

The National Project for Women and Sport (NPWS): A discourse analysis of gender-based organisation

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to discuss the lack of women athletes and the almost complete absence of women in decision-making positions at any level of sport organisations in Israel. By using the Israeli social-historical setting, an attempt is made to focus on the conceptualisation of the National Project for Women and Sport (NPWS) as a gender equity policy organisation in Israel since 2005, which was designed to challenge the existing situation in which women's sport and women in sport found themselves marginalised at all levels of management and competition.

KEYWORDS: women sport, Israel, inequality, discourse analysis

Introduction: The socio-historical contextual gendered discourse of the Israeli culture

The implicit gendering characteristic of civilian life in Israel is expressed in the basic laws that provide equal rights for women: Mandatory Military Service (1949) and the Equal Rights Law for Women (1951). However, even though more than 60 years have passed since these laws were enacted, there are still wide gaps in society in the areas of ethnicity, class, and gender (Simon et al. 2011; Berkovitch 2001; Halevi 2003). Despite progressive legislation regarding women's rights, Israeli society is still a long way from achieving social and political equality for all its citizens (Halevi 2003; Izraeli 1999). In Israel, nowadays, there is a formal discourse on equity, but it is not yet practiced in everyday life (Hertzog 2006).

Mandatory service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is one of the main cores of male bonding, and although women are also obliged to serve, the majority do not serve in combat units or do annual reserve duty with their former units, as men do, and therefore do not create the strong bonding experienced by many men during, and after, their military service. As a central institution, the army has reconstructed the Israeli male, who serves in combat roles, as the prototype of hegemonic masculinity identified with “good citizenship” (Lomsky-Feder & Ben-Ari 1999; Sasson-Levi 2003a).

This conception of masculinity is used as a major criterion in shaping the differential discourse on the connection to the state. Women often are socially constrained and excluded from the mainstream, due to many aspects of public social institutions such as the army, political parties, jobs in industry or the public sector, and this is also the case in the domain of sport.

In addition to the situation described above, the contextual political construction of Israeli sport may in part explain women’s exclusion from decision-making positions in Israeli sport organisations. Sport in Israel was first assimilated into the ideological framework of Zionism when Zionist parties (in which there were only a few women, if any at all) appropriated sport clubs as tools for partisan competition (Galily 2007; Kaufman & Bar-Eli 2005). Beginning in the early 1920s, football clubs were incorporated into nation-wide sport associations that were affiliated with a specific political organisation: Hapoel which was an organ of the General Federation of Labour (Histadrut); Maccabi affiliated with various bourgeois political parties; Beitar, associated with the right-wing Revisionists; and Elizur, connected to the religious-Zionist party (Ben-Porat 1998). The battle for hegemony between these organisations in many branches of sport delayed the establishment of a national sport policy in general and specifically excluded most women from being involved in the decision-making processes of the Israeli sport arena (Galily & Betzer-Tayar 2014; Nir-Toor 2003).

Therefore, in this research we argue that the historical socio-cultural context in Israel, within which there is a lack of women athletes and an almost complete absence of women in decision-making positions at any level of sport organisations, might have been construed as a set of affairs that nowadays does not necessarily reflect full transparency and comprehension for women. As stated, we will focus on the conceptualisation of the National Project for Women and Sport (NPWS) as a gender equity policy organisation in Israel since 2005, which was designed to challenge the existing situation where women’s sport and women in sport found themselves marginalised at all levels of management and competition.

The paper modestly attempt to use the case study of NPWS and engage in what Sol Tax (1975) called action anthropology, meaning that the paper alone by revealing the power mechanisms could help resolving the gendered conflicts in Israeli sport or at least serve as a catalyst.

The National Project for Women and Sport (NPWS)

The aims of the NPWS were to expand the infrastructure of young girls in sports, to improve sport excellence among female athletes, and to create women’s leadership in sport among coaches and decision-makers in sport organisations. The NPWS has tried to bring about significant changes in women’s sport in Israel (Tamir & Galily 2010; Nir-

Toor 2003), namely changes in the perceptions, views, and participation of women in the Israeli sports arena. The Minister of Education, Culture, and Sport officially declared the establishment of the National Project for Women and Sport in 2005.

