

Exploration of Gendered Discourses: An Alternative Theoretical Perception of the Israeli Realm

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Abstract: This article aims to suggest an alternative, theoretical, and methodological framework for exploring how sociocultural, underlying realities construct dominant gendered discourses within the Israeli context. This article also attempts to shed light on the link between the discourse of militarization and its implicit penetration into Israeli civil society and sports. Moreover, this article argues that, to some extent, these underlying, contextualized, flowing discourses marginalize women and some men from decision-making positions in sports organizations. Therefore, this study provides an interesting perspective from which to analyze voices and narratives of the (predominantly female) "other" through post-structuralist feminist lenses. The study also elaborates on the historical, contextual construction of current discourses of masculinity that shape the culture of Israeli sports organizations and society as a whole. This article also introduces readers to the theoretical and methodological processes of narrative revisions, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and the context of the production of gendered knowledge. By using constructivism, rather than positivist ontology, this study elaborates upon, and reveals, how different societal discourses produce and reinforce gender inequities in Israeli sports organizations, which continually (and to some extent, implicitly) exclude women from gaining access to leadership positions.

Keywords: Post-Structuralist Feminism, Israel, Gender, Sports, Discourse

Introduction

This article aims to shed light on the epistemological and methodological framework that led the authors to explore discourses of masculinity and femininity that underpin societies, specifically Israeli society and the institutions of sports within it. For the most part, men govern Israeli sports organizations, which serve the interests of hegemonic masculine forms. In order to explore unique underlying realities within the Israeli context (such as the discourse of militarization), the theoretical framework might be informed by post-structuralist feminism, which provides a way to analyze voices and narratives of the (predominantly female) "other," and explore the historical-contextual construction of current discourses of masculinity within Israeli sports organizations and society as a whole.

This article introduces readers to the process of narrative revisions, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and production of gendered knowledge, which is an alternative way of revealing how discourses produce and reinforce gender inequities in Israeli society. Examples would include the discourse of militarization or the unique political affiliation system in the sporting arena, which implicitly excludes women (and some men) from gaining access to leadership positions in sports organizations.

Theoretical Review

Drawing on the work of Shaw and Frisby (2006) and Meyerson and Kolb (2000), we argue that the post-structuralist feminist theoretical perspective provides an important alternative to more traditional ones by addressing the complexities of gender relations through the process of

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critique, narrative revision, and experimentation. This perspective should allow us to move beyond the simplistic assumptions and solutions offered by liberal feminist approaches typically used in organizational research and practice (Shaw and Frisby 2006), focusing largely on women's equality with men on the basis of their "sameness" and on increasing numbers of women in managerial positions without changing the prevailing discourse, structures, and operating norms (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

For post-structuralists, language is how social organizations and power structures are defined and contested, and where the sense of self and subjectivity are constructed. The objective of this research is not to identify truths, but to highlight issues inherent in the construction of meaning (Williams 1999). A relevant post-structuralist theory regarding language, power, and social organizations can be found in Foucault's ([1970] 1981) work. According to Foucault, the discourse can be utilized as an efficient mechanism in creating oppression and resistance.

Moreover, experience, expertise, and utilization of language are crucial elements of who is authorized to speak in organizational and cultural settings. Bourdieu (2001) also argues that language constitutes a key concept and a crucial element of dominancy for those who hold the right cultural authority, or *habitus*: "He who clings to the right to speak, he who practically maintains the monopoly upon speaking—is totally enforcing his preliminary inquiry arbitrary, his interests arbitrary" (2005, 99). In other words, language can constitute gender inequity by constructing multiple underlying realities that perpetuate (some) male dominance in organizational and cultural settings.

Nonetheless, by using a post-structuralist feminist approach, we can deconstruct the binary thoughts and processes of the knowing-self, providing otherness (in this case, men and women with voices and sets of values other than the dominant gendered discourse in specific organizations) to promote an inclusive space within the social contexts of Israeli sports organizations (Betzer-Tayar 2013). For example, we might be able to explore the practices and dominant gendered discourse that constructs the barriers that (some) women experience in accessing decision-making positions, rather than identify the truth of what prevents them from accessing these positions (Betzer-Tayar et al. 2015; Betzer-Tayar, Zach, and Galily 2016).

