



The gendered and sexualized relationship between Israeli women journalists and their male news sources

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the ways in which the interactions between female Israeli journalists and their male news sources are gendered and sexually structured. The article is grounded in feminist critiques of journalism as well as feminist organizational and work studies and it is based on examination of the narratives of individual experiences of 32 female Israeli journalists, working for 10 newspapers. I set forth the attitudes of the male sources toward the female journalists as the journalists perceive them, and then I examine the practices that the journalists adopt in order to cope with these attitudes. Finally, I both set forth and examine the views that these female journalists express concerning the legitimacy of their own practices. The research findings illustrate how gender and sexuality interact in journalism by showing the dynamic character of this process in organizations. The findings demonstrate that gender and sexuality are key aspects of the relationship between the female journalists I studied and their male sources in the Israeli context.

KEY WORDS ■ female journalists ■ feminism ■ gender ■ journalistic practices ■ news organizations ■ news sources ■ professionalism ■ sexuality

Introduction

Studies of news sources in the field of gendered news research usually focus on the text of the news, analyzing it in terms of the fact that journalists tend to rely on white, middle-class, middle-aged, professional male sources and comparing the different ways male and female sources are represented in the news (Carter et al., 1998). The present article focuses instead on the process of producing news. It examines the narratives of the individual experiences of 32 female Israeli journalists who work with male news sources.

In this article, I study the ways in which the interactions between these female Israeli journalists and their male sources are gendered and sexually structured. I examine some of the attitudes of these male sources toward the female journalists as the journalists perceive them, as well as the practices that journalists adopt in order to cope with those attitudes. Finally, I both set forth and analyze the views that these female journalists express concerning the legitimacy of their own practices. The research findings illustrate how gender and sexuality interact in journalism by showing the dynamic character of this process in organizations (see also De Bruin and Ross, 2004). The findings demonstrate that gender and sexuality are key aspects of the relationship between the female journalists I studied and their male sources in the Israeli context.

Gender, sex and work organizations

The idea that gender is a constitutive element of social structure has been enormously influential and it is now quite commonplace to speak of all manner of social institutions and practices as 'gendered'. Considerable attention has been paid recently to the gendering of organizations and occupations (Britton, 2000). Scholars of gendered organizations emphasize how the structure of major institutions, including the workplace, is gendered in ways that usually give men certain advantages over women (Acker, 1990; Padavic and Reskin, 2002).

According to gender scholars, gender is not a distinct phenomenon, inherent in individuals by virtue of their sex. Instead, the social context affects how people 'demonstrate' gender. In one context, people may 'demonstrate femininity', while in another, when the relevant characteristics of the context are power and status, the same people may 'demonstrate masculinity'. If so, gender is a term that describes a series of interactions that characterizes a specific gender (Bohan, 1993).

Researchers studying the relationships between gender and work have examined how 'employers and workers engage in gender differentiation at work by making sex salient when it is irrelevant and by acting on sex-stereotyped assumptions' (Padavic and Reskin, 2002: 14). Acker (1992) further describes gendered organizations in terms of the kind and extent of mental work that individuals perform, and of the interactions between women and men, women and women, and men and men not only among co-workers but also between workers and outsiders such as clients.

Until recently, sociological analyses of work and organizations have paid scant attention to sexuality as an influential factor. One explanation for this

lacuna may derive from the fact that researchers have perceived a contradiction between sexuality and organizational life. Sexuality tends to be seen as part of family relations, the private sphere, while organizational matters are deemed to be determined by economic relations, the public sphere (Oerton, 1996). By now, however, sexuality has entered the realm of the social. According to Adkins and Merchant (1996), 'sexualizing the social' means

the ways in which various aspects of social life – including employment, family life, representations, politics, identities, and the workings of the law and other bureaucratic organizations – are built on, and themselves build sexuality.

Other scholars concur that sexuality takes many forms in organizations and that it must be understood in context as an interplay between organizational control and individual agency (Williams et al., 1999).

Female journalists and male news sources

The number of women in journalism has risen impressively over the past three decades (Chambers et al., 2004; Gallagher, 2001; Van Zoonen, 1994) in many countries around the world. Nevertheless, the notion that some work is for women and other work is for men (horizontal gender segregation) persists along with vertical segregation:

women have not yet reached a critical mass in 'serious' news beats. Moreover, they remain a minority in the top management jobs in news organizations, where a glass ceiling continues to limit women's promotion to key decision-making positions. (Chambers et al., 2004; see also De Bruin and Ross, 2004)

The growing numbers of women at the lower rungs of the professional hierarchy and in areas that demand attractive and youthful women, such as television broadcasting, coincided with key changes in the agendas, styles, and topics of news.