The leading group within the NPWS suggested steps towards developing women's leadership in Israeli sport organisations as follows (Nir-Toor 2003): first, the transformation of public opinion in Israeli society toward gender equity, and marketing activities in regards to women in sport; second, setting criteria for success; and third, setting the budget of the NPWS.

This study aims at exploring an innovative policy initiative toward gender equity in sport through discourses between key actors resulting in the creation of the national project for women and sport in Israel, the NPWS. It aims at examining how discourses define and reflect the gendered nature of sport equity policy in the Israeli context, including what occurs within a women-based organisation. In addition, the study explores the barriers women encounter on their way to decision-making positions.

On the method

This study used critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology (Wood & Kroger 2000) to explore and understand how discourse helps maintain power structures and thus supports gender inequities. The main objectives of CDA in relation to gendered discourse were: to analyse discourse practices that reflect or construct social problems, to investigate the perception of marginalisation and barriers of women in Israeli sport organisations, and to increase awareness of how to apply these objectives to specific cases of injustice, prejudice, and misuse of power (Bloor & Bloor 2013). We used a CDA perspective that is 'constructivist, kaleidoscopic, and flexible' (Silverman 1998: 27).

Open-ended interviews were conducted with seven participants. The emerging and repeating themes were identified and inductively sorted into categories. In addition, lists of deductively-derived interview themes were drawn up, including codes such as barriers, perceptions, and gender ideology. The researchers used women's and men's explanations and narratives regarding processes that led to the establishment of the NPWS, as well as documentary sources that highlight or critique the official positions adopted within given organisations/institutions, in particular the NPWS.

In addition, both life career interviews and an auto-ethnographical investigation of the first author's experience were applied. Auto-ethnography was used because the first author of this paper is one of the key figures in this case study, as she was one of the members of the pioneering group of women who worked toward the establishment of the NPWS. This approach is consistent with the research epistemology of the post-structural feminist approach, which sees great significance in how language and discourse are used to achieve social goals and the roles this use plays in social maintenance and change in relation to gender inequities (Butler 1990).

The interviewees

A set of 10 interviews were undertaken with two male and five female responders, three of whom were interviewed twice. The interviewees were all involved in the process of the establishment of the NPWS and with the decision-making procedures in the Israel Ministry of Sport. The family status of the females was as follows: one married with three children, one divorcée with one children, one single mother of two children, and two single women. The age range of the women, Interviewees #1 to #5, was 35 to 55 years. All had academic backgrounds, and all were elite athletes either at the international or the national level. The two males selected as interviewees had different managerial styles. Both held the same powerful official position in a sport organisation. They were not elite athletes but had been involved in their careers in different positions in the sport domain. When the interviews took place, one was two years before his retirement, and the other had just started his new position.

Interviews

The main questions of the interview were as follows: Can you describe your gender ideology? What were your administrative career stages and motivation? Why did you access the sport organisation 'world'? What were your goals? What did you want to achieve, and looking back, did it turn out as you had thought? What kind of support did you need/receive? What barriers did you experience/feel? and What kept you going?

Auto-ethnographical account

The supporting pillar of this study is an auto-ethnographical account, herein called M's account, that represents her story regarding her entry to the Israeli Women and Sport Foundation (IWSF), and during the process of the creation of the pioneering group of the NPWS. M's account was constructed from field notes she took during the process of creating the NPWS project, over four years. It includes some parts of her story, as well as perspectives from events taking place at that time. The account was analysed with regard to the cultural context within which her story and perspectives on the ongoing processes took place. Her story focused on the processes in which she was involved, and which eventually led to the establishment of the NPWS.

