 2000; Simpson 2004). They all try to answer the question of what it takes a man to work in a female-dominated setting and how they (re)construct their masculinities. The most common type of professions under scrutiny are nursing, librarianship, teaching in primary schools, and social work (Williams 1995).<sup>1</sup> In *Still A Man's World*, Williams claims that men in traditionally women's occupations may feel emasculation, although they experience no open derision, because they emphasize their masculinities in several ways: (1) focus on masculine aspects of work, (2) focus on the prestige of their workplace, (3) focus on power and authority of their position, (4) focus on physical aspects of work, (5) rename the work when outside it, (6) segregate themselves from female colleagues at work (Williams 1995, 126–132).

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<sup>1</sup> Men doing nursing is the most researched topic among other traditionally female occupations (Auster 1979; Fløge and Merril 1986; Mullan and Harrison 2008; Limiñana-Gras *et al.* 2013; Sánchez-López *et al.* 2014).

In terms of masculinity and education, there is much more scholarship on secondary education masculinity construction (Lesko 2000; Light and Kirk 2000; Swain 2005; Keddie 2006; Burke 2007; Smith 2007; McCann *et al.* 2010; Tischler and McCaughtry 2011; Barnes 2012; Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Cohen 2013) than on higher education masculinity construction (Lyman 1987; Smith 2004; Martin 2008; Laker and Davis 2011; Moss-Racusin *et al.* 2012; Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2013). The indisputable value of this scholarship, however, lies in the fact that they try to give insight into how men reassert their masculinities across a variety of contexts, without placing emphasis on university students reproducing their masculine statuses in female-dominated environments. Almost all of them use the notion of “hegemonic masculinity” as an overarching theory of their research (this theory will be addressed in Chapter 2). Hence, there is a gap in the abundant literature on how male students in institutions of higher learning who want to pursue a profession of an interpreter see themselves and reaffirm their masculinities in a place where female presence is dominant.

In the thesis, I aim to explore how men who come to obtain a profession to such an environment construct their masculinity. In other words, I intend to investigate how they see themselves as men in the feminine territory for a period of five years and what experiences they undergo that affect their gender identities.

The research question for my thesis is as follows: How do men reaffirm their masculinities in the Translation Studies department where they are a minority? In order to answer it, I will have to look deep into several aspects and answer a number of auxiliary questions: What do men think of themselves as men when they dive into a place where they are a minority in order to get professional training? How do they see Translation Studies as a field of knowledge and a future profession and what is their motivation to choose it as a future career? What matters for men in terms of masculinity within the department, what tensions do they possibly have there with their male and female peers? How do men negotiate with their peers the conventional idea of masculinity in the Translation Studies department?

### ***1.3 Methodology***

The research was based on in-depth interviews with men of the Translation Studies department of Belarusian State University in Minsk, Belarus, in April 2015. Of the twenty men currently studying in this department, seventeen agreed for the interviews on the condition of anonymity. The sample included students from first- to fifth-year of studies. When there was a need, interviews were conducted two, three, and even four times. Interviews were semi-structured (the full list of questions can be found in the Appendix). Interviews were recorded, partially transcribed, and analyzed in clusters of topics (such as humor, sport, profession, parental influence, etc.). The process of analysis required sorting and sifting the material depending on key themes.

The research, however, can have certain limitations. Men may have been reluctant to talk about gender issues openly, as it is not the topic that is usually spoken of in Belarus, especially with someone they do not know personally. Some of their answers, then, may have been too politically correct and in tune with what they thought I wanted to hear from them as an interviewee. Furthermore, the aspect of sexuality was not questioned and analyzed in any systemic way; although it is an important factor in the hierarchy of masculinities, I had apprehensions of losing informants by focusing on this sensitive topic. Even when the issue was raised, it was rather a distraction from the main question than a deep focus on the topic. Also, I spent two and half weeks in that department, which is not a long period of time, and the research could have been done more thoroughly if I could immerse in their environment for several months and did a full-time ethnography, but I did not have the luxury of time, thus; the concentration in this research is almost entirely based on men's self-reflections.

I am aware that the findings of the research may seem biased or far-fetched because of my personal involvement and because I analyze mostly men's answers about their own experiences. In mitigation, I should say that the balance between objectivity and subjectivity in social sciences has not yet been reached, and analysis of empirical data oscillates between positivism and interpretivism (Clarke 2009). The former approach aims to study and explain reality dispassionately, while the



latter claims it is impossible to remove the scholar from the study, since it would mean to remove understanding from the study of reality (Clarke 2009, 31–32). As I try to understand the experience of men in the Translation Studies department, I adhere to the interpretivist approach. Moreover, it was not only the interviews with the men. I also made interviews with the female students from the first- to fourth-year of studies, with male and female alumni, as well as with professors of that department and tried to understand how they view or viewed the few men they interact or interacted with. In addition, I sat as an observer with several groups during their classes and several times taught classes to those groups (which allowed me to observe how people behave in that environment) and made conclusions on the precision of some answers drawn from the men's interviews. The mixed methodological approach to studying phenomena in social sciences is called triangulation (Altrichter *et al.* 2008; Harrits 2011; Torrance 2012), which I tried to embed in my research while on site.

Following the Introduction, Chapter 2 explores the Belarusian context *vis-à-vis* gender and how the theory of hegemonic masculinity can be a helpful lens in analyzing men's experience in female-dominated settings. I will also show that the lack of detailed gender statistics at universities is a perfect demonstration of Belarus' disinterest with the topic as such. In Chapter 3, I want to look at the Translation Studies department as a place where men can exercise their masculinities. For this purpose, I will look into why men are driven to choose this department, what possible tensions they may have and what mechanisms they use to tackle them, and will look into some of the female voices and what they think of the few men they study with in their department. Chapter 4 will focus specifically on the men's answers about the themes of humor, body and sport, and academic progress, and will endeavor to show what subtle strategies men have developed in order to reaffirm their masculinities in the environment they study. In the Conclusion, I will summarize the main findings of the research and answer the research question.

## Chapter 2: Gender and Masculinities in the Belarusian Context

This chapter explores how the theory of hegemonic masculinity can be a helpful lens in analyzing men's experience in female-dominated settings and provides a background for the Belarusian context vis-à-vis gender.

### *2.1 Hegemonic masculinity in educational context*

In this section, I want to have a look at the concept of hegemonic masculinity as developed by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell in her *Masculinities* and explain why it was a major theory for the research this thesis is based upon.

The easiest way to define masculinity is to contrast it to femininity, but it is not only that. In his preface of *Masculinities and Identities*, Buchbinder gives a simple and concise definition of masculinity as “a set of attitudes and practices culturally deemed appropriate to men—in short, what it is to be a man” (Buchbinder 1994, vii). This set has never been stable across time and space, on the contrary, it was changing as time unfolded; in other words, masculinity has a history (Connell 1995, 185–203).

In addition, Men's Studies scholars (Buchbinder 1994; Connell 1995; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003) prefer to use the plural form of the word—“masculinities”—to connote that it is not a single and undivided concept but rather a gamut of identities. Connell argues that masculinities are interrelational, and this dynamics of masculinities provides a better analysis of gender relations between men (Connell 1995, 76). She theorizes that class, race, and gender produce a variety of masculinities and hinder a strict typologization of men (Connell 1995, 76).

Different masculinities interact, and at some point one type of masculinity obtains a leading position over the others, becoming a dominant form of masculinity—Connell called it “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 1995, 76–77). Thus, there is an ongoing contest between masculinities for the hegemonic status and power—real or symbolic. To establish superiority, men have to win the consent of other men and women, hence, legitimizing their hegemony (Haywood and Mac an

Ghail 2013, 14). In *Still A Man's World*, Williams writes: “Qualities currently associated with hegemonic masculinity include physical strength and bravado, exclusive heterosexuality, stoicism, authority, and independence” (Williams 1995, 118). Whether men embody these qualities or not, they consider it currently as the cultural ideal and support it. In the hierarchy of masculinities, usually hegemonic masculinity establishes relationships with non-hegemonic masculinities through complicity, subordination, or marginalization, but still, as Connell puts it, “the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (Connell 1995, 79). As Williams observed, “masculinity is always defined as *different from* and *better than* women and femininity. Many men (but certainly not all men) support these forms for economic, social, *and* psychological reasons” (Williams 1995, 122).

In the article dedicated to the revised concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) claim that, depending on contexts, hegemonic masculinity changes. In education, as Haywood and Mac an Ghail write, “boys are provided with a range of institutionally sanctioned masculinities that are often constituted through the performance of aggression and violence, fraternity, homophobia, and heterosexual performance” (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2013, 105). Swain adds that within education “the hegemonic form generally mobilizes around a number of sociocultural constructs such as physical and athletic skill, strength, fitness, control, competitiveness, culturally acclaimed knowledge, discipline, courage, self-reliance, and adventurousness” (Swain 2005, 220). Alternative masculinities, he claims, oftentimes coexist with the hegemonic forms in educational settings, which means that subordination in education may not have violent traces (Swain 2005, 221).

Men in the Translation Studies department at Belarusian State University—as will be shown in the following chapters—aspire to reach a hegemonic version of masculinity as described above in a less evident way. In their context where female presence is dominant, men exercise, perhaps unconsciously, subtle forms of gaining status among peers. These includes joking culture, hidden

competitiveness in physical training classes, preoccupation with their bodies, desire to be disassociated from marginalized forms of masculinities, desire to combine work and studies, and some others. Not everybody is successful in that contest, but that does not mean such men are automatically subordinated. Actually, their friendship networks are well-established and egalitarian, so much so that they claim they never feel excluded or uncomfortable in that environment. Alternative masculinities go hand in hand with hegemonic masculinity in that department, and the contest between them takes an almost invisible shape. They understand they cannot behave in traditionally brutal or impolite ways; hence, to respond to possible tensions, they adhere to covert forms of gaining superiority. In doing so, on a larger scale they reproduce the existing gender relations in the Belarusian patriarchal society.

So, hegemonic masculinity is a theoretical framework that allows to scrutinize the gender dynamics in the educational context of men's behavior and attitudes in the Translation Studies department, since it helps unearth that which is hidden from a superficial glance, that is, the perceived egalitarian environment that the men claimed to be studying in.

