Gender Identities in the Israeli Hi-tech Industry: Between Global Pressures and Local Institutions

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Abstract

Based on the study of gender performance in the Israeli hi-tech sector, this paper sets out to explore the doing of gender in a bicultural context, a context that is comprised of two cultural repertoires characterized by divergent and contradictory fundamental assumptions: on the one hand, the new masculine transnational economy, and on the other, Israeli society, with its strong family orientation. The paper demonstrates how by maneuvering and moving between these global and local cultural repertoires, privileged Israeli hi-tech women enact and construct a "new femininity" that simultaneously challenges both the discourse of the "ideal hi-tech worker" as well as that of traditional Israeli femininity. This new femininity, I argue, is grounded in a local translation of the "family friendly organization" discourse.

Keywords: Gender performance, Hi-tech, Biculturalism, Masculinity, Femininity, Israel.

Reprogramming Femininity: Gender Performance in the Israeli Hi-tech Industry between Global and Local Gender Orders

Introduction

The literature dealing with gender identity in masculine organizational and occupational environments is rich with examples of biological women performing a socially constituted masculinity (Ely, 1995; Gutek, 1985; Izraeli, 1983; Kanter, 1981). Among the structural factors seen as affecting this doing of gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987), or gender performance (Butler, 1999), are the gender composition of both the organization at large and the specific working group (Ely, 1995; Izraeli, 1983; Kanter, 1977), occupational characteristics (Bruni et al., 2004; Hearn, 1992), the organizational control system (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998), and the organizational or industrial corporate culture (Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Connell, 1995; 1998; Cooper, 2000). Yet, despite the theoretical recognition of the importance of historically situated cultural repertoires in the doing and performing of gender (Butler, 1999; Connell, 1995; Lorber, 1994; West and Zimmerman, 1987), this cultural variation is not seen as affecting gender performance inside the organization. The effect of a masculine environment on the construction of gender identities seems to be conceptualized either as universal in nature with no cultural variations (at least in relation to the industrialized world), or rather as the homogenized product of globalizing processes in which historically situated cultural differences have given way to a "world gender order" associated with the requirements and rules of the new economy and global capitalism (Connell, 1998). In this transnational economy, "masculine" performances have become an increasingly important requisite for inclusion in and promotion into the higher echelons of the labor market,

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sweeping away cultural differences that may have affected the doing of gender in earlier times (Acker, 2004; Connell, 1998; Tienari et al., 2005; Woodward, 1996). According to Connell, the "world gender order" brought about by the large scale structures of the new globalized economy is one in which a global business masculinity, associated with flexibility, calculability and geocentricism, as well as conditional loyalty and a declined sense of responsibility for others, constitutes the blueprint for the new "ideal worker". But is this "world gender order" the necessary result of homogenizing processes of gender performance in masculine environments across national and cultural boundaries? Or rather, are there local variations in this global order that may be affected by different gender contracts and family orientations in different cultures?

Based on the study of gender performance in the Israeli hi-tech sector, this paper sets out to explore the doing of gender in a bicultural context (Bell 1999), a context that is comprised simultaneously of two cultural repertoires characterized by divergent and contradictory fundamental assumptions: on the one hand, the new masculine global economy, and on the other, Israeli society, with its strong family orientation (Izraeli, 1997).

Considered the seedbed of a "new masculinity" (Cooper, 2000), the hi-tech industry constitutes an extremely masculine environment in which women are welcome as long as they perform as surrogate men (Acker, 2004; Cooper, 2000), in particular by working long hours and making themselves uninterruptedly available to their work team. In contrast to this cultural repertoire, the pro-natalist culture characteristic of the Israeli middle class is such that it expects women to produce and reproduce at one and the same time. Working in some of the best jobs the labor market has to offer, Israeli hi-tech women are thus expected to maintain their high-profile careers in line with the norms of the new global economy, while

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at the same time functioning as mothers who intensively care for their families (at least during after-school hours) in keeping with the expectations of the extra-organizational Israeli environment.

Building on the analysis of focus group discussions in which Israeli hi-tech men and women discussed their strategies for combining work and family, I argue that by maneuvering and moving between these global and local cultural repertoires, Israeli hi-tech women enact and construct a "new femininity" that simultaneously challenges both the discourse of the "ideal hi-tech worker" as well as that of traditional Israeli femininity. This new femininity, I argue, is grounded in a local translation of the "family friendly organization" (FFO) discourse.

1. Gender identities and the bicultural experience in organizations

Most students of gender identities concur that gender should be treated neither as an objective property of individuals that is synonymous with biological sex, nor as universal across organizational settings. Instead, gender is seen as an ongoing social construction, the meaning, significance, and consequences of which vary for individuals and groups across settings (Acker, 2004; Butler, 1993; 1990; Connell, 1995; Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Lorber, 1994; West and Zimmerman, 1987). From this constructivist point of view, gender identity scholars are particularly interested in two closely intertwined processes: the doing of gender, i.e. the "complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures" and the process of "self-categorization", in which individuals in social interactions associate themselves with one of the gender identity groups, and assign meaning to this association

(Cooper, 2000; Ely, 1995). In her controversial work, feminist writer Judith Butler (1990, 1993) puts forward the concept of 'performative identities' that combines the two. For Butler, "the identity categories at the center of women's and men's lives are fashioned through our involvement with, and subjection to, cultural and linguistic codes". Performances on the outside congeal over time to create an illusion of self on the inside (see Elliott, 2001). Performance of self in public has, therefore, an important significance for both the interactive construction of gender categories and the indeterminist self categorization of one into the constructed gender categories.