According to Richardson (1994 in Amara 2003), understanding competing discourses as ways of giving meaning and organizing the world makes language a site of exploration and struggle. For example, Lev and Hertzog (2017; Hertzog and Lev 2019) show how gender identity and power relationships in three gyms in Israel depend upon context. According to their study, power relationships within the gyms were influenced by the residential area and discourse in which the gyms were located, and the managers' gender. Therefore, post-structuralism directs us (the researchers) to reflexively understand ourselves as people writing from particular positions (as an outsider, a female analyzing organizations dominated by males, but also as an insider as part of these organizational contexts) at a specific time (a local reality characterized by gendered discourse of gender and power relationships) (Richardson 1994, in Amara 2003). Another example can be found in Lev's work on middle-aged, long-distance marathon runners (2019, 2020). As a male sports-therapist and a former professional athlete, Lev demonstrated the dilemmas and complexity of an insider/outsider researcher and the challenges of executing some degree of de-familiarization. Therefore, narratives of pain and suffering among his male and female informants received social and cultural meanings within the Israeli context of which he is a part. To understand why so few women exist in decision-making positions in Israeli sports organizations, as well as the roles these women play, we used a post-structuralist feminist approach to identify gendered discourses and power relationships to develop key gender-equity policies within these organizations (Betzer-Tayar et al. 2015; Betzer-Tayar, Zach, and Galily 2016).

In our research, we adopted a post-structuralist feminist perspective and used CDA as a methodological approach to understand the nature and impact of discourses around gender equity in two policy examples from Israeli sports. Such an approach allowed us to identify the nature of the voices in the documents we reviewed and the interviews we conducted, together with the nature of the discourses themselves. By implication, we could determine the absence of certain discourses and voices from the material we reviewed.

We developed our exploration of these discourses through what Munslow (1997) and Booth (2004) term a deconstructionist approach to the history of the sociocultural construction of the Israeli State and the sporting domain within it, with a special focus on gender roles. For instance, some scholars found that the discourse of militarization is explicitly and implicitly unique to Israel (Sasson-Levi 2006; Betzer-Tayar et al. 2017). The discourse of militarization is crucial to understand, in order to explore underlying barriers for Israeli women to decision-making positions in civilian society, and sports within it. In that sense, the implicit gendering characteristic of civilian life is expressed in basic Israeli laws that provide equal rights for women: Mandatory Military Service (1949) and the Equal Rights Law for Women (1951). The army ethos, and the deep identification with it as the Army of the People, is structurally rooted in the Israeli psyche. It gives the army great influence in granting direct and indirect privileges to those who serve and command within it, by virtue of their cultural capital (Izraeli 1999).

As a result, women are often socially constrained and excluded from mainstream life, and many aspects of social public institutions, such as the army, political parties and posts, and jobs in industry or the public sector, as well as in the sports domain. One explanation for this exclusion might be that it occurs due to the early strictures in social circles, which often start during mandatory military service for both women and men within different army units. For example, combat units are more related to men's military service, while administrative units are more related to women's service. Army service is central to the Israeli context in a manner that may be difficult to appreciate in other societies (Betzer-Tayar 2013).

Moreover, there is a phenomenon of army language that not everyone can comprehend. Women can find themselves excluded from mainstream discussions, as most combat units consist of men (Sasson-Levi 2003). Lev and Hertzog (2017; Hertzog and Lev 2019) argue that militaristic discourse, followed by machismo and discursively constructed culture, penetrate the gym culture in Tel Aviv and exclude women from equipment and areas that are perceived as male territory. Moreover, Sasson-Levi (2003) claims that women are explicitly excluded from the subtextual conversations. Nonetheless, as men still hold most of the decision-making positions in Israeli society, and because military service is a quasi-universal experience, militaristic discourse becomes the hegemonic language in the public sphere. Once again, women find themselves excluded in the local reality of social circles (Sasson-Levi 2003).

The flow between civilian and army cultures is significant and is almost impossible to differentiate. Kimerling (1993) claims that this mixed civilian–militaristic culture pervades all areas of Israeli society. In that sense, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) equality ethos is implicit in a different reality, in which the army not only preserves civil inequality, but even increases this inequality to maintain the status and power of the controlling elite (mostly males) by selecting and maintaining other social groups in accordance with the amount of loyalty it receives from them (Sasson-Levi 2006). Furthermore, the discourse of women's integration into the IDF is characterized by internal contradictions. On the one hand, women are called to serve in the military. On the other hand, along with this discourse of equality, another discourse differentiates women's military participation and contribution from those of men. Women are construed as "others"; this otherness, however, does not completely exclude them from the collective but subtly reinforces domestic roles.