## ***2.2 Belarusian context vis-à-vis gender***

In patriarchal Belarus, gender and sexualities is a topic that is spoken little about by common people (Lalo and Schitov 2008). The state-run media rarely talk about gender, most universities lack gender courses in their curricula, most people have no interest in understanding of what lies at the core of gender dynamics, which is power relations (Scott 1986, 1067).<sup>2</sup> Some changes are starting to happen now, but I argue they are sporadic and have little impact on people's attitudes and perceptions regarding gender and sexuality.<sup>3</sup> In this section, however, I do not suggest what further steps should

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<sup>2</sup> Here, I follow a popular definition of the term "gender" developed by Joan W. Scott in her article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in which she contends: "[G]ender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power."

<sup>3</sup> One major web space exists in Belarus that is focused exclusively on sexualities and gender—MakeOut (the URL is <http://makeout.by/>), although there is not much information about the readership of this portal. As of 27 May 2015, it has 1,341 subscribers on Facebook. The portal is a quickly developing project in Belarus following its launch in January 2014, and it organizes movie screenings, photo exhibitions, etc. in Minsk, Belarus.

be done in Belarus to promote gender equality; I will give an outline of the *status quo* with regard to gender in Belarus and will show that masculinities (and femininities) in Belarus are thought of in essentialist notions, that is, men are men by virtue of birth and the same is considered true for women.

In her account on the formation of nation, class, and gender in Belarus, sociologist Gapova claims that women started to be marginalized in independent Belarus after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which can be accounted for by the emergence of class distinctions (Gapova 2002; Gapova 2004). She argues, “[A]nd class necessarily includes the emergence of masculine privilege” (Gapova 2004, 88). She also claims that starting from *perestroika*’s period (1985 and onward), women in the USSR and later post-Soviet countries were more and more pushed from the public sphere into private (“redomestication”)—“a necessary element” in the new social hierarchy (Gapova 2004, 99). For nation building, when the future of Belarus was ambiguous (to be independent or to form a close union with Russia), it was a pivotal move: The nation started to be conceptualized as a “woman-nation” that needs protection from a powerful colonizer, and brave men would protect her whatever it would take (Gapova 2004, 95–97). Such patriarchal notions (independence as a masculine cause) added to the then existing stereotypical patriarchal understanding of gender.

In her article on how Belarusians view their country themselves, Polish academic Brzozowska argues that “both the academic discourse in Belarus and self-descriptions of Belarus by Belarusian citizens are strongly gendered, even hyper-feminized,” especially when contrasted to Russia (Brzozowska 2007, 186–187). It happens, she claims, unreflectively, which has its toll in the form of political exploitation by its president (a father figure for the nation) and his push for close relationships with Russia (Brzozowska 2007, 198). According to her, Belarusians in their own words perceive themselves as passive and lacking agency, small, weak, invisible, vulnerable, emotional, silenced, even childish and capricious—in other words, “associated with the private sphere, that is, as implicitly ‘feminized’ ” (Brzozowska 2007, 192). Such self-perception in itself demonstrates that the society thinks of maleness and femaleness in highly stereotypical terms and

that the gender differences are inevitably essentialist, or determined by nature, differences stemming from a sexual binary.

Thus, with the theoretical insight about Belarus that Gapova and Brzozowska provided in their works, the masculine status of men is very instable. During *perestroika*, men generally acquired economic privileges, albeit unevenly, because women were “liberated” from the double burden of having jobs and domestic work by allowing them to be good mothers at home (Gapova 2002, 653–654). Economic privileges fostered the emergence of class society (some men started having more money, others—less), which lead to shifts in the distribution of power—something that Gapova calls “rise of masculinity,” which was not the case in the USSR (Gapova 2002, 654). After the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991, followed by severe economic crisis, Belarusian nationalism helped solidify the idea that powerful men would protect the motherland and women—a typically patriarchal view. Belarusians’ self-perception of their country is feminized, which requires men, albeit unreflectively, reaffirm their masculinities in their daily practices. The easiest way to do that is to exercise behavior and exhibit traits expected of men (like paying in restaurants and cafes for a girlfriend). Actually, gender stereotyping begins as early as a kindergarten (Lalo and Schitov 2008, 183), and homosexuality is usually frowned upon (Lalo and Schitov 2008).

### ***2.3 Lack of gender statistics in Belarusian universities***

In Belarusian linguistic universities and departments, there are typically few male students. In 2006 when I enrolled at Belarusian State University (BSU), there were 9 men and 55 women—and it was approximately the same amount for second- and third-year students at the time. My good memory notwithstanding, I had to collect the documented numbers for the research, which I thought would be readily available. Alas, such statistics is something that is either gathered only since a few years back or not gathered at all. Allegedly, BSU publishes its statistics in the national reports, but the reports contain only aggregated numbers and not department-specific, which does not help my project. I pulled some strings in the Philology Department and got some information from the

previous years. As for my alma-mater, the Translation Studies department, the situation was much worse: No statistics, only the list of currently enrolled students. Table 1 contains data on enrolled male and female students at the Philology Department between 2009–2014. Table 2 demonstrates the data on students in the Translation Studies department for the 2014–2015 academic year:

**Table 1. Philology Department, BSU (2009–2014 overall statistics)**

Enrolled first-year students by year	Men	Women	Total
2009	15	158	173
2010	14	166	180
2011	16	160	176
2012	18	180	198
2013	26	228	254
2014	24	208	232
TOTAL	113	1,100	1,213

**Table 2. Translation Studies department, BSU (2014–2015 statistics)**

Academic year 2014–2015	Men	Women	Total
1st year students	10	40	50
2nd year students	6	38	44
3d year students	3	37	40
4th year students	0	17	17
5th year students	1	29	30
TOTAL	20	161	181

The statistics at BSU at those two departments shows that, on the average, the amount of male students for those linguistic majors does not exceed 11 percent.

Minsk State Linguistic University (MSLU), the main foreign languages university in Belarus, could have been a more authoritative place to ask for statistics on men and women enrolled there. Only, the university president rejected my inquiry instantly on the grounds of having “no practical value for MSLU.” During the appointment with the MSLU deputy president, I was told that there was simply no ready-made gender statistics on their students. In order to collect it, it would require to open archives and count male and female students manually, and I volunteered to assist the archivist. We were able to collect the data on MSLU bachelor graduates for the years 2009, 2012–2014 (see Table 3) as well as on MSLU master graduates for the years 2000–2013 (see Table 4).

**Table 3. MSLU bachelor graduates (2009, 2012–2014 statistics)**

Year	Men	Women	Total
2009	815	5,455	6,270
2012	120	1,027	1,147
2013	168	1,071	1,239
2014	176	1,034	1,210

**Table 4. MSLU master graduates (2000–2014 statistics)**

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Men	18	9	8	9	5	16	5	10	12	13	7	7	7	9
Women	45	43	45	57	57	64	64	63	51	52	58	58	47	57
Total	63	52	53	66	62	80	69	73	63	65	65	65	54	66

According to the given period, the average percent of men who studied at MSLU for baccalaureate programs was below 13 percent, for graduate programs—below 20 percent (with the exception of the year 2000).

The complexity with which these scattered data were extracted—an uneasy beginning of my research journey—is another example of the fact that gender as such is overlooked in Belarusian universities: There was no long-term detailed gender statistics in two renowned universities in Minsk. If we calculate the average percent of men who graduated from MSLU in the years provided from both the undergraduate and graduate schools, this number will be 14.67 percent. For the BSU Philology Department, the average percent of the men who enrolled in the studies in the years provided is 9.2 percent. For the BSU students of the Translation Studies department, the average percent of all men who study there in the academic year 2014–2015 is 11 percent. All this information means that, indeed, men are traditionally scarce in Belarusian linguistic universities and departments.



## Chapter 3: Translation Studies as a Locus of Exercising Masculinities

In this chapter, I want to look at the Translation Studies department as a place where men can exercise their masculinities. For this purpose, I will look into why men are driven to choose this department, what possible tensions they may have and what mechanisms they use to tackle them, and will look into some of the female voices and what they think of the few men they study with in their department.

### 3.1 Why men choose Translation Studies

In this section, I argue that men choose Translation Studies as a major for several reasons: (1) they see it as part of their prestigious future profession (interpretation rather than translation), (2) they chose it sometimes with the help of their parents (although, generally, parental influence was minimal), (3) they were not successful at math or physics in high school but were good at languages. In the meantime, I argue that the men's responses contain patterns of hegemonic masculinity, which helps them reaffirm their masculine status.

The popular convictions in Belarus are such that interpreters earn good money, for which I found no concrete evidence. According to the only open statistics source,<sup>4</sup> in which, however, interpreters, linguists, editors, and translators are all in one group, it is not much money.<sup>5</sup> Also contrary to the popular belief, women dominate this profession.<sup>6</sup> Vagueness and methodological flaws of this statistics notwithstanding, I aimed to find out what the profession of a translator/interpreter stand for in the minds of the men in the Translation Studies department and whether the figure of a translator/interpreter is marked by particular characteristics (which are not gendered *per se*, but the combination of them can be). While there were no gender-patterned

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<sup>4</sup> The URL of the website is <http://mojazarplata.by> (literally translates as “my salary”), a non-profit and non-government platform where Belarusians of different professions anonymously put in information about their jobs and salaries by answering a host of detailed questions.

<sup>5</sup> As of 25 May 2015, the website shows that the average salary in the field of technical translation and interpretation, gathered by evaluating 18,793 responses, is circa BYR 6,000,000—which is approximately EUR 375.00.

<sup>6</sup> As of 25 May 2015, statistically only 19 percent of all respondents were men.

answers in men's views of a translator/interpreter, the profession was largely described in terms of personality and the usefulness of this job for other people.

