GENDER AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN THREE INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS IN BRAZIL: THE CASE OF RESPONSES TO ASSESSMENT TURNS

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Abstract

The current study looks at the construction of professional identity and its relations with gender, by analyzing the discursive practices of a unique set of contrasting groups, i.e. three parallel institutions created to address violence against women in Brazil: An all female police station and two crisis intervention centers – one run by feminists professionals and the other run by lay women from a working class community. In particular, the study investigates how the professionals in each setting respond to self and other assessments made by the female victims of violence.

The article discusses how broader insights about the discursive practices at the three settings can be drawn from the analysis of the more micro-interactional phenomenon of adjacency pairs in assessment turns. More specifically, it looks at how the professionals in each setting respond to the assessment turns produced by the women they serve. The theoretical approach used in the study represents innovations to previous sociolinguistic analyses of assessment turns in such way that it relates the study of preference organization to that of facework and social solidarity. This paper aims to present some contributions to the studies that look at diversity in the relationship between language, gender and professional identity, and institutional interaction in work settings.

Keywords: Adjacency pairs; Assessment turns; Identity; Gender; Institutional interaction.

1. Introduction[1] [2]

Violence against women is one of the major causes of women's injuries in almost every country around the world. Domestic violence, in particular, has turned the private sphere into an issue of public attention not only in Brazil but also worldwide. In the past six decades, in particular, there has been increasing worldwide concern over the issue and over systems for addressing the pressing needs of female victims of domestic violence (Schuler 1992; Thomas and Beasley 1993; Davis, Hagen and Early 1994; Coomaraswamy 1997; Kurz 1998; Leiman 1998; Ptacek 1998; Ostermann 2000, 2003a,

2003b).

Institutional solutions to address such needs in developed countries are battered women's shelters and counseling programs as well as telephone hotlines and legal clinics for battered women (Hautzinger 1997; Ostermann 2003a, 2003b). Brazil has found an alternative system to encourage the reporting of such violence through the creation of the unprecedented "all female police stations" (Ostermann 2003b). But prior to, and of major influence on the creation of the specialized police in Brazil were feminist organizations that began to form in the 80s to address the problem of violence against women (Hautzinger 1997; Ostermann 2003a, 2003b). Some of these feminist groups and organizations, normally formed by middle-class intellectual feminists, later became crisis intervention centers, where the feminists themselves worked with the female population. Some of these feminist groups later on articulated themselves with the legal system to train lay working-class women, normally community leaders, so that the latter, called "Promotoras Legais Populares" or Popular Legal Promoters, would advocate directly in their communities for women's rights.

The current study looks at the discursive practices of a unique set of contrasting institutions of this kind, i.e. three parallel institutions created to address violence against women in Brazil: An all female police station (*Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher – DDM*) and two crisis intervention centers, one run by feminists professionals, such as lawyers and psychologists (*Centro de Intervenção na Violência contra a Mulher – CIV Mulher*), and another run by lay women from a working class community, the Popular Legal Promoters (PLPs at *Serviço de Informação a Mulher – SIM*). More specifically, it investigates how the professionals in each setting respond to self and other assessments made by the female victims of violence. The paper aims to present some contributions to the studies that look at diversity in the relationship between language, gender and identity in work settings, as well as the working practices of the organizations under analysis.

This study is aligned with a theoretical perspective of gender identity that sees it as intrinsically related to and operating together with a range of other identities, such as social class, race, education, professional associations, among others. In other words, it departs from an understanding of "woman" as a single and undifferentiated identity category toward "a recognition of the diversity of identities that such a cast cover term obscures" (Bucholtz 1999: 6). Following such a perspective, the study finds its groundings on the concept of "communities of practice" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992), that argues that gender identity is negotiated through the individuals' participation in "communities of practice" (CofP). Penny Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet use the concept of CofP to stress "the learning and mutability in gendered linguistic displays across groups," thus assuming *intra*gender differences as natural, rather than deviant (Bergvall 1999: 273). The concept of CofP assumes that gender is "occasioned" within interaction (Stokoe 1998) and thus in order to understand gender one has to look at the "situatedness" of talk.

Following such anti-essentialist feminist perspective on language and gender identity, the current study also attends to the multiple characterizations of "women's language," or to borrow Judith Butler's (1990) words, it "troubles" the essentialist definitions of women's language and identity. It aims at understanding how talk in these all-women organizations shapes and is shaped by the services they provide as well as by other factors such as the professionals' "situatedness" (social class, education, life experience) and by how they position themselves towards the work they do.

As will be discussed below, the specialized institutions whose professional-client interactions are analyzed here represent responses to violence against women that are singular in many ways and culturally situated; the Delegacia da Mulher, in particular, for its uniqueness worldwide and for the essentialist identity belief which underlies its creation, i.e. the assumption that female police officers would be inherently better equipped to deal with female complainants; the feminist intervention center (CIV-Mulher), for arising from the grassroots women's movements after years of military government in Brazil, and for being the main force behind the creation of all female police stations in the country; the unit of work of Popular Legal Promoters (PLPs-SIM), for arising from an interest to have women from the local, lower income communities advocating for women from their own living communities. Thus their forms of relating to the female community seeking their service deserve more thorough attention.

In the area of research on institutional interactions, as well known, despite its continuous and intensive growth and crucial contributions, studies have traditionally centered on North American and Western European contexts, and largely in Anglophonic interactions (e.g. Atkinson 1992; Drew and Heritage 1992; Drew and Sorjonen 1997; K. Tracy and Tracy 1998a; S.J. Tracy and Tracy 1998b). Most of these studies have also focused on institutions of high status, such as medical, legal and educational settings, but very few have actually focused on more working class types of institutions such as police stations. Moreover the institutional settings that have received most attention are those that support hegemonic systems, rather than those that grow out of a concern with hegemonic practices, such as feminist activist organizations, like CIV-Mulher and the Promotoras Legais Populares at SIM. Finally, studies of talk at work have up until now largely neglected the study of interactions in all-female organizations. As a consequence, such foci in institutional talk might have given rise to culturally specific characterizations of institutional discourse, such as that institutional talk is cautious, neutral, and emotionless (Atkinson 1992; Clayman 1992; Drew and Heritage 1992, 1992b; Jefferson and Lee 1992).

In their introduction to a representative collection of works on institutional talk, Paul Drew and John Heritage (1992: 46-7) claim that many of the studies in that volume suggest that professional or organizational representatives in institutional interactions "design their talk so as to maintain cautiousness, or even a position of neutrality with respect to their co-participants" (cf. K. Tracy and Tracy 1998a; S.J. Tracy and Tracy 1998b). Among the features of institutional talk observed in those studies are: cautiousness in expressing disagreement (Greatbatch 1992); withholding responses that might indicate assessment of the other participant (Button 1992); and avoidance of affiliation and disaffiliation in order to sustain neutral stance (Atkinson 1992).

It is *goal-orientation* (or *task-orientation*), however, one of the fundamental features of institutional interaction. As Drew and Heritage (1992: 22) explain,

> participants organize their conduct by reference to general features of the tasks of functions or particular social institutions […]. Whether in a medical consultation, or an emergency call to the police, in a job interview or a cross-examination in court, both lay and professional participants generally show an orientation to institutional tasks or functions in the design of their conduct, most obviously by the kinds of goals they pursue.

Therefore, the ways in which institutional encounters tend to organize themselves are closely related to the task-oriented activities that are conducted

in/through such encounters. One of the most important claims among studies of institutional talk is that the typical task-orientation of institutional encounters is what gives them specialized shapes (Baldock and Prior 1981; Erickson and Shultz 1982; Whalen and Zimmerman 1990; Zimmerman 1992).