Trustworthiness and soundness

By using an auto-ethnographic method, we attempted to provide opportunities for the readers to gain an insight into, and an understanding of, the subject's life experience. Trustworthiness in this research was demonstrated by the authors being consistent and discrete in presenting the interviewees' conceptions (Morrow 2005), and by additional four criteria: a) credibility (in preference to internal validity); b) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalisation); c) dependability (in preference to reliability); and d) confirmability (in preference to objectivity), as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994). We also claimed trustworthiness by attending to the multiplicity of perspectives: every party to research trusts and is trusted. The judgment of warrantability is trustworthiness

and soundness, which is an overall qualitative judgment and not tied solely to any single criterion (Wood & Kroger 2000).

In accordance with the suggestions of others (see for example, Morrow 2005; Silverman 1998) the following steps were taken. The organisation outsourced the research to an outside, neutral, independent research team. Most of the interviews were held in an academic institution far from the pressures and the watchful eye of the field. The interviews were conducted separately and individually, and the interviewees were chosen from different and separate localities. The interviews were open-ended, designed to “bracket” the researcher’s backgrounds and allow freedom and self-expression to the interviewees. A relaxed, “coffee and cake” friendly atmosphere was maintained. The semi-structured character of the interview causes the conversation to spiral off the preconceived path and reach unexpected topics and ideas. The interviews were transcribed verbatim for future reference; the coding was triangulated, (i.e. done separately by the researchers), and sorted by the previously agreed upon quality and quantity of supporting evidence.

The findings

Four main themes and six sub-themes emerged from the ten in-depth open interviews and the auto-ethnographic account that were undertaken. When reading and re-reading the scripts to identify what was said in relation to the deductively derived themes and to highlight and map out the themes, we considered such macro-criteria as: *ideology* – the values illustrated by the nature of M’s account; *interests* – consideration of whose interests were reflected in the nature of the discourse provided; differences in *descriptions* of events from those provided by interviewees; differences in the *explanation* of causal factors concerning the behavior of individuals, groups, or organisations from those provided by interviewees; *changes* over time in the above.

Perception of the NPWS aim

Differences between the males and females appeared regarding their perceptions of the aims and vision of the NPWS. Most members of the founding group viewed the project as a tool for constructing a holistic gender equity policy change. The male interviewees were focused mainly on the need to increase the number of young girls actively participating in sport, as can be seen in the following argument of the male former director:

Promoting women is one of our philosophies... We are going to establish more clubs for women, work on the grassroots (Interviewee #6, 2005).

The women interviewees were more focused on advancing women towards decision-making positions, promoting the fair allocation of resources, or displacing the masculine hegemony that had infused the sporting system and its organisations:

I’m doing it, first of all, out of a great love for sport, and furthermore out of a belief that the advancement of women (in all levels) is most important (Interviewee #3, female executive in the founding group, 2005).

Furthermore:

I wanted to help young girls achieve their dreams – unlike me, who never had the chance to fulfil my full potential, and will always live with a question mark inside me ... (Interviewee #5, Author's auto-ethnographical account).

Personal insights

The decision to quit sport

Although explicitly described by some female interviewees as gender neutral and certainly not an exclusively female experience, the decision to quit was very significant. It was connected to a significant moment in their sporting careers that was related to the feeling that someone or something within the sport system had disappointed them. This experience was related to interviewees who were top elite athletes, world class, or Olympians:

Thoughts on quitting started after the 1992 Olympic Games, when I was ranked in the World Top 10... but the Elite Sport Unit wasn't able to offer me what the army could, regarding a future and actual career (Interviewee #4).

Returning to sport

The motivations of the pioneering group of women to dedicate their time and energy to the creation of a new gender equity policy in Israel were obvious throughout the interviews. One of the main reasons, despite the gender-unfriendly environment, was their commitment to promoting the issue of sport and gender. Almost all the females in the pioneering group had joined it on a voluntary basis. In addition, their motivation came from their passion for sport, which had come either from their experience of successful sporting careers and positive experiences as athletes or as a product of their frustration, as in the case of women from team sports, in terms of gender discrimination in their particular sport:

I'm doing it, first of all, out of a great love for sport, and out of the belief that the advancement of women is most important (Interviewee #3).