It is possible to decipher the dual discourses of inclusion and marginalization by which the existing reality of gender order is preserved. As a central institution of both state and patriarchy, the army reconstructs the Israeli male, who serves in combat roles, as the prototype of

hegemonic masculinity identified with good citizenship (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999). This construction of masculinity is a major criterion in shaping the differential discourse of belonging to the state. To place the issue of gender roles and sports, particularly women in decision-making positions in sports organizations, in the wider context of women's socially constructed position in Israel, it is important to understand the discourse on the militarization of Israeli society.

To conclude, military service in the Israeli context influences a range of levels of sociocultural contextual structures, including the sporting arena. To challenge this sociohistorical gendered discourse, we took a deconstructionist approach to investigate history, which is related to the post-structuralist feminist approach we adopted in our research.

Studying the processes and discourse regarding the creation of gender-equity initiatives in relation to specific case studies highlights the barriers to women's access to decision-making positions and how they are discursively constructed. Learning from the narratives and perceptions of different actors allows us to understand and counter historical discourse that promotes such barriers.

Using an alternative methodological approach, this study attempts to explore gendered discourses that are deeply embedded within the Israeli sociocultural context about militarized discourse and might influence women's participation within the political and sporting arenas. To do so, we analyzed our own perspectives and other actors' perspectives, experiences, and narratives. This alternative methodology might help us deconstruct and challenge the gendered discourse regarding women's participation as decision-makers within the Israeli sporting field, rather than offering the reader explicit data, as conventional positivist methodology does.

Chronic of Theoretical Considerations

We aimed to explore the theoretical considerations and steps used, rather than look at the results of the study's research questions, in order to highlight the uniqueness of this approach and make it more accessible to social and gender researchers who want to understand gendered, underlying, local realities. The researchers aimed to uncover the rationale and logic of the theoretical and methodological steps they took to explore research questions. By applying a complicated and somewhat controversial framework in the sense that where social learning theory, for example, identified a clear-cut binary division between a "male" category and a "female" category, post-structural theory explores the socially constructed gendered reality[ies] that might allow for differences among women and/or men, resistance, or choice to be seen and heard by arguing that gender could not be treated as one homogeneous group ("female" in this case); furthermore gender, according to poststructuralist theorists, is not fixed, but variable and changes at different times and in different social contexts (Shaw and Frisby, 2006)

Methodological Context

To move past an explicit understanding and identify how gendered discourse constructs barriers to women's access to the sporting arena, this article suggests using both life-career history interviews and conducting an autoethnographical investigation of the researchers themselves. This approach is consistent with the research epistemology of the post-structural feminist approach. It is worth acknowledging that some researchers claim that gender not only shapes identity but is also an axis of power that plays an influential role in interactions, structures, and processes of sports organizations (Shaw and Frisby 2006). If we assume that gender is an axis of power, an analysis must go further than liberal feminist approaches that suggest that just increasing the number of women in an organization is all that is required to challenge the male-dominated nature of such bodies. Liberal feminist theory largely focuses on increasing the number of women in managerial positions, without changing prevailing discourses, structures,

and operating norms. In so doing, liberal feminist theory only deals with the symptoms, rather than with the causes of inequity. Research informed by liberal feminism fails to acknowledge the influence of gendered discourse and does not encourage a full examination of the assumptions, values, and beliefs about men and women that are deeply entrenched in organizations (Meyerson and Kolb 2000). To realize the complexity of our approach toward exploring gendered discourses, we should understand the worldview of constructivism on socially constructed realities.

Epistemological Overview: Adopting Post-Structuralist Feminist Theory as a Perspective

As mentioned before, this study's aim is to introduce readers to the post-structuralist feminist approach. It is feminist in the sense that it takes gender disadvantage as a central issue, and post-structuralist in that it adopts the view that social realities are socially constructed, as well as mainly represented largely through language and also through other discursive systems of symbolic representation. The nature of these forms of social construction also normalizes certain interests and marginalizes others.