Most of the informants spoke about interpreters rather than translators and described professional qualities that can only be applicable for situations of interaction with other people. In their words, an average interpreter looks as follows: Interpreters are patient, diplomatic, polite, well-mannered, communicative, constantly aware, resistant to stress, with composure. Also, they are analytical, witty, with good memory, well-read, and erudite. In terms of skills, interpreters lack the language barrier, know perfectly their mother tongue, speak eloquently, have an ear for music, love their trade and do it well, "understand the things they are talking about," react quickly. The profession is exacting, as one informant put it: "It's a profession that demands creativity. Interpreters have no right to make a mistake." According to another informant, not only is it exacting but it requires determination and commitment: "You can become a real translator only ten years after you graduate from university, after you have acquired high skills and accumulated knowledge. I believe only two people [from our whole class of 2017] will become translators."

The overarching idea of their future profession is that of interpretation, that is, always being in the public eye and being able to effectively communicate things to the audience. As far as personality is concerned, men described an interpreter as a perfect Victorian gentleman (in fact, one informant used this exact word, adding that an interpreter should smell well and wear a nice suit). The fact that almost no one mentioned written translation as part of their future work, testifies to the fact that being in private is not a masculine thing and not ambitious enough for men, since translation would mean perseverance and symbolic invisibility. This is a cultural phenomenon, as Warner argues in *Publics and Counterpublics*: "Masculinity, at least in Western cultures, is felt partly in a way of occupying public space; femininity, in a language of private feeling" (Warner 2005, 24).

As far as parental influence is concerned, none of the informants mentioned any hindrance from their parents' side. On the contrary, parents fully supported their son—his inclination for languages and his freedom of choice. This is also a sign of exercising masculinity for a young man—

being able to make independent decisions and/or take risks (Cohen 2013, 179). One informant admitted his parents influenced his decision (he wanted to pursue a military-related major), another wanted to become a doctor (nonetheless, the choice of Translation Studies was his own). One of the critical arguments for parents in favor of their son studying translation was the significance of languages in the present world, since they grant access to many more job opportunities. Such an encouragement directly links education to profession (a pragmatic approach), when studying is seen as the first step of a future job versus a way of expanding knowledge. Thus, I strongly disagree with a Belarusian social science scholar who claims: “And even though education does not correlate directly with job status or success in professional development, it is a factor that is quite significant in the first phase of the life cycle of both women and men” (Semerikova 2013, 6). On the contrary, in the context of the Translation Studies department, it is precisely the pursuit of “professional development” and eventually status that is pivotal to men.

Four informants stated that their choices of Translation Studies were narrowed down by the lack of skills in math and physics. Ten respondents claimed openly that languages (and more broadly—humanities) was their forte in high school. Some men also commented that English was one of their favorite classes in high school, and they were successful in that class. While natural aptitudes is enough of a reason to choose a major in a related sphere, I find those answers that contained juxtaposition of English with math and physics particularly noteworthy, because it shows that exact sciences are considered harder and more masculine (because generally many more men than women study them globally). By admitting that they could not pursue their career there, they justify their choices of humanities.

To sum it up, men choose Translation Studies for a number of reasons. They may like the field, they may feel more secure in humanities than in exact sciences, or they may be influenced by their parents. So, their first step in reaffirming their masculinities is to show that they have enough capacities to enroll and that education is an asset into their future profession. The profession itself is seen by the men as a highly visible one and was described in unequivocally “public” notions

(behavior, personal qualities, necessary skills). In other words, men were speaking about interpretation, which is seen by them as prestigious, well-paid, and thus, status-guaranteeing. In this aspiration for future status, men reproduce aspirations of reaching hegemonic masculinity.

### ***3.2 Tensions that men may feel in the Translation Studies department***

In this section, I want to enumerate tensions that men in the predominantly female environment of the Translation Studies department may have, why they may appear, and how men tackle them. In harmony with the scholarship that deals with a similar topic (Williams 1995; Simpson 2004), I argue that men's tensions are related to their potential emasculation. However, men who study Translation Studies "learned" to tackle this by ignoring situations of conflict, grouping in classes with other men, and disassociating themselves from homosexuality.

I should stress that the tensions the men may experience in their learning environment have little to do with men's minority status. In fact, sixteen out of seventeen informants mentioned no problem about being in the minority, emphasizing that their groups are very friendly and in good relationships with one another. This is what Simpson calls "a comfort zone effect," meaning that communication with women is absolutely comfortable (Simpson 2004, 358). However, the threat of emasculation can escalate into tension over the course of time, when issues of conflict solving or sexuality come to the fore.

First, speaking about conflicts with their female groupmates, men regularly deny they have any open conflicts. Freshmen and sophomores said that they did not have major conflicts with anybody, but even if they did, those were solved quickly. They do not see them as conflicts but rather minor debates. By denying that situations of conflict are present or renaming them "debates," men may be reluctant to admit that such situations may invoke overemotional reaction on their part, which will be pernicious to their masculinity, since the hegemonic masculinity implies coolness and stoicism when it comes to displaying strong feelings in public. To get a sense of what "debates," let me provide a quote of one of the informants:

We [guys] behave in an unemotional way [*spokoyno*], we don't try to incline into girls' talks about women's things. Although there may be moments when you have to defend your man's position, since we are the minority and have to survive in this women's community [he smiles]. For instance, we may have an argument about stereotypical things, like, who has to stand at the cooking oven or who has to do housework [*zanimatsya kbozayastvom*]*—*common questions which arise every day. We have to defend our positions and repel the weight of girls' emotions and arguments. We digest what they say and speak out despite their reproaches. There are many feminists now, women and men, and this propaganda that's happening today affects them, like, a woman has to work and forget about housework. The truth is, no one wants to stand at the oven, thus, girls try to find excuses. I advocate for a balanced position [in this question].

Demonstrative here is not the man's patriarchal argument itself, but the need to “speak out” when men feel threat to their masculinity voiced by women. Defending their “man's position” here stands for defending their status as man, and this is seen by them as rebuttal rather than participation in a conflict. Peculiar here is that he said that it was not only him who defended his masculine credentials but also his male friend. This solidarity is strategic in such situations. Hegemonic masculinity overall views femininity as subordinate; thus, by “speaking out” against women's “radical” views they maintain the demarcation line between what should and should not be masculine.

Second, I notice an overall tendency for men in the department to group together in their classes. Men create a so-called safe space where they may feel more unity and mutual support. Distancing from the female environment while being in it is a clear example of how egalitarian spirit of the department is not all that egalitarian. By placing themselves in close physical proximity with other men, male students may act as a solidary network and either ignore situations of conflict or react to them together as one. This tactics allows to avoid the threat to masculinity to any single man from women.

Moreover, upperclassmen's and alumni's answers give a sharper insight into the alienation from situations of conflict. One informant said, “I tend to avoid conflicts.” This “avoidance” is a strategy that allows men to not put themselves in the situation when an argument may outgrow its first cause and become an *ad hominem* attack. One alumnus noticed, “I developed one nice and useful skill, that is, listening. And not interfering when girls argue and try to show their extraordinary abilities [he smiles]*—*regarding any question.” The strategy of symbolic disappearing

from the context in a situation of conflict by being silent, yet remaining observant, is a skill that this informant learned during the studies over time. These men realized that by becoming invisible they did not have to engage in the game of power and, thus, not be threatened by emasculation in the process of arguing and exhibiting excessive emotions.

Finally, homosexuality can become an issue for men. Although I never explicitly talked with the current male students about their sexuality and never asked what they think of homosexuality, some freshmen expressed their disassociation from homosexuality by saying that “I don’t care who you are, just don’t impose it on me” and “I’m fine with it, but I don’t think I would shake hands with a gay guy if we had one in our group.” Two alumni’s responses show that the subtle fear of emasculation (*ergo*, stigmatization) was palpable for their experiences. One alumnus (identifies as heterosexual) said, “Girls treated me as a girl, but they wanted to know my man’s perspective [*muzhskoye nachalo*] in many questions.” Here, the informant reaffirms his masculinity by adding that girls, though did not treat him as a man, still recognized his manhood in him. Another alumnus (identifies as gay) said, “At that time, I didn’t really look like other guys—dyed my hair, dressed fashionably, thus, some [women] in our group looked at me, whispered with each other, and giggled.” Here, derision was an instrument of stigmatization, which was an unpleasant experience for him.

For men, tensions in the Translation Studies department arise from potential situations of conflict, which are seen by the men as undesirable and, therefore, over time they learn to avoid them and avoid putting their personality and masculinity into question. Homosexuality is another tension (even if one does not identify as gay), which may result in unpleasant experiences and lead to men’s feeling of emasculation in that context. In this respect, Simpson’s findings support that view: “[M]en in non-traditional occupations, irrespective of sexual orientation, experience anxiety around the powerful stigmas associated with the homosexual status” (Simpson 2004, 365).

### ***3.3 What female students think about their male counterparts***

In order to have a more comprehensive picture of the men constructing their masculinities, it was worthwhile to ask the women in the department how they perceive their male counterparts. In this section, I will look at women's responses to three key questions: What do they think of the few men they study with? In their opinion, why do men choose Translation Studies? To their mind, why do men get expelled from the program more frequently than women? Women's answers may help understand whether there is any form of gender antagonism in the department that may be caused by women.

From first- to fourth-year female students, it was intriguing to know what they thought of the fact that there were few male students in their department (or lack thereof). The first- and second-year students' answers were a little bit more exciting than those of the fourth-year students. One sophomore lamented, "It's bad without guys here, we lack communication with men." A freshman complained, "Female environment is full of gossips." Another sophomore confessed (to a hearty laugh of other women), "How do we feel here without men? As if in a monastery." According to these views, men in a group "relive tensions" in conversations and are good at jokes. Not everybody agrees, however. "I don't think it would be different if we had more guys, why would it?" These were the answers of those women who had few men in their high schools, so I think their disagreement may be accounted by their experiences: They were accustomed to having few men for a long time. However, for those who remember that gender-balanced environment, there is a touch of nostalgia. One student put it, "Now we talk about cosmetics and cool attire all the time, with boys you would instantly have a whole slew of topics to talk about. It's hard to be in exclusively female groups." In the answers of freshmen and sophomores, the scarcity of men is analogous to the scarcity of fun in the department.