Women continue to face sexism in the newsroom. Men explicitly objectify women in order to undermine their confidence and discredit their professionalism. However, there is little evidence that women have invested much energy in removing sexual banter from the newsroom (Chambers et al., 2004). Female journalists also confront sexism outside the newsroom, when they work in the field with news sources, a crucial element of journalists' work.

From the beginning of political science's interest in journalism, numerous scholars, following upon the heels of sociology and the early newsroom studies, began to focus on the smallest interactional setting of journalism – the source–journalist relationship . . . as a way to consider broad questions about journalistic power and autonomy. (Zelizer, 2004: 150)

Studies on the topic of sourcing established with a wide degree of consensus that the practices surrounding this relationship derived from a symbiotic process in which both parties had much to gain in making news.

The literature about women journalists usually overlooks their relationships with their news sources or does not explicitly deal with it. Since journalists tend to rely on male sources (Carter et al., 1998), the relationship of female journalists with male sources is a notable example of a cross-gendered relationship. Despite the equality-oriented legislation in Israel and women's increasing participation in Israel's labor force, traditional job segregation still exists vertically and horizontally. The representation of women at high levels in different institutions of the state, such as the national parliament and the government, is quite low (12–13 percent) (Israel Women's Network, 2002) and only 13 percent of the permanent soldiers of the Israeli defense force are women (Lieberman, 1995). Since politics and security issues are the two important subjects in Israeli public discourse, it is not surprising that studies of various media in Israel show that most persons interviewed as sources of news are male and that women as sources of news are still a minority (10–20 percent) (Lavie, 2001; Tidhar, 1988).

Fragmentary evidence on the relationship of female journalists and their male sources can be found in historic, biographical, and autobiographical literature, in literature about women who were journalists, and in textbooks about news reporting.¹ These accounts display patriarchal attitudes that male news sources hold in common about female journalists, particularly two basic stereotypes: woman as sex object and woman as weak in character. These same accounts also indicate how such attitudes make it very difficult for female journalists to be integrated into the newsroom, to practice their craft, and to be promoted within the profession.

More systematic accounts of women's contributions to journalism have appeared since the mid-1980s. Typically they focus on women journalists who cover subject areas in which men are dominant: sports and war.² In these areas, sources are primarily male and, until very recently, the social situations (sport competitions and military battles) have been identified with males. That women journalists have, in the past, rarely appeared in these situations reinforces the symbolic meaning of any cross-gendered interaction. Academic studies have consistently demonstrated that male news sources tend to discriminate against female journalists. For example, a 1987 survey among female sports journalists for US daily newspapers indicates that over half of them (58 percent) experienced such discrimination. Almost 20 years ago, women sportswriters reported that they were often denied access to locker rooms, that they were sexually harassed, experienced condescension, and had been threatened physically (Eberhard and Myers, 1988). Interviews a decade later with 19

US women who cover sports news found no significant change: their male sources discriminate against them and most reported incidents of sexual harassment (Cramer, 1994). Similarly, female journalists who covered the Salvadorian war between 1990 and 1992 complained about discrimination, derogatory attitudes, and sexual harassment by male sources (Pedelty, 1997). Women journalists who covered the Gulf War also reported difficulties working with male sources because of their sex (Robbins in Pedelty, 1997).

Interestingly, there is little evidence in the literature concerning female journalists and male sources that any non-derogatory conception is held about women as professional journalists. Studies about female journalists who covered the Salvadorian (Pedelty, 1997), Bosnian (Ricchiardi, 1994), and Vietnam (Bartimus et al., 2002) wars indicate that, despite derogatory and sexist attitudes directed against them by their male sources, some of the women journalists perceived their femininity as being an advantage: it allowed the sources to perceive these journalists as unthreatening and, hence, the sources offered them information.

The study

Sample size and method

The present study focuses on women journalists in print journalism in Israel, where, as in other countries around the world, many women have entered the profession, virtually a male-dominated occupation before the 1970s. Caspi and Limor (1999) indicated that a feminization process in Israeli print and electronic journalism began in the mid-1970s and has been gaining momentum since the mid-1980s. The authors found that 37.7 percent of journalists on daily newspapers in 1996 were women. Likewise, Lachover's (2000) research, based on a survey conducted in 1998, found that 37 percent of those working for daily and local weekly newspapers were women. The increasing number of women in Israeli journalism since the 1970s can be partly attributed to the overall feminization of the work force since that decade. Since that time, public, financial and business services have grown quite considerably. Military and defense-related needs have also expanded resulting in an increasing number of men being withdrawn from the civilian sector, thereby reducing the pool of men available for the civilian economy. Consequently, the participation of women in the labor force has, as a whole, increased, as has the proportion of women in several traditionally male professions (Israeli, 1988). While the print media in Israel have been undergoing a process of 'feminization', they have also been segregating journalistic labor in terms of the status

of these positions, their administrative responsibilities, their reporting specializations, and, not least, their salaries (Lachover, 2000).