The rationale for adopting post-structuralist feminism also derives from the available literature and the author's own experience. Within the available literature, few researchers in sports and leisure management have adopted a post-structuralist feminist approach to analyze gender equity. Aitchison (2000), Hoeber (2004), Shaw and Hoeber (2003), and Shaw and Penney (2003) are among the rare examples. The literature shows that gender equity has been conventionally theorized (and treated politically) as just a women's issue (Shaw and Frisby 2006; Ely and Meyerson 2000). This perspective is limited in that, if gender equity is a women's issue, then it is their responsibility to address it, rather than that of all organizational members. Furthermore, Shaw and Frisby (2006) noted that liberal feminist theory is limited because it largely focuses on increasing the number of women in managerial positions, but without changing prevailing discourse, socially contextual cultural structures, or dominant organizational values and beliefs.

By using a post-structuralist feminist perspective, we challenge prevailing gendered discourse by deconstructing existing assumptions in the Israeli sports context. We argue that by increasing gender equity for both men and women, organizational performance may be improved. For example, if inequities exclude some executive board members and lower motivation, disrupting dominant gendered discourses or norms may offer alternatives to ineffective work relationships and potentially contribute to successful new actions or initiatives. Post-structuralist social research also treats social realities as embedded in general discourse, which people use in conducting their everyday activities and interactions (Silverman 2004). We applied post-structuralist feminist theory in this research, as it has a key role in shifting gender debates within sociology away from simple social learning theory.

Methodological Perspective: Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research welcomes discourse through in-depth, detailed data that reflect individuals' subjectivity (Cottle 1973). Within post-structuralist feminist theory, that subjectivity provides depth and enables research participants to express the reality[ies] of their lived experiences (Burgess 1984). This is in contrast to the quantitative method, in which researchers' and participants' subjectivities are seen as biases.

In this theoretical article, which is concerned with the in-depth investigation of the experience of men and women in recruitment, barriers, and glass ceilings, the qualitative research method, which uses specific cases, observations, interviews, and document analysis to gather data, is an appropriate strategy (Shaw 2001). This study argues that the researcher can observe and be an insider for unique case studies by using a qualitative method. We sought to

explore gendered discourses through interviews, observations, autoethnographical accounts of the researcher's own experience as an insider, and the narratives of key actors. Ellis and Bochner (2000) advocate this as a form of writing that "make[s] the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right" (2000, 733), rather than seeming "as if they are written from nowhere by nobody" (2000, 734), and pushes their readers to "feel the truth of their stories and to become co-participants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually" (2000, 745). Therefore, this is a standpoint approach that is entirely consistent with the post-structuralist perspective adopted for the study.

Although this study's focus is on the uniqueness of the Israeli sports context, it also constitutes significant conjunctions in terms of efforts to reduce gendered barriers through equity policy and initiative elsewhere. The chosen case studies should shed light on how equity initiatives have been implemented, and some women and men within the organizations explain the processes and the discourse involved in decision-makers' engagement within these particular sports organizations. The research process also explores interviewees' explanations of the importance of different voices in key positions, such as the National Project for Women and Sports in Israel, which allows women to create gender-equity initiatives (Betzer-Tayar, Zach, and Galily 2016).

To gain greater depth in exploring the research questions, we adopted a methodology drawing on CDA, which focuses on interviewees' conceptions of specific organizational reality[ies], practices, and processes in relation to the barriers, roles, influence, and experience of women in key decision-making positions in the two case studies. As noted earlier, we also used autoethnography to complement other approaches, including life stories, open interviews and, in some cases, background documentary analyses. By using such approaches, we can identify meanings, insights, and significant conjunctions for the research questions discussed in the specific cases (Chang 2007).

Data Analysis

Discourse Analysis: "Debate on constructivism and post-structuralism, leads us to consider discourse analytic studies, which 'combine' analytic language proceedings with the analysis of knowledge process and constructions, without restricting them to the formal aspects of linguistic presentations and processes" (Flick 1998, 203). Discourse analysis emphasizes how versions of the world, society, and inner psychological events are produced in discourse. It is normally used to analyze transcripts of conversation from everyday institutional settings, open-ended interviews, or documents (Silverman 1998).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

We chose to use CDA, which focuses on the linguistic aspects of discourse, but takes into consideration broader issues, such as the social context of the discourse (Bloor and Bloor 2007). Furthermore, it does not attempt the type of objectivity that scientists or linguists sometimes claim, but recognizes that such objectivity is likely to be impossible because of the nature of their experiences.