Unlike them, older fourth-year students who have no men in their groups gave somewhat more rigorous answers to the question whether it would be a different environment should have they more men studying with them. One student said, "If there were more guys now, it would have

distracted us from our studies.” In response to my question about what made them say so (I assumed in the past the men were not kind enough to them or, on the contrary, were too interested in them as women), they said it was not about behavior but overall disinterest in Translation Studies. One of the women said:

The guys joked a lot, I remember, it was a fun time. As to personal interest in us as girls, no—there was only one guy who was ambitiously showing his passions towards girls and paying compliments to almost all of us. None of us took him seriously at that time. To his credit, he had great organizational skills and frequently gathered our whole group after classes.

In this specific account, there is an acknowledgment of the masculine manifestation from one of the previous male students (that is, his enthusiasm for women), but this attempt is rationalized as ambitious and perhaps Casanova-esque, which did not allow him to be taken seriously by the majority of the women. Also, it only solidified his disinterest in the studies *per se*.

The next question I asked female freshmen and sophomores was what they thought of the few men they studied with, and their answer was unanimous: They love them, they are friends with them, they treat them as equals and are treated by them likewise. Thus, even before I asked any gender-specific question, they described their relationships with the men as egalitarian. The men for them are friends and buddies. I joked whether the men at the university indeed never hurt their feelings or treated them badly, they joked back, “Of course no, they don’t offend us in any way—they know we are too dangerous.” Also, female students think the men are funnier and wittier. A freshman said, “We have this guy, he is so much fun, he’s now preparing for the Best Man of the Department contest. Actually, with him, we don’t need other guys, he’s as loud as ten guys!” The popularity of this man may well play into his hands (his participation in the male version of a beauty contest gave him strong appeal with the opposite sex), but if we think of what it can mean for other men, I would argue it would mean a covert contest for a hegemonic status. The women may truly like all the men they study with, but they like some men a bit more—just enough to pull the trigger of masculinity reaffirmation for some men in the group of department.

However, those same freshmen female students claim that male students are less hard-working. One of them said, “Guys usually ask us to copy the answers of home assignments, they



are just too lazy to do them at home.” The women readily give the men their notes and home assignments to copy if need be and consider it common practice. Though this practice in itself is indicative of the fact that male students are less diligent, women find an essentialist justification for such behavior—idleness. Of course, not all men do this, but when they do, women are always prepared and willing to help the men if they ask. Here I see an overall reproduction of the society structure, when a woman is “naturally” ready for classes (because she spent time at home preparing) and a man “naturally” happens to be lazy.

Another question I want to address here is what women in the Translation Studies department think about men’s choosing this department in the first place. The line of reasoning of the fourth-year students was such that it was the only way to go in the Belarusian society: One starts with a kindergarten, followed by a secondary school and a university. Thus, according to the women, if a man does not enroll at a university, he will be drafted in the military—a grim scenario for most high school graduates. Thus, the women claimed, men need to enter a university at all costs even if they lack the necessary knowledge or aptitudes. This was revealing insofar as how aware of the patriarchy and its rules (though they call it simply “the structure of the society”) women become as they grow older—something I did not hear from freshmen or sophomores. They almost said it themselves that patriarchy is reproduced, and men choose occupation simply because this is what everybody expects from them.

Since there are no men in the fourth year of studies, I asked the women why men, to their mind, get expelled from the program more frequently than women. The women said that those men “were not oriented towards studies,” with the jobs, other interests, idleness, and relaxed attitude among possible explanations. Hence, some men left the department out of their free will, some were expelled, some transferred to other universities and switched their majors (for instance, to law or physical training). One woman commented about some men who were expelled: “I guess the guys thought that they could pass easily, without too much effort on their part. They thought of the studies as undemanding. They thought they would charm the teachers with their charisma.”

Such a remark (with which the other women who were present agreed) sheds light on how the women give full responsibility to the men for their actions, with the problem being their light-mindedness and failed ability to juggle multiple tasks. Indifference to the process of studying lead to their expulsion. By mentioning “charisma,” I would say that women acknowledge that men may utilize their privileges in the department by simply being men (plus the fact that they are in the minority), but they are of conviction that truth eventually triumphs: If a man has not worked hard enough, it is logical that he will get expelled from the program.

In this section, I gave the account of how women feel about the few men they study with at the Translation Studies department and why they think men get expelled more often than women. The pattern in the responses was such that the higher the year of the studies, the more disenchanted women grow with men’s presence. Vice versa, the younger female students are, the more “funny” they find being in a company of other men (with the exception of some women who do not think so because of their high school female-dominated environments). In other words, female freshmen and sophomores, unlike female upperclassmen, think that more men would create a more diverse environment for the studies and will make it more interesting. All female students, however, expressed the idea that male students are less hardworking and may manifest their maleness in other aspects—such as activities outside classes and on rare occasions personal interest in women within the department. Overall, there is no gender antagonism in the department that women may cause, but with some of their actions they reproduce the patriarchal society they live in (which female upperclassmen are more cognizant of than female underclassmen)—when they let the men copy their notes or homework or when they discuss the reasons why men choose Translation Studies as a major.

## Chapter 4: Men's Conceptualization of Their Masculinities in the Female-Dominated Setting in the Translation Studies Department

In this chapter, I will focus specifically on the men's answers about the themes of humor, body and sport, and academic progress, and will endeavor to show what subtle strategies men have developed in order to re-affirm their masculinities in the female-dominated environment that they study.

### 4.1 Humor

Oftentimes sociologists consider jokes to be more than just amusing stories aimed at causing laughter (Emerson 1969; Lyman 1987; McCann *et al.* 2010; Barnes 2012). Jokes help establish or, vice versa, destroy social relationships. In fact, in her research undertaken in an educational environment, sociologist Barnes claims that for men the effects of humor are fourfold:

Four purposeful, targeted, and situation-specific uses of humour in the classroom are identified here, including the use of humour to police and to maintain the boundaries of 'acceptable' masculinity; to gain and to keep status within the group; to defuse tension in the classroom; and, finally, to exclude those who transgress or who cannot conform to the norms of the dominant discourse of masculinity in operation. (Barnes 2012, 239)

At a closer look, one can notice that any of these usages of humor indicate subtle power dynamics. The power in question is symbolic, and it is a core constituent of hegemonic masculinity. Jokes allow individuals to wield power surreptitiously. According to Lyman (1987), jokes can become an arena for exercising one's domination over others in a group. He claims that "jokes are not just stories, they are a theatre of domination in everyday life, and the success or failure of a joke marks the boundary within which the power and aggression may be used in a relationship" (Lyman 1987, 150). At the same time, jokes are a uniting parameter for people, bringing them closer and creating a sense of unanimity. It may well be a device for defusing tensions as well as resolving conflicts (Watts 2007, 259). For men, jokes are an invaluable tool of bonding and a solid pillar on which their friendship rests (Lyman 1987, 156–157).

In this subsection, I will analyze how men conceptualize their jokes at the Translation Studies department at BSU and show how the content of jokes changes depending on the context in which

the men happen to be. I contend that, while humor is an indispensable element of male socialization in the female-dominated setting, it is also a way of taking up a higher position vis-à-vis other students of both sexes.

#### *4.1.1 Jokes in mixed groups of women and men*

In the Translation Studies department, men may not be cognizant of delicate humor boundaries that should not be overstepped; however, they have a visceral feeling when their jokes will be appropriate or not in a context where there are men, women, professors, and/or faculty staff. Failure in evaluating the situation in which a joke is produced may result in unpleasant, if not negative, experiences. In order to better assess the context in which a person plans to joke, Lyman says that a person has to send a particular signal (“cue”) to the group that this is actually a joke and make sure that those present in the context read it unambiguously. He theorizes that if such assessment happened to be inaccurate, the joke will fail, seriously endangering the existing relations (Lyman 1987, 153).

Fourteen out of seventeen informants expressed the opinion that it is of considerable importance for them to crack jokes during classes and breaks. One of the informants said, “For me, humor is a way of relieving the strain in a tense situation as well as keeping a lively flow of the studies. It’s so much more pleasant to work with people with whom you can let off your humorous steam.” Another informant stated, “I think, it’s hard without humor. Lots of things are better remembered if you make fun of them.” All men claimed that their humor is polite, friendly, generic, and very unlikely to put another person on the defensive. The most common comments were “humor is really well accepted in our group” and “our jokes are not targeted.”

The content of these so-called general jokes are about their studies (home assignments, class sessions, grades), recent news, teachers, mistakes their groupmates make during classes (for instance, wrong pronunciation in foreign language classes), popular anecdotes on the web, events or meetings where something funny happened, lame excuses that some make about their absences,

etc. As one informant put it, “The content of our jokes is everyday things, all within the limits of reason; these are definitely not adult 18+ jokes.” This last comment is very indicative of how self-reflexive the men in that department are in terms of impersonality of their jokes, especially towards women, because they may turn out to be unpleasant and sexist. This may mean that in a mixed group of women and men, the latter aspire to joke wisely in order to keep the atmosphere of unity in their groups.

Nonetheless, one more narrative was prevalent in men’s responses with regard to humor, that is, their deployment of humor for rectifying awkward situations resulted from somebody’s mean or cynical jokes. One respondent said, “Not everybody can actually get a joke, thus, if somebody feels offended by a joke, my groupmate [deleted name]—who’s very gregarious and easy-going—reduces the unpleasant effect of the joke by his diplomatic humor.” Here, the respondent recognizes the authority of his male peer in preventing the escalation of tenseness by this man’s wit and simulated non-seriousness, behind which is in reality a desire to preserve a good collective spirit of the group. The same is true for the jokes that did not work as intended. One informant said:

Even if a joke falls flat, it’s fine, other people can actually make fun of it. I will make fun of it myself. If there was an eerie silence after my joke, I would stand up and say, ‘Believe it or not, it was funny. Thus, I won’t talk with anyone anymore,’ and this would be said with a different intonation, and it would be alright. But it happens so rarely because, honestly, everybody likes jokes in our group.

By making an amusing comment about his own, albeit imaginary, flat joke, the informant puts himself in the position of self-derision, thus, expressing the feelings other groupmates may have about him but may not be able to speak them out.