This study is based on the semi-structured in-depth interviews I conducted in 1999 with 32 women journalists working for 10 newspapers, including two of the three largest daily national newspapers in Israel: *Yediot Haaronot* and *Haaretz*. *Yediot Haaronot*, the most popular newspaper in Israel, markets the news by emphasizing drama and human interest over sophisticated analysis. *Haaretz*, considered an elite paper in Israel, generally adopts a more serious approach to the news. Eight other newspapers, local weeklies, represent different geographic areas in Israel and the two biggest newspaper chains in Israel round out the sources of my sample.

I selected the interviewees on the basis of maximum variation sampling (sometimes called 'maximum diversity' or 'maximum heterogeneity' sampling). Although this type of sample is not as representative as a random sample, it can be made to be as representative as a random sample if it is carefully drawn. I chose this sampling method since the sample size can be small, as mine was. Using maximum variation sampling, the researcher first analyzes the potential population to assess the maximum range of sites and people that constitute the population. In short, I deliberately chose to interview a widely varying selection of journalists so that their aggregate answers would represent those of the whole population. According to Seidman (1991: 43), this approach 'provides the most effective basic strategy for selecting participants for interview studies'. I drew the sample using sequential sampling (snowball sampling), using only a few respondents among those suggested at each source.

The sample population therefore included journalists (a) working at different newspapers: daily (21) and weekly newspapers (11); (b) at different levels of professional experience: up to two years (11), between 2 and 10 years (12), and more than 11 years (9); and (c) having different job titles: reporters (20), editors (3), and senior reporters and editors (9). This selection of participants reflects the range of categories of journalists in the larger population under study.

Each interview lasted between one and three hours. In order to encourage an open and serious atmosphere, I invited each interviewee to choose the location for the interview. In the newsrooms of two weekly local papers, I conducted a pilot study that included participant observation and unstructured interviews with journalists working there. Based on the pilot, I crystallized the interview plan. I began each interview by asking the interviewee to tell her personal career story. This step provided some of the background information I needed and it also created a communication channel between the interviewee and me. Next, I asked more personal questions that were

connected to the way in which the interviewee perceives her job, her profession, her achievements, and the difficulties she confronts. At that stage, I asked questions dealing with gender issues, such as the journalist's views regarding women's status in the news organization, her view regarding women's status in the profession, and the ways in which gender affects different aspects of her work. I promised anonymity to all interviewees to encourage them to discuss personal and sensitive issues and I tape-recorded all the interviews except one (that person was willing to be interviewed but requested me not to tape-record the interview and, accordingly, I took careful notes instead), transcribing all of them in full. I have changed the interviewees' names in order to preserve anonymity. The interviews were conducted in Hebrew and the translations into English are mine.

Analysis of the interviews

More than one-third of the journalists reported that they now suffer or had in the past suffered from a discriminatory attitude from their male news sources because of their sex. The journalists who spoke about this attitude cover different subject areas of news, not all of which would be considered 'male'. The sources manifest this attitude in two main ways: (a) a sexual harassment that is mainly verbal; and (b) using derogatory language and demeanors that are already unprofessional and often contemptuous. For example, Edna, a senior magazine journalist on a local newspaper, reports that her male sources, especially politicians and public and private organizations' spokesmen, reply to her questions in a derogatory manner in spite of her long professional experience and her good reputation. One source responded to one of her questions by saying: 'Do you know what are you talking about?' The same source did not treat the new male journalist (who she herself had trained) in the same way.

Similarly, Tamar, a chief editor of a big local newspaper, recounts:

Many people that I work with, spokesmen for all kinds of institutions, think they can cheat me more easily if they say to me: *puzi, muzi*.³ They come from such a 'male' background that this kind of behavior is deeply ingrained in them and they perpetuate it. A guy like the police spokesman thinks that if he calls me '*mamale*' [little mama]⁴ three times, everything will be ok. It took him a few times till he saw that it's not ok, and then he stopped. But he tried.

Younger female journalists especially express extensive difficulties with male news sources. Perhaps their youth and often attractive appearance lead male sources to view them more easily in terms of stereotypes. These journalists feel frustrated when the sources do not respond seriously to their questions and

deliberately ignore them. These are some of the behaviors that interviewees described as sexist.