Instead, the researchers are critical of, and open about, their own positions. Therefore, we are using CDA for this research, which focuses on the thoughts of interviewees regarding the organizational processes and gendered discourses relating to the roles of, and barriers to, women in Israeli sports organizations. CDA seeks the deconstruction of the perceptions and attitudes representative of male and female key actors from different sociocultural backgrounds within the Israeli context. As CD analysts, we are interested in how language and meanings construct and maintain dominant gendered discourse. As Bloor and Bloor (2007) note, discourse achieves social goals and performs a role in social maintenance and change.

The CDA used in this study to analyze the interviews, and autoethnographical and background documents, first aims to discover how the designation of self and the other is experienced by men and women from different intellectual, ideological, or political backgrounds. Second, it involves revealing the position of interviewees in terms of their experience within the different case studies.

Furthermore, for the purpose of this study, CDA is part of a general (research) deconstructivist process of Israeli sports organizations in relation to gender-equity discourse, according to interviewees' views or accounts. CDA explores the social, historical, contextual, and organizational structures, and sets of values and beliefs that discursively construct barriers for women to access key decision-making positions. This approach reflects a small, but significant and growing, body of research using CDA in relation to gender issues (Knoppers and Anthonissen 2008; Shaw and Hoeber 2003). CDA is a mirror to detect the binary way of thinking (men/women, ordinate/subordinate), dichotomies (doublings, between-ness), and even ambiguities existing in interviewees' designation of themselves (we, I, and our) and others (such as sports organizations, male values, other women).

Evaluating and Reporting

Warrantability in Discourse Analysis

The basic premise for the discourse analysis is that the social world does not exist independently of our construction of it, so it does not make sense to ask if our analyses are valid, in the sense that they are true and correspond to an independent world. This research suggests that an analysis is warrantable, to the extent that it is both trustworthy and sound. In general terms, trustworthy claims are those that can be depended upon, not only as a useful way of understanding the discourse at hand, but also as a possible basis for understanding other discourses and further work because they are derived from accountable procedures. In comparison, sound claims are solid, credible, and convincing because they are logical and based on evidence from the discourse.

Warrantability is a structure and, like analysis, it rests on shared knowledge. However, this does not diminish the responsibility of the analyst to use warranting as thoroughly as possible (Wood and Kroger 2000).

Trustworthiness and Soundness

The requirements for trustworthiness and soundness are distinguished in terms of process versus product. Trustworthy claims have a theoretical foundation—a set of theoretical and meta-theoretical statements that concern the nature of data, claims, coding, and analytic procedures, and the relationships among them. How criteria should be addressed depends on their nature, whether empirical, conceptual, or sometimes logical. Some criteria are relevant for both trustworthiness and soundness. The criteria are also concerned with different levels, some of which can be either internal or external to the data, the analysis, and the overall work (Amara 2003).

Discussion of trust and trustworthiness in this research takes us further than the discussion of even general rules governing research practice. This is important because, just as moral rules are components of ethical standards, trustworthy behavior often requires the responsible exercise of discretion, which is much more complex than simple rule-following, such as being consistent and discrete in presenting interviewees' conceptions (Whitbeck 1995).

Coherence

Coherence is a criterion that refers to the set of analytic claims that are made about the text. Its application requires an identifiable set of claims. Furthermore, the claims must be clearly

formulated to be coherent. This state of coherence might be applicable to post-structuralist feminist theory (the theoretical claims and their support from within the discourse must be coherent). However, coherence is not the same as grounding, although it does require claims to be grounded (Jackson 1986). *Grounding* is concerned with the relationship between the analysis and the text. In contrast, coherence concerns the nature of the analysis or, more precisely, the entire set of claims made.

Coding and Analysis

A series of coding and categorizing exercises were performed to make a large body of transcripts more manageable. This involves searching through the material for several themes, or nodes, which can arise from concerns on issues relevant to the study focus (gender discourse and female experiences in sports organizations) or from reading respondents' answers.