Barriers to becoming involved

The "male reservation"

The interviewees reported a variety of barriers. Some of these arose within the different sports authorities/organisations in which 'permitting' women onto the board of directors had not changed the organisation's masculine culture:

People, mainly males that do not believe or do not want the project to work are the main barriers ... those people feel that it is more convenient, from a political point of view, to keep the situation as it is now (Interviewee #3).

The difficulties experienced in entering the sport organisations, mainly by those who were the first to break into the male preserve of Israeli sport, meant that women felt as though mere lip service was being paid when recruiting them to different positions:

However, when I got this job, I was very naïve ... they actually used me as a "silence tax" ... it was convenient for them; I was a woman, a former Olympian (Interviewee #1).

The interviewees who were senior male executives made similar observations when referring to how the organisations' culture constructed the roles of women in executive positions. Therefore, the sub-texts in these interviewees' transcripts reveal how top-level sports' leaders in Israel see women's involvement in sport management:

In most organisations, women were there only as a decoration ... behind their backs, men were just laughing at them (Interviewee #6).

The Israeli sport organisations were perceived by the female interviewees to be male preserves, mainly at the managerial level, dominated by a hegemonic masculinity that seemed to be deeply ingrained in the organisational culture and values:

After the Project for the National Women's Volleyball team was doomed by the male executives in the Ministry, I couldn't continue ... I wanted to leave the job, the office and the people there (Interviewee #1).

According to some of the female interviewees, despite legislation and other external efforts to change the current structures of the executive boards, in some cases, the male members found a way to preserve their domination of the board:

The board in some cases subtly minimised the women's ability to influence change in the decision-making process by choosing two or three members who would be the day-to-day executive decision-making team, within national federations, and the board would merely approve this team's decisions. This arrangement was presented as a way of improving the efficiency of the organisation. However, it also maintained male hegemony among the decision-makers of the sports federations (Interviewee #4).

Gender-based conflicts

The process of the establishment of the national project had created 'a wall' between the male leadership of Israeli sport and the women's pioneering group. It was mainly felt at the Ministry of Culture and Sport, where the only executive female there who was working on the project was reported as being pushed aside by her male counterparts when they felt that the NPWS was about to become a reality. This was most evident when the solitary female appointed to lead the process was replaced, claiming that she led the NPWS project in the wrong direction, and another team, comprised only of males, was nominated.

The woman I chose to lead this project didn't do the right thing ... she doesn't know how to work ... that was when I stopped everything and nominated a two-man team and myself, which would answer the requirements of the Betting Council. I know how it works, as I come from there; they can't mess me around, and I can get the money (Interviewee #6).

The officially approved project cost the equivalent of 2.5 million US dollars annually from the Betting Council and governmental budgets. However, since the stakeholders had not prepared and signed the formal agreements, and due to a number of technicalities, the unit employees were not paid their salaries, and after more than two

years of voluntary work, almost everything stopped. Frustration was a very common feeling among the females who worked for the project. The attempt by some of the male leaders to stop the project from moving forward was on going. Two main themes of discourse in relation to this state of affairs emerged from the interviews: firstly, men were obstructing the NPWS project to protect their own position, and secondly, women were too inexperienced to secure the money effectively from the Betting Council:

This national/public council, or those trying to establish it, the pioneering group of females, don't know how to do it, they are not the right people, they are not professional (Interviewee #6).

The struggle for acceptance – mainstreaming the issue of women and sport

The leading group of females constantly had to confront their rejection for being women. This rejection might be interpreted as fear of the “other”:

I believe that the issue of women building a new project for women was perhaps too disturbing, but I don't think this was the one and only problem ... I do think that the problem was in the acceptance of other and unfamiliar voices (Interviewee #3).

In this account, the traditional “old boys’ club” that is at work in sport sees the Israeli sport arena as its own domain, and therefore denies access to others who may wish to be part of the organisation, and thus maintaining its exclusive hold on the “territory”:

They (women) need to understand the people in the ‘club’; for them, women entering decision-making positions means that some of them [the men] will lose their seats; they don't know how to deal with women (Interviewee #6).