Baldock and Prior (19981) assert that whereas in traditional doctors' consultations talk has as much importance as other "important activities" (e.g. physical examination and provision of a prescription), interviews with social workers have talk both as its means and its end, because it is only through the "talking business" that the ultimate goal of "relationship building" and changes about the client's life are accomplished.

The particular interaction of gender and institutional goals is analyzed by Bonnie McElhinny (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995). In a linguistic and ethnographic investigation of gender practices among US police officers, McElhinny (1993a: 191) found that among the younger generation of officers both men and women share communicative styles using an "economy of emotion" when talking to victims of domestic violence. The officers' "economy of emotion" is expressed interactionally in the absence of responses, refusal to respond to specific questions initiated by the victims, interruptions of the complainants' narratives, and abrupt change of topics. Gender practices among female police officers within the Brazilian scenario were first investigated by Sarah Nelson (1997) in a 16-month ethnographic study. The author concludes that female police officers obtain respect, authority and legitimacy within the police hierarchy by complying with "racist, sexist state policy and ideology" (Nelson 1997: 186). Based on observations and interviews, Nelson's (1997: 180) study shows that in many ways, the female police officers

> cultivate the qualities of aloofness and emotional distancing […]. The masculine qualities are often interpreted by the clients as uncaring. In worse cases, the delegadas exhibit behavior that is seen as judgmental, discriminatory, condescending, or even hostile.

Thus, it is within this larger and interdisciplinary scenario of previous work that this study comes in, aiming to discuss how broader insights about the discursive practices, gender and institutional interaction at the three settings can be drawn from the analysis of the more micro-interactional phenomenon of assessment sequences.

2. Linguistic analytical background

2.1. *Face and politeness in reporting domestic violence*

Disclosing and describing to strangers the violence that takes place in the private sphere of one's home constitutes a potential threat to one's public image or *face* (Ostermann 2003a, 2003b). This holds even when those strangers are professionals whose job involves dealing with cases of domestic violence on an everyday basis. It is potentially face-threatening for the victim because it places her in an emotionally vulnerable position. In fact, the creation of unique specialized types of settings to deal with these issues – the female police station, CIV Mulher, and SIM – to some extent constitutes a redressive type of action to potentially face-threatening encounters of this kind. As a

result, one might expect that in dealing with victims, professionals in specialized settings will try to be sensitive to the victim's public image by making use of discursive strategies to minimize the threat these encounters pose to the latter.

Thus, the concept of face and its relationship with politeness and, to an even larger extent, with the interactional phenomenon of preference organization becomes particularly meaningful to the contexts studied here, as further discussed in this paper.

Goffman (1955) presents the concept of *face* as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 213), and its locus is the very flow of our everyday interactions. Protecting one other's face during a conversation is important for all interactants. "The person who can witness another's humiliation and unfeelingly retain a cool countenance himself [sic] is said in our society to be 'heartless', just as he [sic] who can unfeelingly participate in his [sic] own defacement is thought to be 'shameless'" (Goffman 1955: 215). In other words, a person is expected to defend his/her face if threatened and, as by defending his/hers, he/she may be threatening the other's face; it is generally both participants' interest to maintain each other's face. Furthermore, competent speakers are expected to have some knowledge of facework, thus having the capacity (sometimes called "tact") to deal with touchy situations (Goffman 1955: 309).

In order to maintain their own and their partners' face, interactants employ a variety of linguistic strategies; i.e. they perform "facework" (Goffman 1955), which refers to specific types of actions that interactants perform so as "to keep interaction flowing smoothly" and to maintain their positive social persona (K. Tracy and Tracy 1998a: 227). In other words, whereas face has to do with the "socially situated identities people claim or attribute to others", facework refers to the specific "communicative strategies" that are used for the realization and maintenance of those identities (K. Tracy 1990: 210).

Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1978, 1987), in *Politeness Theory*, presented a potential "road map" (Lerner 1996) showing how face maintenance (and threat) is linguistically realized, and how it is related to social factors such as power and social distance (id.). Following Goffman's (1955) claims, Brown and Levinson assume that acts that pose threats to the addressee's face are many times inevitable. The authors argue that some acts actually "intrinsically" threaten face, such as disagreements, interruptions, and complaints (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65-67). These are called "face-threatening acts" (FTAs). According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 68), assuming human beings' rationality and shared interest in maintaining each other's face in interaction, speakers will generally seek to avoid face-threatening acts, or at least try to minimize the threat associated with such acts by employing certain politeness strategies.

Some of the criticisms towards the realization of the politeness strategies, as described in Brown and Levinson's first version of the theory (1978), were towards their limitation to single utterances or single turns (Clayman 2002). Its realization over longer stretches of interaction (i.e. sequential turns of talk) did not receive equivalent attention. Subsequently, other scholars (e.g. Goodwin and Heritage 1990; Bayraktaroglu 1991; Tannen 1994; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Hayashi 1996; Lerner 1996; K. Tracy and Tracy 1998a; Clayman 2002) have advanced the discussion in an attempt to demonstrate how the concepts of face and politeness might be realized in the sequential structure of talk in interaction. An area of interactional studies that seems to be particularly relevant to the concept of face or of social solidarity (the latter being the

preferred term used by conversational analysts; see Clayman 2002; Pillet-Shore 2011) and the theory of politeness, and which still remains somewhat underexplored, is that of *preference organization* (cf. Lerner 1996; Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm 2004; Golato 2005).

2.2. *Preference organization in assessment turns*

As well known, any type of conversation follows interactional rules. One of these rules is that speakers' turns must, in some way, be related to each other. That is, some first utterances require specific second ones as, for instance, questions are expected to be followed by answers, greetings by return greetings, and so on. Such pairs of turns that organize our everyday conversations are commonly referred to as *adjacency pairs* (Schegloff and Sacks 1973).

In interactions in general, people commonly state their opinions and make evaluations about a variety of issues. In other words, interactants "routinely make assessments" (Pomerantz 1984: 57), which may be evaluative comments on all types of shared experience, like the weather, people both the speaker and the addressee know, or any other kind of information.

Following the idea of adjacency pairs, we are able to say speakers coordinate their second assessments with prior ones. When proffering any kind of assessment, the speaker invites the recipient to assess the same referent, thus calling her/him to agree or disagree with what was said. Although any recipient of a first-turn assessment is free to agree or disagree with it, disagreeing when an agreement is invited is usually taken as a dispreferred next action (which under Politeness Theory would be called an FTA), whereas agreement, in most cases, would be taken as preferred.

Preference has been described in the literature as manifested in the design of the turns (Pomerantz 1984). When agreement is preferred, recipients tend to produce their follow-up assessments with minimization of gap (in fact, frequently in slight overlap) and no requests for clarification between the first and the second assessments (Pomerantz 1978, 1984; Levinson 1983; Greatbatch 1992). That is, preferred agreements are produced directly, with no hesitation, no extra morphological material; in other words, they are "unmarked turns" (Pomerantz 1978). Dispreferred second assessments, on the other hand, show a tendency to display more complexity and to be more "morphologically loaded", generally presenting one or more of a collection of marked features, such as delay, hesitation, prefaces, mitigation and accounts.

As Pomerantz (1984) claims, however, it is not in all cases of assessments that agreements are invited. When a speaker produces a self-deprecating assessment, it is also relevant for the recipient to produce a second assessment in response to that one. Nevertheless, agreeing with a prior self-deprecating assessment is seen as a way of criticizing the interlocutor or of poor social solidarity. In such cases, disagreeing is seen as the preferred next turn. Self-deprecating disagreement turns normally take the same shape as the agreements with first assessments. That is, they tend to come unmarked, with no delays, no hesitations, and no extra morphological material. In addition, they might also be produced with *partial repeats* or *negations* (Pomerantz 1984: 83-85).