The mechanics of this process are exercised in the light of the arguments outlined earlier, so that coding is subject to tests of warrantability, rather than validity. Therefore, we suggest an alternative approach to uncover explicit and implicit, contextually structured, gendered discourse that may explain how barriers to women's access to decision-making positions in sports organizations are socially constructed.

To achieve those aims, we constructed two sets of interview objectives. One set was organized under four main, deductively derived objectives (in other words, information on themes originating from the author's definition of relevant information), while the other set was comprised of recognized objectives from the interviews with key actors, which also incorporated three main deductive issues. Although the interviews were organized around these deductively derived codes, the interviews were also designed to allow interviewees to generate ideas or themes themselves.

Data Collection

Choice of Research Sites

The selection of research sites should be influenced by the theoretical argument that gender-power relations are identified through discourse. These key organizational practices were identified as being influenced by: history; women in key positions; gender roles; and masculinity and femininity. The decision regarding which case and research site to focus upon might take into consideration the desire to get in-depth evaluation of data relating to the sociohistorical context and structure of gendered discourse and understanding the processes occurring within that particular sport.

Research Tools

Interviews

Our approach to the interviews was in line with our post-structural feminist perspective for identifying and exploring the fluidity of interviewees' perspectives and changing (non-/anti-) feminist ideologies throughout the process. Our intention with this methodological approach was to uncover explicit and implicit, contextually structured, gendered discourse that may explain how barriers to women's access to decision-making positions are constructed. After the open-ended interviews, it was helpful to pay careful attention to the explicit and implicit cultural and sociocontextual differences between the languages and their meaning in specific contexts. The next step was to identify inductive, emerging, repeating, and accountable

categories within the interview transcripts. The approach to analyzing the interviews was in line with the post-structural feminist perspective adopted in this study.

For the reader to understand the place of the author's autoethnographical account as one of the research tools, it is important to acknowledge that this was also analyzed with reference to similar objectives and categories. This experience inevitably influenced how she approached and conducted interviews, and the deductive categories of information she regarded as potentially significant before going into the interviews themselves. The experience of the current contextual sociocultural reality and experience as a woman or man are clearly important features of the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the research problem.

Data Analysis

Data analysis started by analyzing the author's autoethnographical account:

1. Transcription into Hebrew.
2. Reading and re-reading the scripts to identify passages that relate to the deductively derived themes and to highlight and map inductively derived themes considering macro-criteria, such as ideology (values illustrated by the nature of author's account); interests (of those reflected in the nature of the discourse); differences in descriptions of events from those provided by interviewees; differences in explanation of causal factors concerning the behavior of individuals, groups, or organizations from those provided by interviewees; and any changes over time in the above.
3. Coding and investigating the links/associations between codes.
4. Explaining and translating quotes that illustrate/support arguments into English.

Document Analysis

The importance of background documentary evidence for conceptualizing the current organizational practice was confirmed by providing the basis for interview questions and comparing individuals' views. Documentary analysis is also key in developing a historical dimension to the analysis (Silverman 2004). The influence of key historical events in Israeli sports organizations and individuals' experiences is one of the central theoretical issues of the research. Documentary analysis can provide historical reference and contextual information on current policy decisions and practice initiatives.

With this analysis, we aimed to investigate different perspectives (on dominance, feminist ideology, and interests, for example) of opinions, gender conflicts, relationships, and decision-making processes and events, to identify the main ideologies, values, and gendered discourse that constructed the local realities of gender roles and barriers within sports organizations.

We used the following protocol to analyze the document content:

1. Find the relevant documents for a range of different formal and informal meetings.
2. Identify the appropriate policy documents (to examine decision-making processes, board members' terminologies, arguments, ideologies, perceptions, and reflections on the author's actions or those of others).
3. Examine content consistency over time within and between national policies and the implicit personal values, beliefs, and ideologies of the research subjects and their actions.

Case Study

We argue that case-study strategy deals with gathering the most information possible about a typical, small-scale research entity, such as a gendered group or organization, in a natural setting such as a sports organization. It focuses on individual instances, rather than taking a wide-spectrum approach (Amara 2003). The rationale behind focusing on one or two case

studies, rather than many, is that there may be insights to be gained from an in-depth analysis of central cases that may have wider implications and implementations. The case-study method offers more than other empirical methods because it goes into deeper detail to explain the complexities, power relationships, and (in our case) linguistic aspects of certain gendered situations.