“Cat fights” versus sisterhood

A surprising theme that emerged from our analysis was an implicit struggle between the leading women in the group. Different feminist approaches were presented by the group of women who made the NWPS a “reality” (the pioneering group):

Although all of us were brought together by the same woman and fought for the same goals, the establishment of the project took much time and a great deal of energy. During that time, each of us developed her own way of thinking, and her own perspectives on the situation, for example on how the project should work, her own ambitions, and her own possible solutions for the never-ending story of the establishment of the NWPS, and this eventually split us up (Interviewee #3).

In addition, it was suggested that working non-stop with no actual results brought about cracks in the “wall” of unity among those pioneers.

It is also argued that the differences amongst the leading women in the project led to a deeper crisis of trust, with a fight for recognition that divided the leading group into sub-groups. These struggles were considered by some to be a conflict of ideologies:

It seems that women sometimes prefer to choose compromise, even if it means giving up on ideology; even if it means having to leave a friend ... men won't do that (Interviewee #1).

According to the auto-ethnographic account, this finding was a painful discovery. It seemed that the conflict within the group destroyed some of the beliefs in regards to women's sisterhood. Realising that not all the women were 'there for each other' was a key point of the group fracture.

These feelings within most of the figures in the group led to a realisation that the role of Interviewee #1, a woman in a mid-level of management position in the Ministry of Culture and Sport, may sometimes have been a disruption to the process of achieving changes regarding gender equity, as illustrated in the same leading woman's claim.

Participants' recommendations

Using mentor's guidelines

The findings point towards the use of females to guide young women along the path from young athlete up to the point at which they hold senior positions:

She worked with me for 8 to 9 months ... my mentor taught me all about feminism and its theories ... until I became an official (Interviewee #1).

Establishing a gender equity policy

The expectations of those promoting the NPWS was that a wider implementation of attitude change within the society is required toward women and sport at all levels:

But I'm sure that if there had been three to four women on the board, we could have made a change ... it is difficult, however, to find women who are willing to join sport organisations at this stage ... I have been on the job for many years, I know I tried and did a lot, yet I can't point to any major achievement in changing the hegemonic masculinity in the organisation during that time ... that, perhaps will be the task of the NPWS (Interviewee #1).

Understanding the power relations

It was recognised that the group would have to work with those (males and females) that held very different views on gender equity and on whether/how it should be achieved in sport management and policy. As one of the female leaders of the pioneering group said: 'Yes, we are coming with a positive point of view ... and once we decided that the NFs were partners, we gave them space' (Interviewee #2).

Gender-based network: Is this the answer?

It was also realised by some of the female interviewees that a gender-based organisation might bring the same maladies of power relation struggles, closed-mindedness, and non-acceptance organisational culture, as can be seen in the following argument:

I wanted to submit my name to the bid to become the Chief Director of the Ministry of Sport; I came to her, and she was so negative, she said things

about me that offended me a lot ... it caused a personal break, but also an ideological break, and I told her that (Interviewee #2).

This implies incorporating less homogenised voices and fewer individuals interested in self-advancement, and incorporating others with political-sporting links. Such an approach can be found in different public business sectors, as concluded by Interviewee #1: 'My feminist acknowledgment brought me to realise that if more voices had been heard, the world could have been a better place' (Interviewee #1).

Nevertheless, what all the interviewees accepted in the context of a need for plural voices in sporting organisations was the requirement that women's voices be given a place at all levels of management, and especially in executive positions: 'If we can be four or five in number, nobody will ignore us, or will think of it as a complaint. I still remember the words: "OK ... we heard you"' (Interviewee #1).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore and understand how faulty discourse helps maintain power structures and thus support gender inequities. Furthermore, the objective was to analyse discourse practices that reflect or construct social problems and to investigate the perception of marginalisation and barriers of women in Israeli sport organisations. Themes that were identified included perceptions of the aims and vision of the NPWS, personal insights, barriers to becoming involved, and participants' recommendations.