3. Background of the three institutions investigated

3.1. *Delegacia da Mulher (DDM)*

In the beginning of the 1980's the problem of violence against women was strongly brought into discussion in Brazil. In order to encourage females to openly talk about domestic violence against them, the government of São Paulo created in 1985 the first of a series of Delegacias da Mulher, police stations entirely run in principle *by* and *for* women only. In the international arena, the creation of specialized police stations in charge of exclusively responding to, investigating and prosecuting cases of violence against women represented an unusual institutional response to male-to-female violence (Nelson 1996; Hautzinger 1997; Ostermann 2000, 2003a, 2003b).[3]

The creation of the Delegacias da Mulher in Brazil was grounded on the essentialist identity assumption that female police officers would be "naturally" better suited to deal with domestic violence than male police officers, and that the general male dominated environment of the regular police stations was not conducive to women's reports of violence against them (Nabucco 1989; Station 1989; *Correio da Gente* 1995b; Nelson 1996, 1997).[4] Following the same essentialist understanding of gender, the creation of an all-woman staffed delegacia represented an attempt to "humanize [...] the police after decades of military rule" (Station 1989: 69).

The Delegacia da Mulher, as a specialized type of civil police, is usually sought by a victim as the first step towards starting the legal process against the perpetrator. It is at the Delegacia da Mulher that the victim files a *BO* (*boletim de ocorrência* or incident report). The BO will then be read by the *delegada*, chief police officer, who might initiate an investigation depending on the seriousness of the crime.[5] Thus, a first time encounter at the Delegacia da Mulher is geared towards a task-oriented activity, i.e. the elaboration of a BO, which might (or might not) lead to future encounters at the police station. If the facts narrated by the victim are validated as a criminal act, she will leave the encounter with a response to her request: A document produced and signed by an official which describes the criminal acts inflicted upon her.

To enter the police force which includes the Delegacia da Mulher, applicants must pass a battery of public exams. In their 3-month training at the State police academy, these officers learn how to produce police reports and to shoot, and some basic

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[3] In general terms, there are two types of police in Brazil: the military police and the civil police, and the Delegacias da Mulher fall within the latter, as shown below:
- Military police: preventative; an armed and uniformed police that patrols the streets; they go to the scene of the crime and bring the suspect, victims and witnesses to the civil police station for a police report (Nelson 1997: 67-9);
- Civil police: investigative; there are regular (general precincts that deal with all types of crimes) and specialized ones (that deal with specific crimes, e.g. homicide and crimes against women, as the Delegacia da Mulher); make official police reports, investigate, and prepare cases for trials; do not wear uniforms (id.).

[4] "[The] Delegacias da Mulher have a more maternal atmosphere, conducive to the service of children, contrary to the regular police stations, [that are] full of criminals." Statement made by the chief police officer Carmen Teixeira to a local newspaper [my translation] (*Correio da Gente* 1995a).

[5] However, in cases in which the IML (Legal Medical Institute) attests that there is a *lesão corporal grave* (acute bodily injury), an *inquérito* (investigation) is automatically started.

knowledge about criminal law. Discussion about handling domestic violence or even the more general issues involving violence against women are not part of their training; "[that training] is for the *delegadas* (chief police officers) but not for lower rank police officers," says Alessandra, one of the officers recorded for this study. Once the police academy is over, the officers are assigned to work anywhere in the state, and for females, the likelihood to be posted at a *Delegacia da Mulher* increases. This generates much dissatisfaction among many; after all, they never asked to work for such a specialized type of police nor received any training for it.

At the time of the data collection, there were three police officers in charge of producing reports and who participated in this study, all of them working and lower-middle class single mothers, having studied up to high school, and two of them having already suffered some type of violence in their domestic sphere. They frequently complained about emotional stress at work, about not receiving any training or support from the State, and about lacking "natural aptitude" to deal with the issue of domestic violence. Moreover, the officers believed that the work done at the *Delegacia da Mulher* was not the work of "real" police officers and not the type of work which filled them with pleasure.

It became quite clear during the data collection that despite the larger aims that inspired the creation the specialized all-female police stations, the institutional goal of the delegacias is still limited to producing an official document. i.e. a police report. Alessandra, one of the officers whose interactions were analyzed, claimed that the Delegacia da Mulher actually gives and listens "too much" to the victims. In regular police stations, she goes on, "the victim has to stand up at the counter while the report is being made; and there [in regular police stations] they only want the criminal facts. […] I don't give the victims more than the state can offer. And that's a BO." Maria, another officer who participated in this study, repeatedly emphasized that she does not give the victims any type of personal advice. "This is the criminal sphere," says Maria, and "making a BO is what we can do."

It is also important to mention that none of the officers recorded for this study considered themselves feminist.

3.2. *Feminist Crisis Intervention Center (CIV-Mulher)*

As Sara Hautzinger (1997) reports, even though the Delegacias da Mulher were in general created by politicians, the driving force behind their creation actually came from the pressure exerted upon the government by grassroots feminist groups concerned with the social problem of violence against women in Brazil. It was among these groups that CIV-Mulher – the feminist crisis intervention center under investigation here – came into the existence. The main objectives of those feminists service providers, which began to form in the early 1980s, were to break the isolation of women who suffered gendered violence, help (re)empower them by offering emotional and legal support, raise consciousness among victims that the oppression they suffered at home was a shared and gendered one, and help in reporting the violent incidents to the police (Chauí 1984; Sorj and Montero 1984; Sorj, Montero, Rodrigues and Andréa 1984; Azevedo 1985; Nelson 1996, 1997; Ostermann 2000, 2003a, 2003b).

The crisis intervention center analyzed in this paper, located in the Southeastern Brazil, was created in 1981. This institution, run by middle-class feminist psychologists,

lawyers and anthropologists, assists women in legal and psychological issues, trying not only to assure their rights but also to improve their sense of self-esteem and make them confident enough to move on with their lives. All professionals whose interactions were recorded for this study report to have chosen to work at CIV out of their proximity with the goals of the organization, which are: To build rapport, to initiate a relationship with the woman victim of violence, to give her advice, as well as to project a response into the future, i.e. to set up group meetings and future appointments. The victim leaves the establishment with nothing beyond an appointment card to come to meetings in two or three weeks.

> According to one of the CIV professionals whose interactions were recorded, some other goals are also fundamental, such as

> to welcome her [the victim], to release her tension, to show her that violence against women is a social problem and that there are solutions to the problem the client tells, to inform her of what CIV can offer her, to collect a complete history about her current relationship, and previous relationships.

The professionals at CIV also claim to identify themselves with the women they serve, despite their clearly differing social class, level of education and political engagement.

3.3. *Legal Popular Promoters (PLPs) at the Serviço de Informação à Mulher (SIM)*

Sensitized by the difficulties that a large population of females in lower income areas had to access the formal legal system, some feminists at a crisis intervention center in Southern Brazil (similar to CIV Mulher), by means of a partnership with the judicial system, proposed a training program for women from lower income areas, to enable them to become Promotoras Legais Populares (Popular Legal Promoters or Community Legal Prosecutors - PLPs) in their own communities. The PLPs are females who do volunteer, unpaid work advocating for women's rights in their neighborhoods, generally low income areas. They undergo a series of courses promoted by a feminist NGO in partnership with judges and members of the Public Defender´s office. During a 90-hour training, they take some lessons on law, Brazilian justice, violence against women, sexual and reproductive rights, which prepare them for working with disseminating information of that kind among other poor females in their community. They also receive some training on how to advise other females in cases of gendered violence. The educational training received by these community leaders aims at strengthening their autonomy in their communities to find concrete ways of helping other females.

PLPs regularly perform their task in rooms or building spaces provided for free by the city government. The units where they work are called SIM – Serviço de Informação à Mulher (Information Service to Females).