Finally, everybody denied using sexist jokes, stressing that they only tend to use innocent and impersonal jokes. But one of the respondents actually confessed making targeted jokes directed both at men and women by justifying he is straightforward and unhyprocritical:

I simply state facts by my sharp remarks, some girls and guys may feel hurt but I never lie to anyone, and some people appreciate it a lot. If a girl looks bad, I can’t say ‘Oh, you’re so pretty today,’ I’d say something like ‘Oh my, what happened to you—was somebody beating you up all night?’ See, I won’t say ‘You look ugly today,’ I say it in a joking manner.

In his response, acknowledging that his humor can hurt a person, the respondent feels sharpness is justified for the nobler values such as sincerity. In this instance, though, he symbolically places another person in a lower position by the fact that another person does not look according to some perceived standards of looks in a certain place.

Therefore, men's jokes in mixed groups of men and women are so to speak neutral and not targeted contentwise. Men recognize the boundaries where they have to show respect to their peers, who are absolutely equal with them in the educational setting. On the other hand, jokes are essential to the construction of men's masculinities in those settings, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of men consider exercising humor crucial in their socialization. Moreover, by feeling that humor is an efficient tool of addressing tense situations, men take up an active position of a conflict extinguisher if a conflict looms on the horizon. Also, self-derision in case of a bad joke allows a man to take responsibility for it and correct it by making fun of it, preventing other people from making comments. Lastly, on very rare occasions can a man employ a targeted joke and, hence, play out his masculinity by placing himself on a higher level in comparison with others. These subtle strategies are at the base of men's gaining status among the peers in a gender-mixed environment.

#### *4.1.2 Jokes in male-only companies*

As stated at the beginning of this subsection, jokes are an important factor of releasing tension about a certain topic and can be a huge factor of solidarity between men. In contrast to men's jokes in mixed groups of men and women, men's jokes in male-only companies are generally less restricted, more crude, and habitually more sexualized. The common type of joking between men is an exchange of teasing comments about each other, in other words, banter. Sometimes it can be offensive or even abusive, but this is a kind of test of relationships. Lyman states that "the joke form is a kind of male pedagogy in that, in one guys' words, it teaches 'how to keep in control of

your emotions” (Lyman 1987, 155). *Ergo*, being offended by a joke or not getting a joke may hinder men’s bonding, as men are supposed to be cool about bantering.

This is true about the male students in the Translation Studies department, and they seem to espouse such an expectation. “People can laugh at me sometimes, I’m fine with that, this is normal,” said one informant. “Yes, my buddies laugh at me, we laugh at each other in a friendly way, it doesn’t irritate me at all,” said another one. “My friend [deleted name] makes fun of me, girls don’t. With him, we like to banter at each other,” said another man. “Do they laugh at me? Oh no, it’s dangerous. I’m kidding. Well, even if they do, I’m not angry about it, I will strike back with my joke,” said one more informant. “We banter at each other [with my male friend] all the time in front of everybody. It’s fun, we’re friends, plus the base of any joke is a joke about somebody,” articulated another man. Bantering is ingrained in men’s socialization, it brings them together. At times, though, it resembles a friendly competition: One has to be able to laugh at a joke targeted at him and outwit his peer. Failure to do so may create an obstacle in communication. One informant noticed, “This one guy may joke about your family or war veterans, he doesn’t seem to have any fathomable restrictions, which can be offensive. I needed time to put up with such jokes and realize he has no evil intentions in his head.” Here, the informant worked out a subtle strategy of “putting up” with another person’s joke in order to maintain normal communication, otherwise his seriousness may have been considered failure of his masculine credentials.

Banter is not the only content of men’s jokes. Another distinctive characteristic of men’s jokes in male-only companies is the discussion of topics they do not discuss openly in class, for example, the graphic details of Friday and Saturday nights, or the looks of one another, or the habits of one another (in the words of one informant: “We make fun of this guy who is always like, ‘Hey, can I bum a cigarette?’ or can comment something like, ‘Hey, it’s the fifth time you quit smoking, right?’”). Men make those jokes during breaks when they go out to smoke in a small circle of other men or in a locker room before or after physical training classes. This male locus is also the place

to discuss women, including those in the department. They can discuss the way they look or behave. Such conversations allow men to say things that may seem inappropriate in other contexts. Lyman writes, “Jokes can create group solidarity only if they allow dangerous things to be said; allow a physical catharsis of tension through laughter; or create a solidarity of an ‘in group’ through shared aggression against an ‘out group’” (Lyman 1987, 159). The mechanism of solidarity and men’s group intimacy, in the scholar’s view, is “the erotic of rule breaking” (Lyman 1987, 160), that is, the mere fact that there is a space where they can cross the boundaries of the standard conversation.

There is a flip side of joking in male-only companies, however. In addition to the male solidarity narrative, there is an articulation of distinction between men and women. Some informants mentioned in an essentialist manner that male and female types of humor are different. One respondent noted, “Women’s jokes are sometimes hard to get, like in *Comedy Woman*,<sup>7</sup> where I don’t understand what they laugh about at all.” Another respondent said:

I think men are better at jokes. Take *KVN*,<sup>8</sup> for instance: 90% [of the participants] there are men, 90% of whose jokes are hilarious. With *Comedy Woman*, I wouldn’t say it’s not funny, it’s just not for me, girls will probably better understand that type of humor.

These answers are of crucial importance in the way that men back up their convictions about humor by referring, so to speak, to an external authority—popular TV programs in which men are presumably better at jokes. Which is, in fact, not a problem *per se*, but more of an instance of reproducing the things they see on TV, where the presence of women in the joking entertainment is significantly less and whose jokes, to their mind, is not as laughable. Marking such a distinction, men conceptualize their masculinity in opposition to femininity, which is an aspect of men’s conceptualization of their masculinity (Connell 1995, 11).

Thus, humor in male-only companies are a two-sided coin, in which one side is indicative of men’s solidarity and intimacy building whereas the other side demonstrates men’s difference from

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<sup>7</sup> *Comedy Woman* is a popular humorous program on Russian TNT channel, where all jokes and skits are done by women. It is a female alternative to a popular humorous show of the same kind called *Comedy Club* created and performed exclusively by men.

<sup>8</sup> *KVN* is a popular humorous program on Russian Channel One, where different teams (comprised of men and women) compete with other teams by cracking jokes and performing funny skits.



women. On the one hand, in a single-sex setting men expand the range of topics to laugh at, where bantering and making jokes about women is safe. On the other hand, in reflecting on the basics of humor, men provide evidence that suggest that their humor is different from women's humor. Humor is seen here as exclusion (Watts 2007, 253). By sharing these common modes of behavior, men reaffirm their masculine status among each other.

#### 4.1.3 Homosocial jokes

As Connell wrote in her *Masculinities*, “[o]ne of the effects of hegemony is to shape perceptions of gayness” (Connell 1995, 156). Even being perceived as gay is not desirable, as it puts a man into the lowest position among masculinities. In dominant forms of masculinities, gays and effeminate men are considered to disprove masculine credentials, among which heterosexuality is a pivotal element (Buchbinder 1994; Connell 1995; Williams 1995; Swain 2005). Othering and deriding this threatening form of masculinities is a device to not only reaffirm one's own masculinity and heterosexuality but the status within a group: “With homophobic humour, hegemonic heterosexuality performs its self-ascribed superiority over the other...” (McCann *et al.* 2010, 507).

In the Translation Studies department, men admitted to either being joked at as gay or joking themselves that other men are gay. It was part of a regular socialization and, according to them, not at all a mockery, let alone name-calling. However, phrases about somebody being gay were not open statements (such as “You are a homo!”) but rather hints pronounced with a different intonation (which served as a cue to others that it was a joke, in Lyman's words (1987, 153)). One first-year respondent said:

Yeah, gay jokes happen. But these are not serious, no one deems them so. I can say to a buddy in the group, “Mmm [deleted name], you have such a sweet butt that I wanna bite it” [*different intonation*]. This is all frivolous. I've never been called gay but even if I were, I have a ready-made answer for it: “I am rear-steer” [uses different intonation]. Two friends in the group may call each other names with diminutive suffixes to show affection, girls may comment something like, “Ah, you two are together, right?”—but that's a joke. These guys even have girlfriends, which in that context can actually be made fun of: “Nay, they have girlfriends only as a cover.” We can laugh at it and forget about it the next minute. It's part of goofing around.

In this quintessential response—in fact a paragon of responses to this topic—a vivid illustration is provided of how homosocial jokes are ingrained into day-to-day communication, with a clear notice that it is a better strategy to be able to accept such jokes, should they be addressed at you. Moreover, according to this reply, in such jokes sexuality is not questioned, no bullying or humiliation are intended, it is simply part of doing and saying silly things for the sake of them.

While some scholars claim that men may feel “high levels of anxiety about being called gay or effeminate” (Barnes 2012, 241)—because such an association is detrimental to their masculinity—none of this was observed in the responses of the men in the Translation Studies department. McCann *et al.* write: “Not all aspects of the social construction of the individual are controlled by homophobia, and not all jokes about sexuality or gender are malicious” (McCann *et al.* 2010, 519).

The reasons for such jokes can be to test somebody’s sense of humor. One respondent said, “There was a sporadic gay joke targeted at me once, something like ‘Oh look how edgy you’ve dressed today’ but in a funny way.” Another respondent admitted that he made similar jokes of other men:

In the first semester, I could joke at [deleted name] because he had an earring. I’d be like ‘Hey [deleted name], you wanna spank me?’ I just teased him for fun, he really didn’t like it at first, but then saw that I was just making fun. I mean, you never seek to offend anyone. I can say to another guy something like ‘Oh [deleted name], you look so beautiful today,’ which I don’t mean, you know.

Here, while his intention was good as a joker, initially the man with an earring did not find it funny, but later became fine with it. This is also part of reaffirming one’s masculine status: “If a boy failed to be able to laugh at himself—even when the context was abuse or violence—he failed the test and was not admitted to the social realm of manhood” (McCann *et al.* 2010, 511). By accepting the joke, the targeted man reclaimed his masculinity and situated himself in the masculine hierarchy.