Starting with the aim of the project, the men had a different focus than the women did. While men thought about athletic participation, women thought about promoting women into decision-making roles. Hence, a potential consequence of maintaining the status quo in terms of culture and values, while apparently addressing the problem of gender equity was evident. Indeed, as critics of liberal feminism argue, getting women into positions of authority is not sufficient for confronting the dominantly masculine values in organisations (see Tong 2013). Since such values perpetuate and, often implicitly, legitimise male interests, merely adding more women personnel without changing the cultures of organisations in the system means that significant and sustainable change may not be achieved.

Perceptions as described above by the interviewee who had been a very senior executive informs one's understanding of the extent of the gender inequities and barriers that women have needed to break through in order to become influential in existing Israeli sport organisations. It also suggests the degree of determination and passion women needed to bring to this task in order to take their place within the organisational structure.

The findings of a number of studies regarding the lack of women in leadership positions in sport organisations, such as that of Pfister (2006), showed that although women and men might report on their sporting organisations as gender neutral, the characteristics or image of the ideal leader were still shaped by overt masculinity.

This conflict was described by the female employee as "the same old news", with everybody saying that it was imperative to promote women in sport, a plan of action adopted by the minister herself. However, when it came closer to "reality" when the men started to understand that a new and powerful project was about to start, the project was backed by a large

amount of money, regardless of their beliefs about the female capability to bring it to reality, the men wanted to take control, and therefore they excluded the leading woman there.

The use of terms such as “they”/”us” with generalisations about the other gender appears in the majority of the interviews and written documentary data. This is, some will say, symbolic of the core of existing discourse in regard to gender issues in the Israeli sport arena. The process of women entering key positions in sport is something that touches the soft core of Israeli sport, by questioning the issues of controlling the situation and feeling needed and a sense of belonging. Indeed, it eventually questions the traditional positions.

Considering the situation in greater depth, this might be interpreted as a personal crisis of faith for the two main leaders of the founding group, resulting from their different perspectives on the project. However, it also may be related to the struggle for leadership of the project, where the perceptions of having been personally insulted to some extent led to a breaking point of the solidarity between the two leading figures.

It has been shown that a mentoring system can be helpful in paving the way to promoting gender equity (e.g., Henry et al. 2004; Henry & Robinson 2010; Nir-Toor 2003; White 1994). A mentoring programme can, of course, sensitise women who are new to the arena to the struggle toward gender equity. It could also be used to foster a sense of obligation and commitment through developing a deeper understanding and exploration of the contextual socio-cultural structures that were responsible for the existing gender inequities in sport. The establishing of a sisterhood can also provide an empowering environment for other women, and maybe for some men. Furthermore, due to the historical socio-cultural structure of sport in Israel, women may need to overcome deeply embedded historical traditions, whereby the military socialisation process and the unique political sporting bodies/parties, such as Maccabi, Hapoel, Elizur, and Beitar, are also involved in the decisions regarding the composition of the sporting organisations. Therefore, the different lists for elections are constructed by and thus reflect the political interests of these bodies. Historically, these organisations consist mainly of men who had previously known one another. They often have met during their army service, through politics, a common hometown, while others may be “friends of friends”. Therefore, most women may feel like, and may be treated as, outsiders in such an environment, as illustrated in the author’s auto-ethnographical account:

I was sitting there ... the only woman. I was ten years younger than most of them, and I didn’t know whether to laugh at their jokes, particularly when they had a chauvinistic undertone ... When I tried to recruit more women and fellow players, they laughed at me and called me the Don Quixote of women’s volleyball (Interviewee #5).

It seems, therefore, that mentors and advisors might be needed in order to help individually help those women involved or who wish to be involved in sport to achieve positions as decision-makers, without prejudicing their own specific voice, perspective, or initiatives.

We argue that in order to change the existing values and culture, women need to take a position that reflects their own perceptions and which might help in directing them to the target of the implementation of gender equity policies. Mentoring programmes are likely to contribute to achieving this.

This acknowledgment (see the cat fight section) points to a significant aspect of our research: a gender-based organisation may bring the same maladies of power relation struggles, closed-mindedness, and non-acceptance, whether dominated by males or females. The same aspirations (implementing a gender equity policy for women by women) as these pioneering women had demanded and for which they had striven, ceased when they were envisioning the project and changed to individualised aspirations (positional struggles) when the project was about to be realised.