Although the journalists perceived such acts as expressing a discriminatory attitude toward women, they avoided categorizing such acts as sexual harassment, perhaps because explicitly complaining about harassment could harm them professionally. Besides having to cope emotionally, a woman journalist who dares to complain can expect to confront many difficulties as she tries to sustain her relationship with her sources. Although some of the journalists testify that they sometimes confront the harasser, many do not consider their behavior to be sexual harassment per se. Given the discrepancy between experiencing sexual harassment and being willing to recognize specific behaviors as sexual harassment (an ability that depends on a woman's personal vulnerabilities and on her sophistication in recognizing power plays) (Buzzanell, 2004), it is not surprising that these journalists almost never complained about being harassed.

By the same token, the journalists do not usually view themselves as victims; instead, they describe themselves as functioning within a framework of power relationships. Instead of focusing on the personal meaning of the harassment they encounter, they speak of it as a routine event that does not cause them very much discomfort. In fact, they talk about the way that they cope with the harassment, emphasizing their self-control and what they see as their power over the harasser: they can choose whether to react to the harassment or to ignore it. They present their choice as a deliberate decision that follows from their understanding of their needs as journalists (i.e. if their work as journalists requires it, they continue to contact a specific source in order to complete their assignments) and of their emotional ability to tolerate specific events that they would not endure in their personal lives.

Ayala, a senior woman journalist on a daily newspaper, reports:

A lot of my interviewees are chauvinists, and not only interviewees who serve in the army. Do you respond to the term '*Meidale*' [Hebrew slang for: 'Hey doll'] or do you not? If I feel nervous, I respond, and if I really need him to continue with the conversation, I won't respond. It depends on how much I need [the news]. Look, I'll have to get back to him later, you see? It's a bit of a problem. I'm not complaining. I think I win more [often] than I lose.

This journalist presents her decision of whether or not to respond to the harassment as one arising within a professional context, namely that of how she estimates her journalistic needs. She perceives her decision not to react as expressing her strength, since she believes that she gains more from the situation than she loses. It is important to notice that these women do not ignore the political and aggressive nature of the sexual harassment: they recognize it and they do what they can to change its meaning from men's

control over women to women's control over men. By turning the force of the meaning back against the men, these women exert self-discipline: they decide whether, when, and how to respond to the sexual harassment. In other words, the journalists try to break the structure of the existing gendered relationship not by denying the harassment but by acknowledging its presence and thereby taking control of it (instead of responding automatically in any of the more usual ways).

This feeling of strength that primarily characterizes the relationship that the women journalists articulate as existing with their male news sources is the most surprising finding of my study. I analyze it more fully in the following sections, which describe the stereotypes of women that the women journalists use to their advantage as journalists, the tactics with which they deploy these stereotypes, and the resulting ethical problem that they find themselves dealing with: how to exert their power as women in order to achieve their professional purposes.

Three male stereotypes of women

According to Kanter (1977), organizations tend to categorize women by certain stereotypes: as a sexual object, as having a weak character, and as a caring person. The first stereotype defines women in terms of their sexuality. Men judge professional women by their appearance more than by their competence, just as, in the social world, they expect women's appearance and their actions in the world of work to conform to cultural views of femininity. Having a weak character reflects the social view that women are in need of men's protection, as though they are children. This stereotype sees women as less mature than men, certainly as less competent, and/or less capable of making decisions. Finally, regarding women as inherently caring persons is valued as a source of comfort and support for men (Wood, 1999).

However, Kanter's research focused on relationships within organizations. The study on which I am reporting here differs from hers by broadening the focus to include relationships between employees and individuals outside the organization, as well as between employees within it. The picture I found through my interviewees is much more complex. The female journalists to whom I spoke did not passively allow men to define their work in terms of the roles that men tried to impose on them. Instead, these women saw a potential source of power in the stereotypical roles that their male sources wanted to impose on them, a power that would give them sufficient advantage to enable

them to do their work as the professionals that they rightly believe themselves to be.

Woman as sexual objects

Frequently the journalists I interviewed stated that when they realize that their male sources are perceiving them as sexual objects, they become aware of a sexual tension in the relationship that seems to encourage the source to try to impress them *as women* by giving them what they needed *as journalists*. Since women journalists want exactly what men journalists want – as much information or as much distinctive information, as possible – male sources would, in fact, contribute that information in the apparent belief that they will receive something in exchange. Gal, a young journalist on a weekly newspaper, demonstrates the interchange:

I visit the mayor's chamber more often than any other journalist. I arrive at the press conference and he soon shakes my hand, offers me a cake, serves me coffee, escorts me outside to the elevator. Being an attractive woman is advantageous. Something that a guy cannot have . . . As we walk to the elevator, I can wring all sorts of things out of him, things that he didn't mention to anyone else [inside the press conference hall]. So I can't complain [about having difficulties as a woman]. I don't know . . . I've heard all kinds of stories about the failures of city hall [regarding specific matters] that no other journalist heard. Next weekend I have this amazing article that the guy from *Haaretz* [the prestigious Israeli daily] doesn't have. So why do I need to weep? I don't weep.