The group of PLPs who participated in this study was also formed by volunteers, most of them with no formal jobs. PLPs are required to be literate, but no formal education is demanded. Except for one, none of the PLPs participating in this study had finished high school (some of them, not even elementary school) and all of them had some type of prominent role in their community (e.g. president of community associations, such as religious and handcrafting associations) and political engagement

with other local leaders. Finally, the PLPs claimed to identify themselves very closely with the women they serve. One of the PLPs, Fabiana, claimed that it was her "own personal growth that motivated her to work as a PLP." Moreover, as stressed by another PLP, Gessi, many times it was difficult to say who actually benefitted from their work, whether it was the women who looked for their unit or the PLPs themselves. "I've learned so much since I became a PLP", she claimed.

Figure 1 presents a summarized description of the characterization of the professionals at the three institutions.
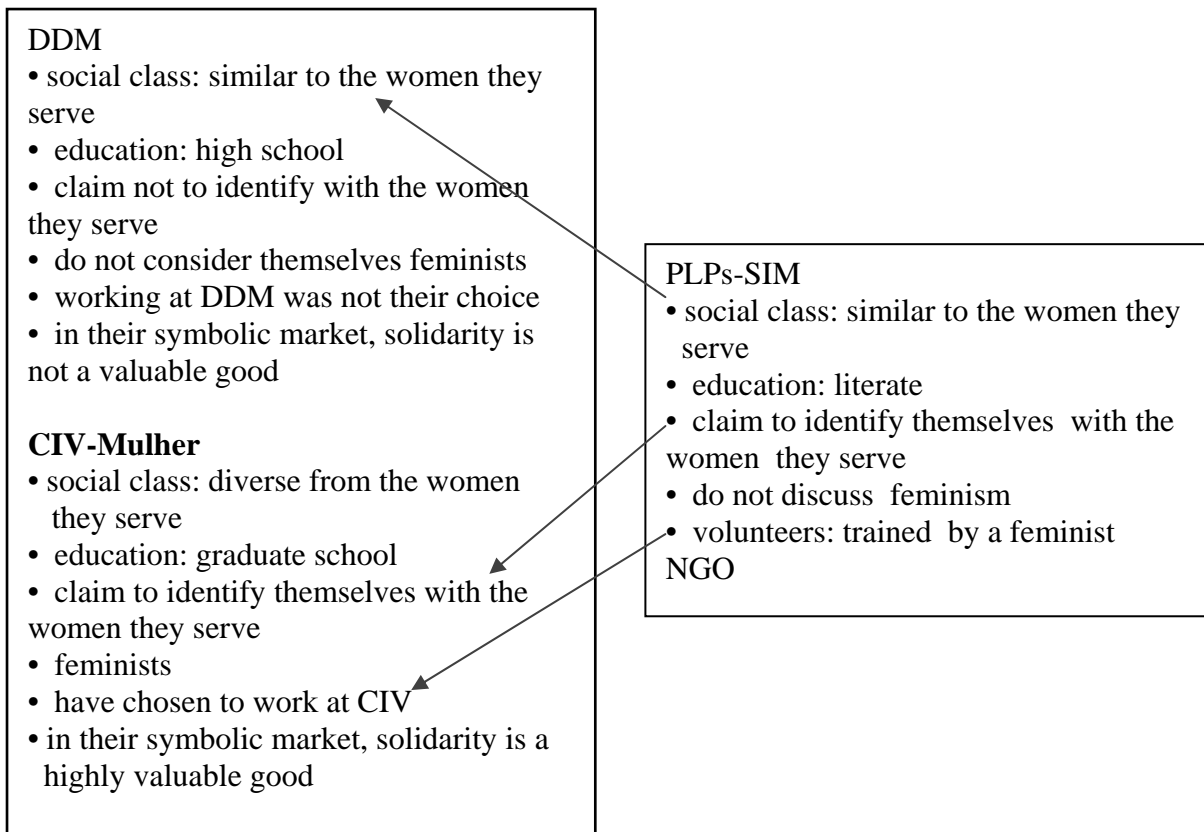

DDM
• social class: similar to the women they serve
• education: high school
• claim not to identify with the women they serve
• do not consider themselves feminists
• working at DDM was not their choice
• in their symbolic market, solidarity is not a valuable good

CIV-Mulher
• social class: diverse from the women they serve
• education: graduate school
• claim to identify themselves with the women they serve
• feminists
• have chosen to work at CIV
• in their symbolic market, solidarity is a highly valuable good

PLPs-SIM
• social class: similar to the women they serve
• education: literate
• claim to identify themselves with the women they serve
• do not discuss feminism
• volunteers: trained by a feminist NGO

Fig. 1: Summarized description of the characterization of the professionals at the three institutions

4. Data for the current study

The data analyzed here consist of 39 fully-transcribed audio-recorded *first-time* encounters between professionals and complainants at the three institutions described above.[6] Twenty-six of the interactions come from a unit of *Delegacia da Mulher* and of

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[6] All the spoken data were transcribed by the first author using the transcription conventions adapted from John Du Bois et al. (1992). Transcription conventions used for the excerpts that appear in the text are outlined in the Appendix section.

CIV Mulher, both located in Southeastern Brazil.[7] There is a total of 13 interviews per setting involving three different professionals in each institution – three *triagistas* at *CIV Mulher* and three police officers (also known as *frentistas*) at the *Delegacia da Mulher*. The other thirteen interactions come from a unit of work of SIM (Serviço de Informação à Mulher, where the Promotoras Legais Populares work), located in Southern Brazil. The interactions recorded were limited to those involving female victims of violence in the home sphere, and violence that had been inflicted by someone of the opposite sex with whom they were or had been intimate (boyfriends, partners, husbands).

5. Analysis

The analysis of adjacency pairs in this paper is restricted to those in which the first assessment is produced by the victim and followed (or not) by second assessments by the professionals, this way focusing on how professionals construct their next turns. Such decision was partially driven by the data – first assessments in our data are much more frequently produced by the victims (rather than by the professionals in each settings) – and partially motivated by our research interest – that is, to investigate how the professionals from the three different institutions react to the victims' assessments of others and of themselves.

In order to investigate the overall pattern of the types of second assessments the professionals produce (or do not produce) after a victim's assessment, first a general quantitative analysis was conducted. After looking at all assessments produced by the victims in each setting, four types were identified.

1. *Assessments about a third party*: when the victim makes an evaluation of a third person, event or object. (e.g. He is very nice.)[8]
2. *Self-assessments*: when the victim produces some type of evaluation of herself or of something she has done. (e.g. I think I did something stupid.)
3. *Assessments of the self made by a third party*: when the victim reports an assessment that somebody else (her partner, her family, her partner's family) has made about her. (e.g. He came and entered and said like this, "You are a hore, you bitch. You were after men.")
4. *Assessments of the self through generalizations*: when the victim makes general assessments that include her. (e.g. The person gets disoriented.)

As for the responses provided by the professionals, or their second pair part to the assessments proffered by the victims, four types emerged in the data:

1) *preferred responses*;
2) *(morphologically expressed) dispreferred responses*: overtly produced disagreements (this category excludes silences and minimal responses that are produced solely, without prefacing or in the midst of a disagreement);

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[7] In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants in this study, all personal names, name of the city, names of hospitals, streets and other locations, as well as names of the local newspapers have been replaced by fictitious ones.

[8] Examples taken from the actual data analyzed.

3) *minimal responses*: vocalization by the professional of continuers, such as *mhm*, *mm*, *uh*, *aham*, which show listenership but do not convey any type of second evaluation;

4) *no responses* or *silence*: when the professional does not take a turn nor does produce any type of minimal response after the victim makes an assessment (this response does not include *expressed dispreferred responses* that are designed with intraturn pauses).