Nevertheless, what all the women, and to some extent, the male, interviewees accepted in the context of a need for plural voices in sporting organisations was the requirement for women's voices to be given a place at all levels of management, and especially in executive positions.

It should be noted that at the time this paper was written, it was constructed mainly in relation to M's professional life story and did not focus on her other roles as mother, wife, daughter, *kibbutznik* (a member of a kibbutz), and as a native, secular Jewish Israeli. This was in part because at that time she was less aware of the impact that her personal life story had on its relation to her professional identity and role.

Looking deeper into the later interviews and documents (2008), it seems that only a short time after the project had officially been established cracks started to appear in the young sisterhood that the pioneering group had initiated. The female interviewees had changed their language regarding the united force and friendships among themselves. They reported that there was an undeclared hierarchy among the group during the creative process, as all of them were volunteers and only one, from the Ministry of Culture and Sport, was paid for this initiative. She had received the revolutionary mandate from the Ministry of Culture and Sport to establish the NPWS, and she chose all the women in the group. It was, therefore, accepted by the group that she would be the leader for that stage: 'I remember that we all were enthusiastic about being part of this unofficial group that S established and led' (M's auto-ethnographic report).

Later, close to Day One of the project, the group unofficially nominated another woman from the group as the director of the project, and she started to be recognised by the different sport authorities as the leader of the NPWS.

It seemed that the new "challenger" intended to assume the leadership over the other members and to consolidate her position, as is evidenced by her comments: 'The woman there [in the Sport Authority] has no power to lead or change things...it is a problem for us that she is there' (Interviewee #2).

This impasse influenced the project before and even after it started, mainly during the creation of the project agenda and with the continuing struggle for the division of money at all levels, where other organisations were involved. The project started in 2007, and until mid-2009 there was no longer any sign of the initiating sisterhood. In fact, the entire team, except for the project manager, felt themselves to be outsiders, no longer explicitly involved in the NPWS. M noted in her auto-ethnographical account:

Our dream of creating a revolutionary project for women in sport is vanishing, and I'm standing here and can't help; sometimes I'm so angry and sometimes I'm sad, what direction will they choose? Why doesn't she (the

manager) call us to help? I think she is afraid.

Returning to the informal conversations with those women, they all felt that although they had been pushed aside by their female counterpart, they were still willing to help and rebuild the leading team that had in its early stages shown considerable commitment and determination. It might be explained that as long as men continue to be the majority at all levels of the NPWS and the sport arena, and as long as gender inequities continue to exist, it might be difficult for women who found their way up the corporate ladder to behave differently, as during the process of climbing they needed to confront or to work in conjunction with, this male-based organisational behaviour. For the pioneering group of the NPWS, the challenge of the Israeli sport organisation's culture was a major change that they wanted to bring to the Israeli sport arena.

The vision of this change was to allow women with different behavioural patterns to enter Israeli sport bodies and, even more than that, to allow other discourses, such as comprehension, acceptance, sharing, and cooperation, to become part of the mainstream discourse, and thereby to permit varying opinions and voices to be heard around the table of the decision-makers and at all levels of the organisation. At the end of the research process, it appears that much more work still needs to be done in order to achieve this vision, perhaps including the need for women and men to internalise the codes of the gender equity policy among themselves by learning to work together with colleagues (male and female) who have different views.

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Povzetek

Namen pričujoče analize je razprava o majhnem številu žensk športnic in o njihovi skoraj popolni odsotnosti s položajev odločanja na vseh ravneh športnih organizacij v Izraelu. Z analizo izraelskega socialno-zgodovinskega okolja se poskušamo osredotočiti na konceptualizacije Nacionalnega projekta za ženske in šport kot politične organizacije za enakost spolov v Izraelu od leta 2005, ki je bil oblikovan z namenom spreminjanja obstoječih razmer, v katerih so ženske v športu in ženski šport marginalizirane na vseh ravneh upravljanja in tekmovanj.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: ženski šport, Izrael, neenakost, analiza diskurza

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