This journalist's narrative about her sexual advantage is open and unconstrained. Moreover, editors in newsrooms explicitly discuss these circumstances when they recruit women and assign them to professional tasks. Female journalists testify that their attractiveness or that of their associates can affect whether they are assigned to certain news beats, especially those of city nightlife and to crime. The decision-makers in newsrooms make no secret of wanting to capitalize on the attractiveness of these women. Similarly, female journalists testify that their editors have indirectly suggested to them, and sometimes even directly ordered, that they appear in appealing clothing at all their meetings with male sources.

Women as weak

Female journalists, especially younger women, report that, when their male source treats them as weak or as a child, they recognize that he considers them to be unthreatening. They also immediately realize that, from then on, it will be easier for them to obtain information from that source. Men continue to hold this image of women as being weak even when the journalist is senior,

very experienced, and has a good reputation. Such men may consider every male–female relationship to be a relationship between the strong and the weak, and so they behave with gentleness and sensitivity, ‘the way you should treat a woman’. Playing along with this stereotype, even famous women journalists who have already proved themselves to be serious professionals can obtain information that a male journalist with the same record and achievement might not get.

Women as motherly

Although only men attribute the other two stereotypes to women, women themselves attribute the maternal stereotype to other women. Female journalists are willingly do so because this stereotype is based on characteristics that both men and women perceive as positive, while the other two stereotypes have negative connotations. The positive characteristics seem to be that female journalists see themselves interacting with their sources in a generous and friendly (motherly) manner while male journalists interact aggressively. Female journalists are often perceived to have a special talent for encouraging other people to talk candidly while they themselves listen attentively.

Pre-empting the stereotypes for the workplace

The journalists in my sample often consciously and directly exploit these stereotypical attitudes of their male news sources by adopting and mastering tactics that will or can promote their professional aims.

The tactic of flirting

Using the stereotype of being a sexual object, female journalists deliberately create sexual tension with the male source in order to strengthen their relationship with him. Usually the tension is only implied and usually the source initiates it. The women see their part in the game to be that of preserving and cultivating it. Gal, a young journalist on a weekly newspaper, clearly views her role as being passive as she talks about this tactic:

Gal: I didn’t sleep with [him] I think what I did was more flirting with them. I knew how to play with that.

E.L.: What do you mean?

Gal: It means you play all sorts of games on the phone, kind of play to this tension, to be nice. I internalized the message . . . There were men who hinted to me in all directions . . . I didn’t put them in their place because I thought this tension was useful to me. I knew that they will not get what they want. They would not get me into bed with them. It [the flirting] will

motivate them to give me information and to stay in touch with me . . . You cultivate this kind of tension.

The journalists in my study also tend to use a seemingly paradoxical strategy of erasing their femininity at times. They do this by not enhancing their feminine appearance: they do not wear clothes that are revealing or too tight, despite sometimes being encouraged by their bosses to do so. They feel that, in a face-to-face meeting with a male source, they should be careful about their appearance by not dressing in too feminine a way so that the man will not misunderstand their intentions. Galit, a young reporter on a weekly newspaper, describes covering a trial:

In court . . . many people hang around and they are not usually polite. So I wear modest clothes, no undershirt, no heels, pants instead of a skirt, and the pants not too tight. In some way you are neutralizing your femininity a little bit in order to feel comfortable there. Many people [are there], and many people brush against you, because it's crowded, and there are some who deliberately brush up against you. It's not a nice feeling.

Navigating between creating sexual tension and placing strict boundaries on it is good evidence that the feelings of control and power that the female journalists describe are genuine.

Smadar, a senior journalist on a local newspaper, clearly exemplifies this use of sexuality as female power. Although her male source is in a position of strength by virtue of his high social status and his economic circumstances, his stereotypical attitude to women puts him in a position of weakness that she very easily and cynically exploits:

There are interviewees in positions of power. Mostly I like men who have power. It [the interaction] always starts man–woman. I flirt, I flatter his ego. I know men and what works with them. If the interviewee is a man, first of all I flirt . . . I pay attention to personal things: his haircut, his eyes. 'What have you done?' 'What are your successes?' What boundaries do I place? I won't go out with him to drink, not at all. If he falls in the trap and he thinks that because I want to interview him, maybe he'll get something . . . he's wrong.

Some of the women perceived the flirtation tactic as being 'professional': they have adopted it for their work but it is not part of their social behavior outside of work. Others also use it as a tactic in their personal relationships. Only one journalist suggested that she uses this tactic in her private life but not when she is working, because she thinks it demeans her professional identity.