Homophobia may be at the core of ‘gay jokes’ within the Translation Studies department—however hard the men denied it—but to claim that I needed to pull this view out of their actual answers. It was manifested in three ways: (1) the men shared their ideas about how they could identify gay men if there were some in their department, (2) some admitted discussing the sexual

orientation of one of the peers outside of the joking context, (3) some men refused to elaborate on the topic when asked.

When asked why they said that “gay jokes” are only jokes and not insults, some men said that it was because there was not enough evidence to doubt somebody’s sexuality. One informant said, “You can identify a gay guy by his mannerisms, looks, you know. I’m not a homophobe, I don’t care, of importance is that nobody imposes anything on me.” Another said, “To call somebody gay, you have to see it in his behavior and the way he looks. I can’t say there is someone here who stands out of the crowd by the stereotypical gay characteristics.” Two things in those responses are evident. One is that, in the view of the men, gays are identified by certain traits. The other is that their attitude towards gays is okay, but they do not want to be imposed by anything. In saying so, the men make sure they distance themselves from being associated with gay men, because it may damage their masculinity.

One informant said that once he himself had been questioning the sexuality of one man before that man started to have a girlfriend. Still, the majority of informants were reluctant to talk more about the topic. Perhaps the mere conversation about that is uncomfortable and looks undermining their masculinity, because such a conversation is not intended to make fun of or deride homosexuality but seeks to look at the matter with more scrutiny, to which not everyone was ready.

To sum it up, I need to highlight that homosocial jokes are integral for men’s socialization. No one knows why, it just happened to be so (as one informant put it, “It was when I was in high school, it is now here, I don’t know where these jokes come from”). Such humor by no means intends to mock other men, it is part of overall fun. Still, such jokes in actuality help demonstrate that other men in the department are heterosexual. McCann *et al.* write: “In terms of creating behavioural norms for men, homophobic humour marks out the boundary between homosocial and homosexual interaction. Thus, homosexuality becomes fodder for derision” (McCann *et al.* 2010, 506). While no man tries to humiliate another man by those jokes, the dynamics here is such that it helps disassociate men from a non-desirable non-hegemonic form of masculinity, which is

homosexuality. I did not hear many homophobic remarks in the responses of the men, but in the way some men structured their answers—or refused to talk about the topic—I find evidence of homophobia as one of the underlying motives for such jokes.

## ***4.2 Sport and Body***

Sport and bodily performances have long been emblematic of masculinity. In *Masculinities*, Connell discusses how the idea that masculinity is unchangeable permeates culture and argues that “[t]rue masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body” (Connell 1995, 45). Body is thought to produce gender identity (Light and Kirk 2000, 163), thus, a biological man can consider himself man (hence, masculine) if he has developed body, physical prowess, strength, and other standard characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity (Tischler and McCaughtry 2011, 38).

In this section, I want to focus on the role of a male body and its role for the men in the Translation Studies department by analyzing their attitudes towards sports, reflections about interactions in physical training (PT) classes, and their perceptions of their own bodies. I argue that men in this department maintain and reproduce elements of hegemonic masculinity, which is manifested in the form of hidden competitiveness during PT classes and in men’s preoccupation with their bodies.

### ***4.2.1 The crucible of physical training classes***

PT classes are compulsory in the curricula of Belarusian universities, with BSU being no exception. In fact, at the Translation Studies department it was a recurring class for first-, second-, and third-year students, but in the academic year 2013–2014 fourth-year students, too, had to attend those classes for the first time. This testifies to the fact that sport is institutionalized not only for secondary but also for tertiary education. As Connell noted, “The institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination

of women” (Connell 1995, 54). Institutionalization of such a course demonstrates that the country is interested not only in healthy and disciplined bodies but in reproducing the ideology of a sound mind in a sound body.

However, in the Translation Studies department, there are some peculiarities that contradict part of Connell’s statement—that is, exclusion or domination of women. In these classes, one game is chosen for one semester, either volleyball or table tennis. Unlike in secondary schools or most of the other universities in Belarus, there are no physical fitness tests required from students in this department. Usually students come to a class, have a 10–15-minute warm-up (running, jumping, stretching, and the like), and play one of the two games. Also, class attendance is not mandatory there provided a student presents a membership card to any sports facility that he or she goes to exercise individually. Thus, in this department PT classes are very loose and less demanding as compared to other institutions of higher learning in the country, and it gives students more freedom. On the surface, such a degree of freedom makes it seem that competition among men during those classes is non-existent. In fact, it only makes competition among men more intricate (this is especially obvious in men’s narratives about their experiences in PT classes), which ties into the hegemonic masculinity concept.

All first- and second-year informants agreed that PT classes are important, which they use synonymously with the word “sport” (“Everyone must attend PT classes and treat them seriously—it is your physical fitness, you just have to,” said one student). In contrast, upperclassmen clearly separate the two notions. The two students from the third and fifth year of studies were much more critical of those classes, precisely because it is obligatory and, thus, undermines the idea of sport as a free choice and because, in the words of the near-graduate, “[i]t is useless and I don’t see the point of it. In our transcripts, it is the second largest class according to the hours we spent on it in all five years. However, I like sport.” Perhaps, such a rigid distinction can be accounted for by the structure of the course, which is game oriented, barely diverse, and does not allow men to develop their bodies or exercise their strength. Therefore, it is a waste of

time for them, on the one hand, and it is inefficient in practicing or performing masculinity, on the other. As Swain argues, “sporty types of masculinity will be easier to achieve and perform in a school that sanctions competitive sport than in a school that bans, say, football” (Swain 2005, 215), but since there are only two sanctioned types of sports every year, as time goes, performing bodies in PT classes loses its sense in negotiating men’s masculinity.

Then what makes freshmen and sophomores like PT classes and what hidden meanings may it bear for them? Obviously, love for sport is important but upperclassmen’s love for sport is actually incompatible with PT classes. My assumption was that the competitive spirit (an aspect of hegemonic masculinity) is what drives their interest—that is, the aspiration to not only compete but be better than others. In other words, freshmen and sophomores are motivated to go to those classes and interact with others in games in order to pursue a dominating position among other men. First, because there are more people to compete with, second, because they are still new to the university environment and their masculinity has not yet been reaffirmed to either men or women. The better one performs during PT classes, the higher the position they get.

The assumption was not left without tangible evidence. In responding to the question about whether he noticed that somebody tries to outperform in PT classes, one informant commented:

Of course, there is some sort of showing off. Everyone wants to show he is better at something, that he is a man (*muzhik*). But each guy is better than others at something: Someone at football, another at [table] tennis, another at pull-ups, or what have you. Everyone wants to hide his weakness and demonstrate his strength.

Generalizing as it may sound, this response unmasks the covert dynamic that happens during classes: Not only is it visible for him that some people try to show better results than others but he describes a mechanism of how it is possible to do so—by concealing their vulnerabilities and repeating their successes. Indeed, some informants claimed to be better than their peers at tennis, volleyball, football. I believe this is not a simple “friendly cooperation” (as one informant put it) or a total lack thereof (as six informants asserted), but a desire, albeit non-reflexive and unintentional, to ascend in the masculine hierarchy. As Buchbinder says, such rivalry serves “to produce a male-centered structure which is neither monolithic nor uniformly cooperative”

(Buchbinder 1998, 45). Failure to play the game of affirming masculinity may result in a suspended, if not marginalized, status of a man's masculinity.

A common justification for competitiveness among the men was the predetermined nature of man. Swain contends that “[s]port provides a way of measuring boys’ masculine accomplishment not only against each other, but also against a wider world of men” (Swain 2005, 224). In other words, the competition is a way to both gain status and conform to the traditional perceptions of what it means to be a man. One informant said:

The desire to win is typical for men, after all, they are breadwinners [*dobytychiki*]—I have this in my blood. So any guy seeks to win when he plays and wants to show that he is the boss here, he is the daddy. I’d say, it’s part of me—this yearning to score more than others and win.

Here, the informant tries to explain why he is competitive by resorting to the essentialist discourse of alleged natural characteristics of men. The “natural” competition, however, is not supposed to be vigorous and aggressive; in fact, the men’s answers show that it is there as part of normal interaction when playing games.

Thus, underclassmen in the Translation Studies department reaffirm their masculinities in PT classes through interaction with others during games not consciously or aggressively but in a less obvious manner, so much so that some men do not recognize it as competition. However, the environment there becomes just right to compete with one another by outperforming other peers, as for them PT classes equal sport. In doing so, they reproduce a popular belief that competitiveness is both natural and masculine. In order to be unambiguously men, as Buchbinder claims, “men are required simultaneously to identify with other males *and* to compete against them” (Buchbinder 1998, 65). This helps them gain their higher status in the hierarchy of masculinities (hegemonic masculinity). As time unfolds, men stop seeing their PT classes useful or interesting and oppose it to sport, perhaps because, as they see it, its invariability does not give them an opportunity to compete and negotiate their masculinities, therefore, they prefer individual sport activities outside the university.

#### 4.2.2 *Body image matters*

Men's dissatisfaction with their body image is a well-known phenomenon: Men want either a more muscular body or, vice versa, a thinner one (Murray and Touyz 2012). The Translation Studies department is not unique in that sense. However, men's preoccupation and general dissatisfaction with their bodies, as gathered from their responses, signifies that there is an on-going negotiation of men's masculinities even in a place where it would be logical to assume that it would matter the least. Swain contends that men "are aware of their body's significance, both as their personal (but unfinished) resource and as a social symbol, which communicates signs and messages about their self-identity" (Swain 2005, 224). Hence, bodies are actually their masculinity. I argue that in that particular department the urge to place their bodies in opposition to femininity and change them in the future results in men's unconsciously reproducing hegemonic masculinity. Thus, I side with Swain who suggests:

For much of the time, boys define their masculinity through action, and, as I have already stated, the most esteemed and prevalent resources that boys draw on to establish status are physicality and athleticism, which are inextricably linked to the body in the form of strength, toughness, power, skill, fitness, and speed. (Swain 2005, 224)

Out of eleven men who I asked to reflect on their bodies, nine said that they were dissatisfied with their bodies and were changing or would soon start changing them. The first notable thing is the desire to place their bodies in opposition to femininity by saying that the body lacks an appropriate muscle mass. Coles writes, "Muscles have come to be equated with hegemonic masculine ideals of strength and power" (Coles 2009, 38). One informant said, "I hate that I'm thin. Not skinny, though, but I wanna have more mass than now. It doesn't matter if I have an athletic body, I just wanna be more broad." Another informant said, "I have complexes about my body, actually, and I'd love to change it. I guess, to build up more muscles." Here, the issue is that a body does not have enough mass, and the words "skinny" and "complexes" show that it is problematic for them as men, because thinness can be a sign of femininity (Murray and Touyz 2012, 230). When I asked one informant directly whether he considers skinny men to be



unmasculine, he replied with his eyes downcast, “Yes, I think so, but of course it’s not the only criteria.”