Justification for using autoethnography as a research method: Autoethnography, as Bochner and Ellis describe (1998, 111), shows “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles.” In essence, autoethnography is a story that reenacts an experience by which people find meaning, through which they can reconcile themselves to that experience. It can be further explained as research, writings, stories, and methods that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political realms (Ellis 2004).

While ethnography is a social science, it is also a qualitative research method that describes human social phenomena based on fieldwork. In autoethnography, the researcher becomes the primary research participant/subject by writing personal stories and narratives. The term “autoethnography” is controversial in the sense that its emphasis on the self entails the problematic ethical considerations of the method (Ellis 2007). As a personal narrative is developed, the context and people interacting with the subject start to emerge in the reflexive practice (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Nonetheless it is sometimes used interchangeably with, or referred to as “personal narrative” or “autobiography.” Autoethnography is a reflexive account of one’s own experiences, situated in culture. In other words, autoethnography provides a cultural accounting, in addition to describing, and looking critically at, the author’s own experience, in this case, in the sports organization as the only female member on the executive board.

Autobiographical methods generally carry a strong humanist impetus, in that they provide a means of conducting research that can give voice to the socially excluded (Bertaux 1996). The holistic approach of the biography leads to broader depictions of individuals’ identities, both temporally and socially, within the social network that supports them (Miller 2000). Nevertheless, the concept of *process* has a particularly double-edged meaning within the autobiographical perspective. It is relevant to our case, in the sense that when a person’s life is viewed as a whole, the idea of their career history can be comprehended at two levels. First, the interviewee has their own history of personal development, barriers, and change as they proceed along their life. Second, a considerable period of time passes as they move along their life course. In this respect, “historical event and social change at the societal level impinge upon the individual’s own unique life history” (Miller 2000, 9).

The popularity of the biographical perspective is built on three basic approaches (Miller 2000):

1. The *realist* approach is based on induction. Information is gathered by collecting life histories, and general principles concerning social phenomena are then constructed.
2. The *neo-positivist* approach is based on deduction. Preexisting networks of concepts are used to make theoretically based predictions concerning peoples’ lives in real time. The collection of information centers upon areas of theoretical concern. Issues of conceptual validity are important for this approach. Like the realist approach, neo-positivism also presumes the existence of an objective reality and supposes that the perceptions of the actor and his or her objective represent aspects of that reality.
3. The *narrative* approach bases itself upon the ongoing development of the respondent’s viewpoint during the telling of a life story or a specific experience. Understanding the individual’s unique, changing perspective, as it is mediated by context, takes precedence over questions of fact.

The narrative approach is postmodern, in that reality is situational and fluid. The narrative approach is tightly located in the present moment, and remembrances of the past and anticipations of the future are continually reconstructed through the lens of the present (see Kohli 1981).

Although these three approaches may overlap in many cases, the realist and neo-positivist approaches share a common view of objective truth and hold that the macro-view can be captured by studying the micro-view. The approaches emphasize the tension between the actor's subjective viewpoint and his or her perception of the overarching social structure.

The neo-positivist approach focuses on the depiction of structure and is evaluated by the respondents' reporting of their subjective perception of placement in structure and time. Similar tension can be observed in the realist approach, in which reported subjective perception provides the basic units for generalizing structure. However, the narrative approach, which we suggest is most appropriate to this type of research, is built upon a similar tension, but at a different level. The postmodern view of structure does not see it as a single reality, but as the interplay between actors, who socially construct reality through the power relationships among themselves (Miller 2000).

In that sense, the narrative approach accommodates autoethnographies and other interviewees' career histories. The narrative in this study was based on the unique experiences of the interviewees and the author, and mediated by current contexts, but in relation to sociohistorical discourse. Furthermore, it is interesting to evaluate Wolcott's account (in Ellis 2004) of ethnography as part art and part science as a way of understanding autoethnography's uniqueness. Ellis (2004) suggests that readers can look at autoethnography in terms of its meaning as a form of ethnography. Autoethnography overlaps art and science; it is part *auto* (self) and part *ethno* (culture). Like ethnography, autoethnography refers to the process, as well what it produces. Autoethnography addresses the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. It first looks through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience, and then looks inward, exposing a vulnerable self that may be moved by and through cultural interpretations, as well as refract and resist those same interpretations.