Figure 2 thus displays the overall pattern of the professionals' second assessments to the victims' different types of assessments.
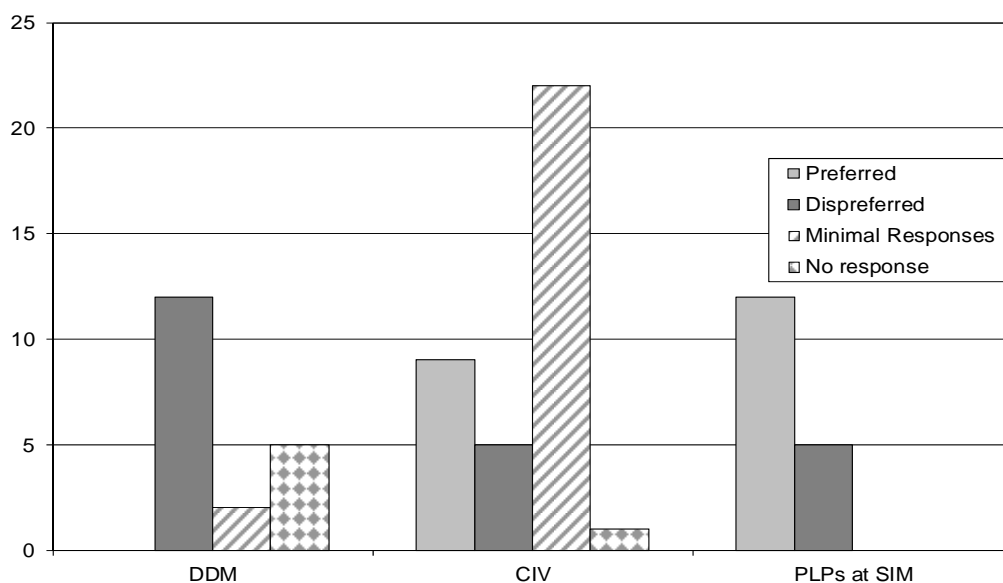

Fig. 2: Overall pattern of the professionals' second assessments to the victims' different types of assessments

As shown in Figure 2, the professionals' response types are more contrastive than similar among the three institutions. The single similarity to be pointed out is that the only type of response to assessments that happens by the professionals in the three settings is the *morphologically expressed dispreferred* one. On all other accounts, the three settings differ more than look similar.

Among the police officers at DDM the most frequent type of response to assessments made by the victims are *morphologically expressed dispreferred responses*, followed up by *no responses*, which, of course, are a type of dispreferred response, according to Pomerantz (1984). Notice, in particular, that there are no occurrences of *preferred type of responses*. It is only in the interactions with feminists at CIV that we see all types of responses taking place. However, their frequency differs from the two other settings. The most frequent type of response to assessments made by the victims are *minimal responses*, followed by *preferred responses*. The least chosen reaction to the victims' assessments at CIV are *no responses*. Finally, at SIM, with the Promotoras Legais

Populares, only two types of responses take place, the most frequent ones being *preferred responses*, followed up by *morphologically expressed dispreferred* ones.

These results are limited in the sense that they point only to some general facework strategies used in each institution on what concerns doing second assessments. Feminists at CIV tend to show a great deal of non-commitment to the assessments made by victims, as by far their most frequent type of response are *minimal responses*, which do not convey any overt type of agreement or disagreement, but which, according to Pomerantz (1984) might also point dispreferrence. Their second most frequent type of response to assessments, *preferred responses*, displays positive alignment with the victims. What is clearly an uncommon type of response by feminists is the absence of a response.

Among the Popular Legal Promoters, we find only two types of responses being used by professionals: *preferred* and *morphologically expressed dispreferred responses*, with the latter being the most common one.

The prevalence of both *morphologically expressed dispreferred responses* and *no responses* (a type of dispreferred response) at DDM suggests that the encounters in that setting are less cooperative, and that the smooth flow of the interactions seem more easily at risk, thus creating opportunities which constitute face-threatening events in themselves. Both non-mitigated *morphologically expressed dispreferred responses* and *absence of response* might indicate a lack of concern with the victim's face or less concern with social solidarity and thus might threaten her face.

It is, nevertheless, only by looking at the "situadedness of talk" (Gal 1995), here understood as the use of these responses in their discursive contexts, that one is able to investigate the complexities involved in the use of one or another response in the flow of interaction. Thus, in the following subsection, we contextualize the professionals' responses within a discursive level of analysis, investigating where and how they occur. Moreover, we comparatively analyze second assessments made by professionals in the three settings so as to show the complexities that are not reflected by solely looking at their frequencies of use.

5.1. *Delegacia da Mulher: Dispreference and lack of engagement*

As discussed earlier, once an assessment is produced, a second assessment is called for. Such an assumption, however, does not hold for professionals at DDM who, among the three groups investigated, present the largest occurrences of no responses to assessments. Excerpt 1 below illustrates such characterization of the police officers' talk, in which the victim Pulsina produces a series of assessments which receive no response from her interlocutor.

Excerpt 1 [DDM - AP][9]

30 PULSINA: É. Agrediu. O problema dele é que ele::-- assi::m-- ele é muito bom. Entendeu. Sempre calmo, sempre ami::go. XX XX pra mim, ele era muito amigo entendeu? O que precisasse ele tava lá. Entendeu.

---

[9] All the spoken data were transcribed by the author using the transcription conventions adapted from John Du Bois et al. (1992). Transcription conventions used for the excerpts that appear in the text are outlined in the Appendix section.

		Yeah. He attacked ((no overt object)). His problem is that he::-- I me::an– he is very nice. You know. Always calm, always frien::dly. XX XX with me, he was very friendly you know? Whatever I needed he was there. You know.
39		
40		(.)
41		
42	PULSINA:	Só que quando ele fica nervoso, ele é assim, entendeu.
		But when he gets nervous, he is like this, you know.
46		
47		(.)
48		
49	PULSINA:	Ele parece que ele que ele não pensa. Entendeu.
50		*It seems like he doesn't think. You know.*
52		(.)

In this Excerpt, on three different occasions (lines 30-38, 42-45 and 49-50), the complainant Pulsina produces assessments of a third party, in this case, her partner, as she describes his behavior to the police officer Alessandra. Pulsina reaches a transitional relevant place on three different occasions, but the officer does not take a turn in any of them, thus neither producing second assessments nor any other type of responses, thus showing high degree of non responsiveness and lack of interactional engagement.

The production of negative self-assessments is probably the most difficult one to deal with. Not responding to it or responding with an agreement constitute strong type of FTA, not only to the addressee but also to the speaker herself/himself. It is often the case that people make pejorative self-assessments expecting their interlocutors to be supportive and to come up with comments such as, "Come on" or "No, you aren't." Thus, the lack of responses to negative self-assessments might create uncomfortable situations.

In Excerpt 2 below, the assessment is not exactly about the complainant herself but about her ID card, as shown below.

Excerpt 2 [DDM12–AE]

112	PO ALESSANDRA:	Põe o seu RG em cima da mesa. A gente vai fazer a ocorrência.
113		*Put your ID on the table. We're going to do the police report.*
114		
115	ELIZANDRA:	Olha, o meu RG tá MUITO feio. Eu vou ter que tirar outro. ((Procura o
116		RG dentro da bolsa.))
117		*You see, my ID looks VERY ugly. I'm gonna have to have another one*
118		*done. ((While looking for her ID in her purse.))*
119		
120		((PO Alessandra deixa o cubículo enquanto a vítima ainda está falando.
121		Quando ela retorna, a vítima começa a falar novamente.))
122		*((PO Alessandra leaves the cubicle while the victim is still talking. When*
123		*PO Alessandra returns, the victim starts talking again.))*

In this passage, after the victim's negative assessment of something that not only belongs to her, but which also represents her, i.e. her picture ID (lines 117-121), the

police officer Alessandra does not provide any response to what the situation asks for. Instead, she goes out the room without excusing herself, leaving the victim alone.