Two respondents actually commented that my question about the body was “strange.” One of them said, “Hm, it is such a strange question, not that I consider myself.. well, everyone thinks he is handsome and irresistible, but.. you baffled me with this question. I’m thin, not skeletal, with moderate physique.” Such a pause between the question and actual response gave the informant time to find strength and actually describe his body as he sees it. At the same time, the word “thin” is probably not the one he wanted to articulate, since it was followed by the explanation that it is actually not “skeletal,” hence, not feminine.

In answering the question of why it was important for them to change their body and what ideal they had in mind, the informants mentioned three main reasons: (1) to stay healthy and in good shape, (2) to protect themselves or their loved ones, (3) to feel satisfaction. One informant also commented:

I want it [to build up the body] just for myself, say, you walk in the street and it’s hot and you wanna take off your shirt—so you do this and you’re not ashamed. Not that I feel shame now, but it’s just, I guess, a common thing [for men to have athletic bodies].

I find important here mentioning of a “common thing” for men to be well-built if they are men, which is a direct reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Particularly, one does not have to have a real role model whose body to emulate, but there is a general ideal body image for each of the informants which they know they have to aspire to achieve. If one is not preoccupied with one’s body, one’s masculinity may be threatened (Murray and Touyz 2012, 231).

Interesting enough is that no one mentioned that better bodies would make them more popular with the opposite sex. When asked if they thought their enhanced bodies would make them more attractive to people, the informants usually denied that (“I don’t know about other people, maybe”; “I don’t think it will make me more successful”; “Probably it wouldn’t make me more popular, [since] it’s not important [for girls] nowadays anyway”). Here, the men speak of their imagined enhanced bodies as not having an erotic function. In my opinion, the responses show

that by claiming the erotic function of the body men exhibit signs of weakness with regard to the women in that department, which can become a reason for derision. While heteronormativity is a very important element of hegemonic masculinity (Cohen 2013, 179), confessing that the body is also important as a way to be popular with the opposite sex can be a sign of immoderation or narcissism in that female-dominated setting. Not admitting the erotic function of the body is also part of the men's strategy to negotiate their masculinities in that department.

In sum, men reaffirm their masculinities in the Translation Studies department by the preoccupation of their bodies, with which most of them are dissatisfied. They have an ideal vision of their bodies in their heads, and they want to improve them (first and foremost, by muscle mass) and firmly oppose them to the notion of femininity. Their own reasons for this are threefold: For health, protection, and self-satisfaction. In doing so, men reproduce hegemonic masculinity in their daily practices. Also, they denied the erotic function of the body, which in that context is part of their masculinity negotiation. As far as PT classes are concerned, the competition between the boys become covert, that is, men want to exhibit during the classes those skills that are best developed in them and actually hide the fact that they do it intentionally—which may mean they pursue to position themselves in the masculine hierarchy.

#### ***4.3 Gender, academic progress, and part-time employment***

While students, men's attitudes to the learning process are generally different from women's (Smith 2004; Keddie 2006; Burke 2007). The common scholars' observation is that "boys generally underperform relative to girls" (Legewie and DiPrete 2012). Smith (2004) and Keddie (2006) attribute this to the fact that "macho" culture is detrimental to constructing masculinities in schools, and Burke (2007) adds male students' narratives of men's natural laziness, in which working hard is viewed as a feminine trait. These deep-rooted ideas are the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, and while this may be true for men in the Translation Studies department, this does not contradict with the findings I obtained when conducting interviews (which were not

aimed at comparing men's and women's academic achievements at all). In fact, I think these findings complement the existing scholarship in a way that they unveil how in a female-dominated context men's gender helps them enjoy some privileges.

In this section, drawing on the informants' responses and three male alumni's responses about their academic progress, I endeavor to reason why men in the Translation Department view grades as both important and unimportant, how their gender puts them in a favorable position as far as teachers' grading is concerned, and how men make use of it. My observation is that men's attitude towards grades is pragmatic, men are given slightly better grades than they actually deserve, and men tend to combine work and studies. By accepting such state of affairs, men (and, in fact, teachers) reproduce hegemonic masculinity and the established patriarchal gender order.

#### *4.3.1 When grades are both important and unimportant for men*

Although I never asked each of my respondents concretely whether academic grades are of importance to them, the answers they provided on different matters give grounds to infer that men in the Translation Studies department consider grades neither the indicator of knowledge nor the reflection of their hard work. For them, grades bear a pragmatic function: The better the grades, the bigger the discount on the tuition fee for the following year of studies. Because tuition fees rise every year, the possibility to get a discount is of primary importance. Women's attitude towards grades, I should point, are multifunctional: The way to get a discount on the tuition fee, the reflection of their diligence and commitment to studies, the gauge of their skills in the field of translation. As Smith argues, for women such an attitude to studies becomes the embodiment of their femininity:

Thus it seems that, within the spatial context of Brunel University, female students produce and reproduce a culture of femininity premised on the need to work hard, perform the role of 'good student' and support each other in this endeavour. This particular materialization of femininity is one that is clearly rewarded by educational success. (Smith 2004, 173–174)

As far as men are concerned, she continues, they are more focused on non-academic aspects of their university life, which is usually sports and social life (Smith 2004, 175). In such a way, the conventional ideas about masculinity and femininity are reproduced in daily practices.

Also, when a man has higher grades, this is a reason for some of the informants to give a generalized comment about him. One of them, when answering the question about humor (discussed in the first section of this chapter), said: “Our group can be called ‘a joke.’ I mean, probably in the [deleted] group where there are nerds nobody jokes, but we do in our group abundantly.” In this answer, the respondent in fact reprimands a man studying there, and not the whole group, as he suggests that good academic standing may hinder that man’s social relations with other men in the department (inability to joke, therefore, to be part of the men’s “club”). The reason I think so is because all men who were interviewed admitted that they at times asked women to copy home assignments, notes, etc., which shows that women are viewed by the men as more dedicated to studies than them. It may be true that men see good grades as positive only when they are pragmatic, whereas if for somebody they are important in themselves, this falls out of the whole picture of hegemonic masculinity and can be a reason for disapproval.

#### *4.3.2 When students’ gender affects their grades*

In their study about gender bias in science education, Moss-Racusin and her colleagues from Yale University provided figures and personal accounts that women are treated with more bias than men by the faculty members (both men and women) and are thought to be less competent—an unusual perception that is “generated from widespread cultural stereotypes rather than a conscious intention to harm women” (Moss-Racusin *et al.* 2012, 16477). This, as they write, affects the decision that female students make to either pursue their careers in science or quit, and the authors suggest ways to tackle this issue. In the Translation Studies department, this bias also exists; however, to a lesser degree. Female students in that department are not viewed as less competent, nor do they get lower grades, but men seem to get somewhat better grades than they deserve. As

men in this department grow, they become more aware of that (especially evidenced in the responses of the former male alumni), and can use it for their advantage.

The majority of first- and second-year male students claimed that their grades in their department are objective. One informant said, “I think it’s all objective here, there is no bias towards anyone in terms of grading.” Another said, “I believe teachers grade fairly here, sometimes I may disagree with what they give me and criticize them but if I look at myself from afar then yeah.. perhaps, it all depended on me, I could have worked harder.” Other eight informants’ answers were analogous to these two views. At the same time, within the answers there were clues that it is not that simple. One informant said, “My grades are adequate, but some teachers were merciful to me and gave better grades.” Another said, “Some teachers—it depends on a person—like guys here more than girls, they obviously give [us] slightly higher grades.” Another said, “For instance, my grade in [English] phonetics was like an advance payment, probably the teacher hopes that I will eventually learn anything. But it motivates me to work harder and live up to that grade.” In all those responses, underclassmen do not think that such occasions are systemic and not individual-based; hence, they have a perception that grades are “advanced payment” or may be a result of good relationships with a teacher.

Male upperclassmen and alumni give a more bird’s eye view on the systemic “advanced payment” for men. The fifth-year student said, “Yep, there is such a thing here—your grades are higher than you should have, because you’re a guy. It’s a gender thing, and it’s obvious.” Since there was only one fifth-year student, I reached out to some male alumni and asked if that was true for them. One said, “Female teachers were less demanding of the male students and, as was my observation, overrated their grades.” Two more alumni gave similar answers, and, being an alumnus of this department, I claim the same.

I want to highlight that the men’s grades are not compared to the grades of other students in the department and I do not want to say that men easily get A or A minus. For an average grade, men do not work as hard as their female counterparts, but they become aware of that only as time

unfolds. After starting to understand it, they get more relaxed or, in the words of an alumnus, “less motivated, because it didn’t inspire [to work hard].” Again, as Moss-Racusin *et al.* write, “we are not suggesting that these biases are intentional” (Moss-Racusin *et al.* 2012, 16474), it is the reproduction of the culture in which men are seen as those who simply can do good things with less effort. Thus, men feel they can start doing other things outside their studies—volunteering and part-time employment.

#### 4.3.3 *When men combine studies and work*

Starting from the second year of studies, men in the Translation Studies department either start working part-time or volunteering, or consider seriously the option of combining work with studies. The major motivation for men to do so is financial independence. Connell lists dependence as an element of femininity within patriarchy (Connell 1995, 83). He also suggests that there is an overall belief that men are breadwinners (Connell 1995, 90); thus, the strife for independence that men shared in their answers is a reproduction of the existing cultural norms and expectations from a man. One first-year student said:

I plan to combine work and studies next year, because, first, I pay the tuition fee, second, I rent an apartment, third, I have to live on something. Also, it gets on my nerves that I’m burdening my parents and I depend on them completely. I want at least to provide for my expenses [here in Minsk] such as food or clothes, be free from the pocket money they give me. Surely, I can’t pay tuition or the rent, but I want to be able to buy everyday things myself. If I could have worked when high school, I would have, but I was 17 and lived in a small town, and the only option was to pull strings and be a loader or the like—for the summertime.