The 'help me' tactic

With this tactic, the journalist allows herself to appear stupid and links her 'weakness' to her lack of experience and to her youth. She thus seems to

denigrate herself and to enhance the power of the male source. Pretending that she does not understand the subject that she is working on, the journalist presents herself as one who needs the source's explanation and guidance. Shlomit, a senior journalist, explains how this tactic works:

I have never *said*: 'Look, I'm terribly dumb; maybe you can explain it to me.' I try to reach him using a smile. 'Please explain it to me . . .'. You apply something that they [the male sources] understand more instinctively than they understand what a woman is doing here. 'Why is she interfering with us?' They *do* understand this: here is this woman, she has this mission, and she must return [to her editor] with an article, so I'll do her a favor and explain it to her. You really need to adjust yourself to what is working.

Using the tactic of childishness, the journalist presents herself, as someone who needs the source's protection in order to diminish the threat that he perceives her to be. Noga, a young but experienced journalist, tells how using this gave her access to places that are usually closed to journalists, male and female both.

The prime minister's chamber is [for] a typically men's gang. I acted completely like a child. After a few times [of doing that and succeeding], I reached the conclusion that the only way I'll get materials [I need] is to pretend. Seven hundred guards used to accompany the prime minister, they would push all journalists aside, but I'd attach myself to [a senior employee in the prime minister chamber], and say, 'Are you taking care of me?' I'd get wherever I wanted [to go].

Mastering the different tactics

Some of the journalists used all the tactics, moving among them as a situation seemed to require, thus proving to themselves their dominance and activism in their relationship with their male sources. The way they discuss their mastery of these tactics also reveals that they themselves perceive it as an expression of power. Lea, a local newspaper editor, praises very highly the skill with which one of her colleagues uses the different tactics to her advantage.

There was a reporter here. She was an ace in that she knew how to play with each [interviewee] any game that would help her milk the source . . . She was very young. When necessary she played the little innocent girl and being vulnerable. . . . When she needed to, she was the beautiful woman, tempting and sexy . . . and she always knew how to move among the different characters, and sometimes she would be two characters at the same time. She was simply . . . I take off my hat, she was a queen.

Analyzing the discourse of the journalists reveals that they choose which character to play on the basis of three factors: first, the characteristics of the source with whom the journalist needs to interact; second, the characteristics of the specific situation; and third, the woman journalist's own personality.

Not all the journalists could play at being every character. Some found it difficult to play one character or another, both because of their own personality and because they do not approve of using the tactic. Ayala, a field reporter, said that in her past she used to play the weak woman very well, especially by pretending to be childish, but that she could not play the tempting woman:

I didn't play the '*Meidale*', but I did play the innocent. . . . 'I'm a girl, I'm not threatening you.' While I worked in the territories⁵ I was mainly the innocent. I must say: for religious men and Arab men, this is the woman's pattern they are familiar with. It was convenient to play [the innocent], but I didn't like to play the '*Meidale*' and the sexually tempting [woman]. I'm just not good at this. I wasn't so good at this as a woman anyway, being courted and all that stuff. I *am* good at playing the innocent. Orthodox and Arab men, whom I used to work with a lot at the time, love it and it opens them up.

Ayala was one of the few journalists who mentioned that she was not good in playing the tempting character either in her personal life or in her professional life.

All these examples confirm that these women are familiar with the full variety of tactics and choose among them, as they need them. Only a few were clever enough or sufficiently self-assured to choose whether to use a certain tactic based solely on what best suited the specific circumstances. Others were unwilling to use certain of the tactics under any circumstances.

When expectations based on gender emerge at the workplace, Nieva and Gutek (1981) call the phenomenon 'sex-role spillover'. Nieva and Gutek focused on the seeming inferiority of women to men in the workplace: since women lack control over how men perceive them, men who persistently view women as sexual objects thereby compel women to feel a deep conflict between their femininity and their professionalism. Furthermore, the process the researchers described does not envisage the possibility that women or men can ever change sex roles. So, while, the relationship between the female Israeli journalists and their male sources seems to confirm Nieva and Gutek's notion of spillover to the workplace, the female journalists perceive their relationship with their male news sources differently. The Israeli women do identify the controlling element in their relationship with male sources but, far from accepting the inferior role that is assigned to them in the power structure, they try to upset it by using the traditional stereotypes to their own advantage.