The absence of any type of response from the police officers in such situations, as seen in Excerpts 1 and 2, seem clear FTAs, showing no concern about the victim's face as there are no attempts to show any kind of involvement.

However, as shown in Figure 2, in addition to lack of responses and engagement, what mostly characterizes the DDM police officers' responses is the production of dispreferred responses. This is what is analyzed in the next Excerpt, in which we see an explicit realization of a negative self-assessment by the victim.

Excerpt 3 [DDM – AE]

19	ELIZANDRA:	É. QUANDO foi o mês passado, eu não sei se fiz besteira, porque eu
20		acho que fiz besteira, eu tirei o meu DIU.
21		*Right. Then LAST month, I don't know if I did something stupid, because*
22		*I think I did something stupid, I had my IUD[10] removed.*
23		
24		(0.6)
25		
26	PO ALESSANDRA:	É. Fez besteira.
27		*Yes. Did(2nd person) a stupid thing.*

Victim Elizandra produces a negative self-assessment in line 19, claiming that she may have done something stupid. Despite a short delay in police officer Alessandra's response, she goes ahead in producing her agreement with the victim's negative self-assessment without any mitigation, justification or any other features of dispreference. She designs her next turn in a straightforward way, more in the format of a preferred response, thus producing her response to the victim´s negative self-assessment "baldly on record" (Brown and Levinson 1987), thus showing no concern over social solidarity with her interlocutor.

5.2. *CIV Mulher: Between neutrality and engagement with the victims*

What mostly characterizes the interactions at CIV Mulher is that assessments hardly ever remain without a response. However, responses to assessments at CIV are not always constructed as explicit agreements or disagreements. By far, as seen in Figure 2, the most common way the feminists respond to the complainants' first assessments is by producing minimal responses, such as *mhm* and *ahãm*. Such minimal responses communicate to the victim that she is being listened to and allow her to continue talking, conveying that the interlocutor does not intend to take a turn at any of the transition relevant points. However, they also communicate neutrality.

Excerpt 4 below demonstrates the use of minimal responses in the position where a second assessment is called for.

---

[10] Intrauterine Device, a birth control method.

Excerpt 4 [CIV - FM]

907	ZULEICA:	Eu quero-- se eu tenho direito a uma pensão-- eu vô trabalhá. Eu não sô
908		mulher que-- pode pegá minha carteira, eu não sô mulher de ficar parada
909		não.
910		*I want- if I am entitled to receive pension– I will work. I am not this kind*
911		*of woman that- you can check my working records, I´m not a laid back*
912		*woman. Not at all.*
913		
914	CIV-FERNANDA:	mhm
915		*mhm*
916		
917	ZULEICA:	Eu SEMPRE trabalhei. E eu VÔ trabalhá. Mas eu vou exigir dele TUDO
918		o que eu tenho direito.
919		*I´ve ALWAYS worked. And I WILL work. But I will claim for*
920		*EVERYTHING that I am entitled to.*
921		
922	CIV-FERNANDA:	mhm
923		*mhm*
924		
925	ZULEICA:	SE ELE disser >NÃO<- (1.4) então a gente va::i- aí::: (0.7) >ele sumindo
926		vai ser um favor que ele vai fazer na minha vida<
927		*IF HE says >NÃO<- (1.4) then we'll- then (0.7) >if he disappears it will*
928		*be a favor he'll do to my life<*

In Excerpt 4, after the victim makes a positive self-assessment (lines 912-913), Fernanda does not produce any kind of agreement or disagreement in the position of second assessments. Instead, she makes use of a minimal response which releases her from positioning herself for or against what is being assessed by the victim in the previous turn. However, despite not producing any type of overt assessment, the provision of continuers displays orientation to her role as an addressee and attentive listener. In this case, the provision of only a minimal response by the professional (lines 915-916) leads to a slight modification on the next turn by the victim, however, not a modification so as to achieve agreement (in order words, not a modified assessment), as stated by Pomerantz to be commonly the case after minimal responses or silences.

Another way of responding to victims (and which comes as the second preferred way to respond to assessments at CIV), is agreement, as can be seen in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5 [CIV – FL]

748	LEANDRA:	É exatamente, porque lá eu tenho que trabalhar, tenho conta pra mim
749		pagar=
750		*It's exactly, because there (("there" as in the life out there, outside CIV*
751		*Mulher)) I have to work, I have bills to pay=*
752		
753	CIV-FERNANDA:	=mhm
754		*=mhm*
755		
756	LEANDRA:	Então vem assim-- a cabeça da pessoa fica desnorteada.

757		*Then it comes like that— the person gets disoriented.*
758		
759	CIV-FERNANDA:	Exatamente.
760		*Exactly.*
761		
762	LEANDRA:	Você não sabe o que fazer.
763		*You don't know what to do.*
764		
765	CIV-FERNANDA:	I::sso. Por isso que aqui você pode usar com um espaço pra VOCÊ. É
766		TEU esse espaço. Esse espaço é pra você pensar sobre as coisas que você
767		quiser. Pra você organizar estas coisas dentro de você, pra você traçar um
768		rumo pra você. Isso vai te dando FORÇAS pra respirar lá fora, pra chegar
769		mais forte na tua casa. Tá? E também, você vai descobrir uma coisa.
770		"Poxa, eu sou a última a fazer escolha, né. Eu sempre estou escolhendo
771		pra proteger os outros. Quem é que escolhe pra me proteger?" Né.
772		*Ri::ght. That's why here you can use this space for YOU. IT IS YOUR*
773		*space. This space us for you to think whatever you like. For you to*
774		*organize your inner issues, for you to design a plan for you. This will give*
775		*you strength to breath out there, to arrive home as a stronger person.*
776		*Okay?*
777		
778	LEANDRA:	°Ce:rto.°
779		*°Ri:ght.°*

In this except, Leandra is reporting on the difficulties "there", under the circumstances in which she lives, explaining that together with dealing with the circumstances of the abuse, she has to keep on working and paying the bills (lines 748-752). In lines 757-760, she goes on to produce an assessment, designing it as a consequence of the difficulties she is experiencing: "the person's head gets disoriented", to which the professional Fernanda promply agrees in a preferred format. The victim goes on to produce further assessment (lines 765-766) to which Fernanda not only agrees again, but also provides an extended turn with explanation how the institution can help the victim with reorganizing her life and feeling stronger.

5.3. *PLPs at SIM: The collapse of institutional neutrality and the explicit engagement with the victims*

In contrast to both DDM and CIV Mulher, what characterizes the interactions at SIM is the single way by which the Popular Legal Promoters respond to the victims' assessments: Overt second assessments. In our data, there are no occurrences of assessments made by the victims that received "no response" or even just a minimal, neutral response such as *mhm or mm*, from the PLPs. In addition, there is a tendency for preferred, agreement responses by the PLPs to the victims' assessments.

In Excerpt 6, victim Veroni is reporting on a financial argument she and her partner had over a shopping event, as a way to exemplify the situations that normally escalate into physical violence.