The internal tension voiced by the student lies in the fact that he is limited in his financial resources. Every time he wants to purchase something, he has to ask money from his parents, which not only is a heavy “burden” for parents but more so for himself. Should he have a job, he would at least be able to be free from explaining to his parents what he needs money for, and this may grant him some independency at least in everyday life and perhaps help him feel more mature and more like a “man.”

Some men say that they “will have to work starting from the third year [of studies],” preferably a job that has to do with their major (intellectual versus manual work). Such answers imply that it is not so much their own desire to work but an expectation that they will choose to work in a more or less professional environment. Those who already work or volunteer speak about their choice as an asset into their future in terms of real-life experience and networking. One informant said:

I need a good CV, you know; thus, I volunteer or work at any opportunity I have. I’ve been involved in 30 projects already [as a translator]—from J. Lo’s concert [in Minsk in 2012] to the World Hockey Championships [in Minsk in 2014]. It is already something and it may give me a chance to find a very good job afterwards. When I volunteer, I get real practice of colloquial English which I can’t get through films or during our regular classes at university. These activities do affect my studies negatively, no doubt about it, but I have to sacrifice. Of course, if the sacrifice were too enormous, I wouldn’t do it. But I want to do it and I need it, I don’t wanna work at a factory.

Here, the respondent puts his working experience in opposition to the academic experience, which to him is less real or practical and unlikely to secure a good job. Also, the opposition of intellectual versus manual job is very tangible in this answer, and his engagements in the projects which require headwork allow him to claim that his future job would be of a higher status than just a factory job. The pursuit of status, I want to highlight, is neither good nor bad, but it stems from the patriarchal system we live in and the expectations that gender order has from a man. The higher the status of a job, the higher the position in the hierarchy of masculinities. The combination of work and studies is possible because the Translation Studies department allows to do so, and also because men both feel the need of independence and know there are expectations imposed on them by the outside world. In addition, this is yet another chance for the men in that department where female presence is dominant to reaffirm their masculinities.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis, I sought to explore how men in the Translation Studies department at Belarusian State University reaffirm their masculinities in a traditionally female-dominated environment. For the analysis, I used the Connellian concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) which, as it was discussed in Chapter 1, assumes a hierarchy of (oftentimes competing) masculinities in which over time one form of masculinity becomes dominant. The research led to the conclusion that men construct their masculinities by unreflectively reproducing hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, the existing gender order of the patriarchal Belarusian society is also reproduced. In the female-dominated setting, men—despite being in the minority—celebrate the egalitarian spirit of the setting in their reflections; however, the process of reaffirmation of masculinities seems to be a latent dynamic. Swain's claims (Swain 2005) that in education hegemonic masculinity does not take an aggressive form were corroborated in the research, but his other claims about peer group pressure, overt homophobia, negative attitudes to friendships between men and women were not verified. As the analysis revealed, in spite of the men's almost unanimous perception that gender plays little, if not zero, role in their interaction with female students in the department, their practices and behavior depending on the context indicate otherwise: Men are concerned with their masculinities, and the mechanism of reaffirmation of their masculine credentials happens in somewhat clandestine ways.

Then, how do men reaffirm their masculinities in the Translation Studies department? To begin with, reaffirmation of masculinity for men starts before they get enrolled in the studies. The profession is viewed by them as very profitable; hence, the whole education experience becomes a path to get a profession, that is, exact skills that will be applied in the job market. Interestingly, the future profession of an interpreter/translator is described by the men as a very public one and the personality of an interpreter is described by the men not so much in terms of skills but in terms of personality. For them, an interpreter is almost the embodiment of a Victorian gentleman (in which



composure and witty mind come to the forefront), and that perception is a strong disassociation from a private, traditionally feminine, sphere (Warner 2005).

Another peculiar thing in men's masculinity reaffirmation process is the so-called "comfort zone effect" (Simpson 2004), when the men claim to enjoy the company of their female counterparts, yet they themselves create their own "comfort zones" in classrooms by sitting together with other men and responding to possible delicate issues as a united voice. Men's solidarity is very much in the picture when it comes to situations of conflict, where men may defend their positions as a collective. Thus, on the one hand, men say they fit well in that environment, on the other hand, they tend to secure a space for themselves in order to avoid the threat to their masculinity on an individual basis. As time unfolds, men learn to ignore heated discussions in order to avoid questioning their masculine status and symbolic power altogether.

Reaffirming masculinity for men in the Translation Studies department, as was mentioned, is very subtle and can be traced on the level of humor, attitudes to body and sport, and academic progress. As far as humor is concerned, it is a factor of socialization for men and part of their bonding. In male-only companies, men banter at each other and allow themselves to joke on the topics they cannot otherwise joke in class when women or faculty staff are present. Humor in male-only companies demarcates the line of masculinity and femininity (as evidenced by the fact that some men admitted women's humor to be less funny than men's). Humor is a kind of exclusion (Watts 2007) for creating a man's space in the environment. Also, a feature of hegemonic masculinity is that it is opposed to femininity, thus, such a seclusion helps men feel unity in their masculinity. Homosocial jokes are also important for men as part of disassociation from homosexuality. Although I did not ask men directly about homosexuality, there were traces in some men's responses that allow me to conclude that homophobia may also lie at the base of homosocial jokes. So, by deriding homosexuality and laughing at such jokes, men reaffirm that they are not marginalized in the masculine hierarchy.

Moreover, hidden competitiveness during PT classes and men's preoccupation with their bodies reproduce hegemonic masculinity and help men reaffirm their masculine status as well. All underclassmen claim that PT classes are crucial for the learning process (they refer to them as a synonym to sport). The competitiveness in classes depends on the activity that a certain man is better at than other men. The mechanism that men reproduce is concealing their vulnerabilities and exercising their strengths. By winning in what they select to compete, they gain status among each other, and it is crucial for their perception of themselves as men. The dissatisfaction with their bodies may be the most hidden mechanism of reaffirming masculinity, as most men independently of each other contended they wanted stronger and more muscled bodies—for the reasons of fitness, protection, and self-satisfaction. However, they denied the aesthetic/erotic function of their bodies vis-à-vis the opposite gender, which may indicate a weakness: The desire to be liked by another person may mean that their preoccupation with bodies is not their agency but society standards or expectations. Such “weakness” may undermine their masculinity, so they choose other reasons for talking about improving the body to negotiate their masculinities.

Finally, academic progress is not the primary concern for men in itself; instead, it is important as a way of getting reduced tuition fees. This is different from women in the department, for whom grades are not only that but also the indicator of their knowledge and diligence. For men, having good grades just for the sake of having them may not be in harmony with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity but points to geekiness, which may mean social isolation and consequently becoming “the other.” Also, with time men become aware that their gender and their minority status help them enjoy some privileges in terms of grading: For the same grade they do not have to work as hard as before. This results in having a bit more free time, which—combined with the deep-rooted idea that men have to be financially independent—encourages men to both study and work part-time. In fact, the expectation of independence is more prevalent in this case, and men use the opportunity to work and study starting from second or third year of their studies.

This research contributes to the existing scholarship on men's experiences in female-dominated environments. The gap that it fills lies in the fact that masculinity reaffirmation and its negotiation with female peers in universities (where presumably male and female students are standing on equal positions) has not been much developed. My findings resulted in understanding one thing that I have not yet seen articulated by other scholars, that is, reaffirmation of masculinities in educational settings where female presence is dominant takes on subtle forms, with no demonstration of aggression, discrimination, or open exclusion. Yet men in the Translation Studies department reproduce hegemonic masculinity unreflectively, perhaps to make sure there will be no emasculation, and in doing so, the existing structure of gender hierarchies in Belarus are also reproduced.

## Appendix

### Questionnaire

1. What did your parents think when you decided to study for a translator?
2. How did you feel when you came into the environment where there were mostly girls?
3. How did girls meet you in your group? Did you have to adapt?
4. How different, do you think, it would be if there were more guys in your studies?
5. What is the attitude between girls and guys in your group?
6. When you are not ready with homework, do girls give you their answers?
7. Have—and how—your friends, family, or former schoolmates joked about the fact that you have so many girls in your group?
8. Do you think you are lucky to study in such an environment? Have you ever tried to flirt with a girl in this department or date one?
9. What do you think about PT classes?
10. Have you noticed in PT classes other men or you were showing off (scoring more, running faster, pulling up more, etc.)?
11. Is sport important in your life and why?
12. What do you think of your body? Why do you want to change it, if you are not satisfied with it? Imagine you enhanced your body, what would it change?
13. How did you choose the monitor of the class (class representative)? Did you want to become one?
14. In your opinion, are male teachers and female teachers different—in terms of their demands, level of knowledge, grading, approach to teaching, joking in class? Are they subjective or biased when grading?
15. Do you think you were unfairly graded in any way (upgraded or downgraded)?
16. Do you or somebody else practice straying from the topic in classes and talk with teachers on unrelated topics?
17. How do you joke in classes? What is the content of your jokes? Who is the target of your jokes?
18. How do you react to others' jokes? Have you ever been a target of somebody's jokes in your group?
19. Do you celebrate March 08 and February 23? If so, how?
20. How do you communicate with your groupmates outside classes?
21. Why do you think guys are more often expelled from this program than girls?
22. What disagreements or conflicts, if at all, did you have in your groups?
23. Were there any stereotypes about girls that confirmed for you or, vice versa, were disproved?
24. Do you like more lecture- or seminar-based classes? Why?
25. To your mind, what qualities does a translator have?
26. Do you think that men are better fit for oral translations and women for written translations?
27. Do you regret the choice of the place for your studies?
28. Is there anything that angers or irritates you in your studies in terms of interpersonal relationships?
29. Have you ever heard anyone call you or other men gay? If you were called gay, how would you react?

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