Unlike the women journalists in my study, women in Gutek's (1989) studies usually do not report intentionally using their sexuality for professional goals. Perhaps the goal of the Israeli journalists differs from that of the women in Gutek's studies, which focused on how women use their

sexuality in winning promotions within an organization. Using sexuality for this kind of bonus is apparently less legitimate than using it as the Israelis did because promotions are a material reward, they are often won at another's expense, and they are highly visible. In contrast, the Israeli women journalists used their sexuality to forward their professional goals, which they perceived as being a legitimate purpose even though indirectly it serves to help them get promoted. Furthermore, getting the most (or best) news does not hurt other employees (at least not directly) and it is less visible than being promoted. Of course, the journalists in my study were not reporting about using their femininity in their relationships with colleagues and superiors in order to gain their ends within their own newsroom.

Another, less prominent strategy emerged from my study: women who blurred their femininity. Women did so by adopting masculine clothing and behavior. Galit, the journalist who earlier remarked about being brushed up against in courtrooms, told this story:

I met someone – a prisoner's parent – and sat with him. She [another journalist who happened to be in the courtroom and observed the meeting] said to me . . . [that] she was hypnotized. She told me that I'm a different person [from the friend she knows]. She told me: 'You completely spoke his language.' I don't smoke but I smoked half a cigarette with him, and I drank black coffee⁶ with him, and we were like buddies from the neighborhood. From the moment I get out of car when I arrive at work, I'm not the same. I'm more aggressive. My boyfriend says that when I return home after working long days, it takes me an hour until I am back to myself . . . After all, I'm a gentle woman. I need this costume [in order to do my job as a journalist].

By blurring her femininity, this journalist appears to want to break the dichotomy brought about by male uses of gender and, in this way, to reduce the tension that women journalists are forced to experience between their feminine values and their professional values. This strategy does not necessarily make the tension easier but only limits its impact in certain cases. Galit adopted a manly appearance in order to express her professionalism but, when one of the male sources speaks of her as 'one of the boys', she feels that her womanhood is insulted.

The legitimacy of using one's sexuality: professionalism versus feminism

Since the journalists expressed their sense of their own power and their confidence by using these strategies in their interaction with male news sources, I expected that they would discuss at length and openly the legitimacy of using them. That was not the case.

The women I interviewed discussed the legitimacy of using their femininity only in the context of using sexuality to achieve professional goals. This

discourse expresses the feminist and professional perceptions of the journalists in my study. From a feminist point of view, these women justify using their sexuality because it allows them to correct the imbalance in the power relations that exist between men and themselves. The journalists compared their tactic of using their sexuality with the tactic that men journalists use with other men: they are 'brothers in arms'. The journalists in my study legitimize using their sexuality because male and female journalists have unequal opportunities in their relationships with their news sources. They seem to have concluded early in their careers that using their sexuality in this (or some other) way can right the balance in their professional relationships. Noga, a senior woman journalist on a national daily newspaper, says:

Noga: I can tell you, as a woman reporter, that I did use my femininity. In my opinion, it was legitimate, because there were other things that I couldn't do. I couldn't sit together with [the sources] in their reserve service and fart⁷, so I had to use something else . . . I used my femininity because I thought that it gave me an advantage over my male colleagues, who have their own advantages . . . I can't tell you that I really liked it.

E.L.: Was it easy for you to play this game or have you acquired this ability over time?

Noga: I closed my eyes and took an anti-disgust pill.

Other journalists in my study justified using the tactic without feeling a need to compare their action with those of male journalists. The women simply seemed to think that this is a 'natural' tool. Smadar, a reporter on a weekly newspaper, says:

I have never had a conflict [regarding using my sexuality]. If you have a man that you must deal with, you want to tempt him; you want to make him tell you his life story in two hours. So what will you do? So I have my own tools for [interactions between] a woman and a man. I don't have other tools; I don't have any other tool, or really anything else. This is what I have, and it works wonderfully.

As these quotations demonstrate, the journalists in my study do not explicitly define the tactic in feminist terms. They neither use the term 'feminism' nor do they cite feminist scholars or activists to justify what they do. Similarly, the journalists do not explicitly mention the argument against them that the use of female sexuality is not a feminist act. Perhaps the level of feminist awareness of the women in my study is low. Nor do the women journalists elaborate on the professional implications of using this tactic. Most of them justify its use so long as it does not replace good professional work. Nurit, a senior editor on a national daily newspaper, says:

It [the sexual tactic] doesn't remove the demand for being prepared as best as she can, or for studying the archive and studying the person and getting to know him

well. But if you arrive [at the interview] with all that, [using this tactic] gives you an additional value.

Noga, a reporter on a daily newspaper, is not proud of using her sexuality in her work but she believes that it is professionally necessary to do so:

I can't say I'm very proud of it. I'd like to meet a woman reporter who would tell me that she had never used [her femininity], or anything else, but I couldn't believe her. I think that, at one time, or another, everyone finds herself behaving in that way.