Excerpt 6 [SIM – VGM]

1	VERONI:	E rancho [né]. Ele reclama- onte mesmo ele me deu dez reais,
2		*And groceries [right]. He complains- it was yesterday he gave me ten*
3		*reais ((Brazilian currency))*
4		
5	PLP GESSI:	[uhum]
6		[*mhm]*
7		
8		
9		
10	VERONI:	"Ah me traz troco." Mas daí eu tinha que comprá café, comprá carne,
11		azeite já não tinha mais comprá leite pra ela, fruta e [mais um]
12		"Oh bring me the change." But then I had to buy coffee, buy meat, oil and
13		also had buy milk for her ((her daughter)), fruit and [one more]
14		
15	PLP GESSI:	[imagina]
16		*[gee]*
17		
18	VERONI:	E eu toda preocupada. Troco não tem. Trouxe um real minha filha, é
19		troco=
20		*And I was so concerned. There's no change. If one brings one real, my*
21		*dear, that's change=*
22		
23	PLP GESSI:	=[é lógico].
24		*=[of course].*

Veroni reports that her husband had given her some money and asked her to bring back the change. She then explains that she bought many different products, spending most of the money and being able to save only R$1,00.[11] At this point, she makes an assessment by claiming that R$1,00 has to be considered change, with which PLP Gessi promptly agrees, by constructing her turn latched to Veroni's – no gaps – and by using a strong agreement expression, 'of course'. Such a preferred response comes within a context in which the PLP had already shown strong alignment with the victim by reacting with a 'gee' (line 18) to the victim's description of how many items she had to buy with such short amount of money.

The next Excerpt shows another occurrence of overt agreement with the victim. In this case, the victim Dina is reporting her children's unhappiness with her wish to make a police report of the abuse perpetrated by their father.

Excerpt 7 [SIM – ED]

1	DINA:	<Eu não pretendo mais me abalá pra nada>. Pra mim agora acabô acabô.
2		(.) Ói os filho te cobrá:. Se eles não são feliz não deixam a gente sê
3		feliz.[Dói na alma XXXX XXXX]
4		*<I don't want to get emotional anymore for anything>. Everything is*
5		*over is over. (.) You see your children's charging you:. If they are not*

---

[11] Equivalent to US$ 0,60.

6		*happy they don't allow us to be happy. [It hurts one's soul XXXX XXXX]*
7		
8	PLP ELISA:	[Não. Filhos eles são assim mesmo.] Eles são
9		assim mesmo. Eles são ingratos. Filhos são ingratos.=
10		[*No. Children they are really like that.] They*
11		*are like that. They are unthankful. Children are unthankful.*
12		

In lines 5-7, the victim reports on her children's charges about the police report, followed by an assessment (lines 7-9) about her children's unhappiness being her own unhappiness. In line 14, PLP Elisa produces a second assessment which comes as an agreement to the victim's previous turn. Such an agreement, besides being delivered quite directly and in overlap with the victim's previous turn is also upgraded, with the PLP making repetitions (two different ones) and providing an even stronger assessment about children: Their being unthankful.

In Excerpt 8, the victim is explaining why she does not want to leave her home, but instead wants her husband (the abuser) to do so.

Excerpt 8 [SIM – AR]

1	REBECA:	Eu podia até saí né numa boa mas eu acho assim ó um desaforo. Eu
2		construí, eu ajudá ele e depois eu saí assim e largá tudo pra ele é um
3		GRANde desaforo.
4		*I could even leave, right, just fine. But I think this is insolence. I built, I*
5		*helped him and then I go out and leave everything for him is a big*
6		*insolence.*
7		
8	PLP ALICE:	°Certamente°.
9		*°Of course°.*
10		
11	REBECA:	Então por isso=
12		*So this is why=*
13		
14	PLP ALICE:	=NÃo é justo né, tu ajudô junto, construindo.
15		*=It's NOt fair, is it, you helped together, building it.*
16		
17	REBECA:	°Exatamente°. Aí ele diz ah eu tu não tem prova.
18		*°Exactly°. And then he says "ah I you can't prove it."*

There are two occurrences of agreements to assessments in Excerpt 8. In lines 4-7, Rebeca assesses the possibility of her leaving her house (and her husband continuing living there) as insolence. The Popular Legal Promoter Alice responds with a prompt, preferred format of a second assessment in agreement with the victim ("Of course", line 10). Later, in lines 16-17, PLP Alice goes on to elaborate her previous agreement providing further assessment. Such an assessment constitutes an upgraded agreement, as it starts with a simple agreement adverb that develops into a full blown second assessment by the PLP, which, in its turn, also receives an agreement from the victim (lines 20, "exactly").

In Excerpt 9 below, the attendant's disagreement is actually a preferred response.

Excerpt 9 [SIM – GV]

1	VERONI:	É ele diz que eu gosto de °apanhá° @@.
2		*Yeah He says that I like °being beaten up° @@.*
3		
4	PLP GESSI:	não ninguém gosta de apanhá.
5		*No nobody likes being beaten up.*

This is an example of a disagreement constructed in a preferred format after a reported negative assessment of the self. In this passage, victim Veroni reports that her husband has claimed that she enjoys being beaten up. The PLP Gessi presents her disagreement with an assessment in a straightforward way, beginning her turn with 'no' and upgrading her disagreement so as to incorporate "everyone", claiming this way how unrealistic the assessment made by the victim has made: It is not only the victim does not like to be beaten up, but "nobody" does.

The next two excerpts present assessments the victims produced about themselves and how the PLPs respond to them. In Excerpt 10, the victim is talking about her fear of having to divide the assets she was able to gather after a lot of struggle with her husband, from whom she has been separated for years but not legally divorced up to then.

Excerpt 10 [SIM – ALO]

1	OLGA:	E eu não posso fazê a escritura. como sô casada ainda legalmente. Por no
2		nome dele né? E é muita gente também eu sô meio, meia burrinha a
3		gente 2 não entende muito essas coisa.
4		*And I can't make the deed. As I am still legally married. To put his name*
5		*in it right? And it is too many people and also I am a little, a little dumb*
6		*we don't understand much of these things.*
7		
8	PLP ALICE:	Não:@@ nós não somos burras não.
9		*Não@@ we're not dumb((grammatically feminine)) no.*
10		

In this excerpt, the victim is talking about her fear of having to divide the assets she was able to buy after a lot of struggle with her husband, from whom she has been separated for years but not legally divorced up to then. At the end of her turn (lines 7-8), she produces a negative self-assessment saying she is "a little dumb" and that "we" (possibly women in general) do not understand much of these legal procedures. Attendant Alice takes a turn right after that, beginning it with a direct and non-mitigated double negation (preferred format) and, this way, disagreeing with the victim's assessment. Notice that the PLP takes up the pronoun "we" used by the victim, when negating that "we" are dumb. In addition, the adjective dumb (which was originally used in the singular and referring to the victim, thus in the feminine), is now picked up by the PLP and reproduced in a "we" statement, which would possibly apply to all females, thus including the PLP herself. This can be seen as an attempt to show common identity ground.

Another occurrence of a disagreement after a pejorative self-assessment can be seen

below.

Excerpt 11 [SIM – AE]

1	ELOIZA:	=Morava no pátio lá né? Sabe a irmã dele falava muitas coisas às vezes
2		né, e eu não era feia, eu era muito bonita né quando eu era solteira.=
3		=*Lived((suject not clear)) on the back there right? You see his sister said*
4		*many things sometimes right, and I wasn't ugly, I was very pretty when I*
5		*as single.=*
6		
7	PLP ALICE:	=Tu é tão bonita ainda.=
8		=*You are still so pretty.=*

This is what we could call an indirect negative-self assessment, as the victim does not overtly produce a pejorative assessment of herself. Instead, she claims she was pretty when single. Although saying she was beautiful may sound as a positive self-assessment, the fact that she says so by adding "in the past" suggests her prettiness no longer holds. PLP Alice promptly interprets Eloiza's assertion as being a negative self-assessment and responds to it with a disagreement, claiming that the victim "is still so pretty". Notice that PLP Alice's turn comes latched with Eloiza's and is produced with an upgrade (adverb "so").