Furthermore, autoethnography seeks to connect the autobiographical and ethnographic impulses. The ethnographic impulse has been characterized as "the gaze outward," as Neumann (1996, 173) says: "worlds beyond [our] own, as a means of marking the social coordinates of a self." The autobiographical impulse "gazes inward for a story of self, but ultimately retrieves a vantage point for interpreting culture."

Autoethnography moves back and forth, first looking inside, then outside, then backward, and forward (Clandinin and Connelly 1994), until the distinctions between individual and social are blurred. Autoethnography is further explained by Ellis and Bochner (2000, 739) as "an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural." In that sense, the story's validity can be judged by whether or not it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is authentic, lifelike, believable, and possible. The story's generalizability can be judged by whether or not it speaks to readers about their experience.

The benefits of autoethnography are the ways in which research of such a personal nature might give insight into problems often overlooked in culture, such as the nature of identity, race, sexuality, child abuse, eating disorders, and life in academia. In addition to helping the researcher make sense of their individual experience, autoethnographies are political in nature, as they engage us in important political issues, and often ask us to consider or do things differently. Chang (2007) argues that autoethnography offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers because its texts are engaging and enable researchers to gain a cultural understanding of the self in relation to others, from which cross-cultural coalitions can be built between the self and others.

This study attempts to reframe the narrative voice. According to Ellis (1997), evocative autoethnography does not question if narratives convey precisely how things actually are, but rather what narratives do, their consequences, and to what uses they can be put. In that sense, female executive members of sports organizations are not a homogenous group. Although many share the same interest in the love of sport, they nevertheless differ in terms of class, race, sexual identity, age, disability, body size, and cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage (Dewar 1993). To some extent, this is reflected in the life stories and experiences of different women and men in executive positions in the Israeli sports context.

The story that follows highlights aspects of some women's and some men's career histories and the author's autoethnographical account, which aims to explore the reality[ies] of their feminist or other types of politics (Clarke and Humberstone 1997), the barriers they might encounter, their perceptions of certain gender-equity initiatives, and the role and influence they had on the processes that led to these initiatives being established. However, there is no intention in this type of methodological approach to universalize or generalize this story to all cases of females in executive positions in Israeli sports organizations, and women in Israel in general. Instead, by using the post-structuralist feminist approach, we sought to explore and understand the sociohistorical gendered discourse constructing barriers for women in the specific case studies within the Israeli sports context.

By using this methodology, we are attempting to tell the story from the perspectives of selected women and men. While writing our text, we made a clear distinction between the dual roles of researcher and subject. Use of a post-structuralist feminist theory allowed us to liberate the research from the boundaries of study validation (in the sense of truth as corresponding to the facts). We are highlighting a particular truth that takes place within a specific set of rules of one local reality, based on unique knowledge (in which validity concerns are replaced by the criterion of warrantability, emphasizing truth as coherence).

We believe that sports organizations, like other social situations and relationships, represent a discourse established between people, based on power relationships. Different experiences constitute different kinds of knowledge, which lead to different socially constructed discourses. Therefore, the autoethnographical texts give us an adequate account from the subject's point of view and help us reveal realities and truths of the self within the organizational culture, from the subject's self-interpretation. In effect, the author's account is judged against how plausible, coherent, and authentic it appears to be. By using an autoethnographic method, we provide opportunities for the readers to identify and learn from these life experiences and perspectives. They may also gain insight into, and an understanding of, their own, and the subject's, life experience.

Concluding Remarks

In light of the foregoing arguments, we suggest that exploration of gendered barriers could be explained through a post-structuralist feminist perspective that allows freedom from the notion of a single truth that frees us to include different voices and narratives. Nevertheless, by using the narrative approach to present autoethnographical accounts and accounts of the interviewees, we are not claiming to universalize the story in all cases of female executives in Israeli sports organizations. Instead, we are presenting the narratives of the author and other interviewees' particular truths, which are specific to a certain reality within a specific organizational culture. Post-structuralist feminist theory sees great significance in how language or discourse is used to achieve social goals and the roles this discourse plays in social maintenance and change within the Israeli sports context, in relation to gender inequities. This realization led us to suggest the CDA methodology, which might assist us in exploring how dominant gendered discourse helps maintain power structures and supports gender inequities.

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