For most of the journalists in my study, the issue of their relationship with male sources is not so emotionally loaded but three of the younger journalists perceived it as the most difficult issue in their professional lives. For Gal, the reporter on the local weekly, it is the main reason that she decided to move from a job reporting hard news to a job writing features. In her new job of writing for a magazine, she feels less pressure to be concerned with what she calls 'the flirting issue', because the relationships with her sources are for short periods only. From this perspective, one might hypothesize that using one's sexuality in order to better meet the requirements of one's job as a journalist (when one is a woman) is necessary only when one must preserve continuing contact with one's (male) news sources.

Conclusion

I begin drawing my conclusions by pointing out that I found no differences among the female journalists I interviewed in the use of such tactics, no matter whether they worked for daily or weekly local newspapers; no matter their levels of professional experience; and no matter the variances in their job titles. In contrast, I found that the field of journalism in which the female journalist specializes might affect the nature of the gendered and sexual relationship between female journalists and their sources. In the past, men primarily covered crime stories. However, an increasing number of women in Israel have been entering the field of crime reporting over the past few years. Here, too, however, men are the primary sources of information: criminal lawyers, police, jailers, and criminals, all of whom are used to masculine forms of communication. In addition, the usual context for this kind of reporting is identified as 'male': courts, police stations, jails, and the crime situation in which an arrest occurs. Women seem to be assigned to cover crime only when their editors think their gender makes them more likely to get useful information. The interaction between female Israeli journalists and their male sources is a dynamic process. It occurs in a broad range of contexts and circumstances, affecting and affected by the personal characteristics of the female journalists

as well as their male sources. As Oerton (1996: 29) suggests: 'Gender and sexuality are not stable or cohesive elements of work and organizational life, but provide the dynamics upon which power relations are mapped out'.

The feminist theoretician Judith Butler suggests using the term *performativity* instead of speaking in terms of sexual and gendered identity. To her, *performativity* means that gender cannot be understood as a *role* which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self', whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act', broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority (Butler, 1990: 279). If we use Butler's terms to interpret how the journalists in my study interact with their male sources, we can say that, in that relationship, which rests on power and status, men tend to act in stereotypical masculine ways toward the female journalists and, as such, these men provoke the women into acting in stereotypical feminine ways. In the case of Israeli journalists, however, women merely pretend to act in the expected way, by deliberately using the same feminine stereotypes against the male sources in order to achieve their own goals.

My study also reinforces the claim of Williams et al. (1999) that sexuality takes many forms in organizations and that it must be understood in context as interplay between organizational control and individual agency. In the Israeli newsrooms that employed my interviewees, sexuality appears to be a key aspect of any relationship that a female journalist establishes with her male sources of news. Since sometimes Israel is considered to be a sexually discriminatory society (Mayer, 1994), a cross-cultural study that includes Israel might, therefore, provide interesting results.

By almost any criteria, perceiving one's femininity, in general, and perceiving one's sexuality, in particular, as a personal and professional resource is a political act. The journalists in my study can, therefore, be viewed as trying to break down the separation between the private sphere and the public sphere by shifting into the public sphere some practices now widely accepted in the private. This effort confirms Mills' (1989) theory which emphasizes the dynamic character of the gendered process in organizations. According to Mills, women do not take a passive role in this process: they can resist or challenge the existing social forms, beginning with a revolt and ending by creating feminine subcultures that range from establishing women's organizations to creating an oppositional culture, from challenging the law to criticizing the analysis of male dominance in the workplace.

Similar claims regarding sexuality can be found in the literature. According to Oerton (1996), sexuality can offer women workers resources for resistance as well as means for dominance and control. The female journalists in my study do not challenge their male sources directly and overtly. Their challenge

begins by seeming to accept the existing order (Bohan, 1993), even though the journalists then subvert that order by turning male power back against itself. This type of confrontation cannot lead to genuine social change. The female journalists in my study are rewarded by their news organizations employing feminine tactics because they result in obtaining more and sometimes exclusive information. As such, these tactics can prove to be useful to women in achieving their professional goals. Nevertheless, such skirmishes have minimal impact on changing wider social perceptions of how gendered power is or 'ought to be' distributed in society.

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Notes

- 1 For example, see Steiner (1992, 1997).
- 2 For examples of male sexual attitudes toward female journalists in sport, see Cramer (1994); for examples of male sexual attitudes toward female journalists in battle areas, see Pedelty (1997).
- 3 A Hebrew slang expression that means 'flirtatious talk'.
- 4 A Hebrew slang expression that means 'a sweaty'.
- 5 Territories: the occupied areas in Israel.
- 6 Black coffee is more popular than instant coffee among Israeli men, while Israeli women prefer instant coffee.
- 7 In a cynical way, the speaker is saying that she cannot be part of men's activities.

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