6. Final considerations

The comparative analysis of the professionals' ways of dealing with assessments made by the victims at the three settings shows similarities and differences to be highlighted concerning issues of institutional interaction and gender, and professional identity.
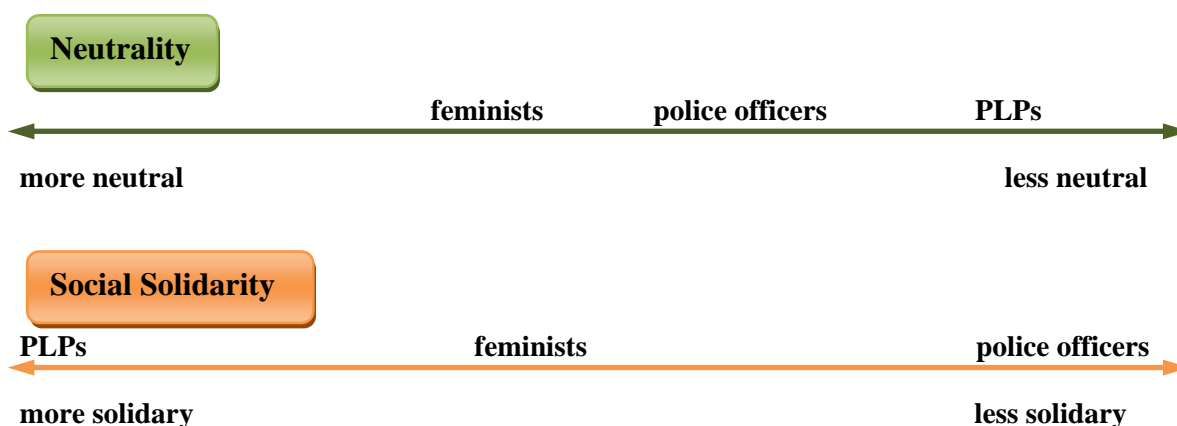
It is among the professionals at CIV Mulher that we identify most closely the common discursive practice associated with interactional talk and professional identity: neutrality and cautiousness in agreeing or disagreeing with the victims. As seen, by far, the most characteristic way of responding the victims' assessments at CIV are the provision of minimal responses, with preferred agreements and disagreements (in self-negative assessments) coming second.

The police officers seem to tend towards two extremes: No response at all or blatant disagreement responses in assessment sequences initiated by the victims. The lack of responses after the victims' assessments – a type of dispreferred response per se – tends to produce more talk by the victims and further tentative of alignment from the officers. Officers also show lack of engagement with the victims by changing topics and ignoring the assessment made in the previous turn. The other extreme way of dealing with the victims' responses, blatant dispreferred responses, are designed in ways that seem almost punitive, considering that a number of the assessments the victims produce are negative self-assessments and that these are females reporting gendered domestic violence for the first time.

Finally, it is among the Popular Legal Promoters that we find the most distinguishing way of interacting with the victims, with the PLPs making use of both types of overt second assessments, with preferred responses as most typical. As discussed, the PLPs tend not only to promptly agree with the victims assessments – when assessments call

for agreement – but also to promptly disagree in cases of negative self-assessments. Moreover, there is a tendency for the PLPs to upgrade their second assessments, as it became evident in the larger number of excerpts analyzed.

When placed on continuums of neutrality and social solidarity, the interactions between the professionals in the three institutions and the female victims of violence are characterized in such way that the PLPs would be at two extremes: The least neutral and most solidary ones, as represented below.

Neutrality

| feminists | police officers | PLPs |

more neutral   **less neutral**

Social Solidarity

PLPs   **feminists**   **police officers**

more solidary   **less solidary**

The analysis raises some discussion on the relation of language, gender and professional identity in work settings. For our understanding of the links between language and gender identity, in particular, these results question homogeneous definitions of the "female" gender in its relationship to language, in particular, the essentialist motivations that gave rise to the creation of the specialized all-female police stations (i.e. that female officers would be "naturally" more nurturing, caring and humanizing than male officers). The differing social solidarity practices we can identify by means of the analysis of the assessment sequences cannot be associated with 'a single gender identity'.

But language and gender identity here also seem to play a complex relationship with professional identity and institutional talk. By bringing to the fore the interactional practices of professionals in institutions not commonly discussed in the literature (i.e., a blue-collar institution and two organizations born out of a grassroots movement in Brazil) the investigation conducted here in some ways seems to question or even blur the limits between institutional talk and ordinary talk.

Institutional talk, at least among the professionals at two of the groups studied, the blue-collar police officers and the Popular Legal Promoters, does not entail any "neutral" stance on the part of the professionals as previous studies have strongly suggested. Among the Promotoras Legais Populares, in particular, it is social solidarity and a non-neutral stance towards the victims – more closely related to mundane conversation – that seems to be constantly sought by the attendants. Not coincidently, among the professionals in the three institutions investigated, the Popular Legal Promoters are what we could possibly call the least "professionalized"[12] ones. In spite

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[12] The expression "least professionalized" is not to be seen as derogatory. It is instead referring to the fact that among the three sets of professionals, the Promotoras Legais Populares are the ones who do not hold "a job" nor get paid for what they do.

of their differing motivations, both the police officers and the feminists work for a salary, whereas the PLPs are volunteers. In addition, the PLPs are women who serve other women who not only are from their own social class, but also from their own community. What we see in the analysis is that despite enacting an important institutional role for which they are trained a number of hours, the PLPs relate to the women they serve in a way not commonly normally associated with institutional practices. PLPs work towards constantly diminishing the distance from the victims and building less of what is commonly associated with a "professional" identity and more of "camaraderie" type of relationship.

The feminists, all of them holding university degrees, perform what could be most closely associated with the professional cautiousness described in the literature. However, their institutional neutrality is not held for long, as most of the time their neutral stances turn into affiliation with the victims, likely as a result of their ideological affiliations with the purposes of organization they serve (i.e. a *feminist* organization). Among the officers at the all-female police stations, we do not find an "economy of emotions", as described by McElhinny (1993a, 1993b), but instead something that could be possibly described as an "economy of solidarity," in which there is an active movement from the police officers to make sure they will engage neither in neutral nor in any affiliative ways with the victims.

In this sense, the differing practices in the preference structure also seem to be closely related to the different goal or task orientations and the nature of the responses provided by the three settings, as represented below.

Goal orientation		
police officers	feminists	PLPs
task-oriented		relationship-oriented

In other words, although the encounters in the three settings have tasks to be accomplished, they contrast between being more task-oriented and more relationship-building oriented.

Finally, these findings also raise the possibility that institutional interaction might not be an either/or phenomenon (in relation to ordinary talk) but a merely a continuum.

Appendix

The transcription conventions were adapted from Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Paolino, & Cumming (1992) and are as follows:

CAPS	increased volume
bold	part of the transcript emphasized for the analysis
underline	stretch of talk that overlaps with the activity of typing

italics	English gloss
,	continuing intonation
.	stopping falling intonation
?	rising intonation
[ ]	stretch of talk of current speaker which is overlapped with the bracketed stretch of talk of the next speaker
-	truncated word
--	truncated sentence
=	latched talk
: :	prolonged sound or syllable
(0.0)	length of time in seconds (0.4 or above) during which there is no talk (when in minutes, marked as such; e.g. *3 min 4 sec*)
(( ))	factual information about the exchange or translation clarification
{ }	stretches of uncertain transcription
X	stretches that are inaudible; each X represents approximately one syllable
SPEAKER:	at the beginning of a stretch of talk, identifies current speaker
@	laughter
hhh	inhalation

Notes on the transcript conventions:

1 - Each turn in the transcript is followed by free translations of the original Portuguese notated in italics.

2 - Sound elongation, notated "::" in the transcripts in Portuguese, is not reproduced in the English translations since it is not always obvious where the corresponding elongation would take place in the English version.

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