As well as describing the doing of gender as situational and constantly reproduced, most researchers and theoreticians in the field also agree that they are cast in historically situated societies and bounded by the dominant cultural schemas, ideologies and discourses that sustain their collective definitions, social arrangements, and hierarchies of power.

In earlier works, these cultural repertoires were often viewed as either constructed within the boundaries of the nation state, or as universal (or at least Western or Euro-American. See Acker, 2004; Cerulo, 1997). Yet in the postmodern world, in which dominant social discourses at the national level are constantly challenged by both internal minority groups and external transnational forces, identity scholars are gradually turning more attention to the importance of the 'bi' or 'multi' cultural experience in the doing of gender (Bell, 1990; Bell, 1999). Questions concerning the ways in which movement between two or more cultural repertoires with occasionally conflicting underlying assumptions affects the construction of gender categories have become ever more important. In her important work on the *bicultural experience* of professional black women in the US, Bell traces the compartmentalization of the various components of these women's lives as they try to self-

categorize themselves as both career-oriented and black in an environment in which each part of their identities is subjected to different and often contradicting cultural repertoires. Yet in their analysis of identity construction in different organizational and occupational settings, students of gender in organizations have by and large overlooked this bicultural experience.

Thus, for example, in her widely cited work on the "power in demography", Robin Ely (Ely, 1995) convincingly demonstrates how different sex compositions in organizations affect both the construction of gender identity categories and the process of self-categorization women experience as they attempt to fit into their organizational environment. Ely compares integrative and segregated masculine organizations and shows how in the latter gender is viewed in a more stereotypical way, with senior women tending to view femininity in negative terms and to distance themselves from that identity group. Variations in the ways gender is constructed by different ethnic groups and the way this variation may affect the performance of gender are not discussed (see also Alvesson, 1998; Bruni et al., 2004; Kerfoot and Knights, 1993). Thus, while the doing of gender in all these contexts is grounded in the general cultural repertoire beyond the organization and may vary across class, national, and ethnic boundaries, the way this variation may affect the construction of gender identities within the organization has so far received very little attention in the literature.

This lack of attention to the complex and conflicting effects of the encounter between local (national, ethnic, regional or other) and organizational cultural repertoires is especially problematic when thinking about the doing of gender in the context of the new economy, where more people than ever before simultaneously enact the often contradicting cultural repertoires of both their local identity group (be it at the national, class or ethnic level) and

that of the transnational economic organization to which they belong (Acker, 2004; Sassen, 1991).

The hi-tech world and the new, transnational hegemonic masculinity

In his recent "Masculinities and Globalization," Connell (1998) argues that processes of cultural and economic globalization have effected a new world gender order and a new hegemonic masculinity associated with the leading figures of the global economy, namely, the executives and managers of multinational organizations. This "transnational business masculinity", as Connell calls it, does not require bodily force, so femininity is not excluded on that basis. Rather, it is marked by an increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (even to the corporation), and a declining sense of responsibility for others (except for purposes of image making) (p.16), such that femininity is almost entirely negated on the basis of women's traditional commitment to family care. Today, Connell argues, "the requirements of a career in international business set up strong pressures on domestic life". It is for that reason, he continues, that "almost all multinational executives are men" (p. 10). Thus, while in advanced industrial economies the traditional division of labor between the sexes is being constantly challenged at the national level, it seems that it is being reproduced and reinforced at the transnational one (for a more empirically substantiated analysis, see Tienari et al., 2005).[2] In other words, for Connell, the new hegemonic masculinity at the transnational level is not only reproducing an old traditional femininity, but it is actually reinforcing a type of femininity that may have been losing ground in most advanced industrial societies.

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[2] Joan Acker provides a more subtle version of a very similar argument that gives more space to cultural differences in her overview of Gender, Capitalism and Globalization.

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This conclusion is supported by the few studies that have focused on the doing of gender in the hi-tech sector (Acker, 2004; Cooper, 2000; Wright, 1996). In this context, as it was vividly portrayed by Cooper, a new masculinity has emerged that is different from the traditional US dominant discourse of the "rich, good-looking, popular, athletic, heterosexual man" in many ways. Technical skill and brilliance, for example, "are more important than looks and athletic ability… competition isn't waged on the basketball court or by getting girls," but rather "men compete in cubicles to see who can work more hours, who can cut the best code, and who can be most creative and innovative" (Cooper, 2000). Moreover, unlike the traditional discourse that associates masculinity with being a breadwinner, the Silicon Valley men interviewed by Cooper seem to adhere to a more gender egalitarian ideology. In their words, though not necessarily in their actions, they welcome women into their work environment, sometimes claiming that they would actually prefer a woman candidate over a man whenever they can find one. Nonetheless, according to Cooper, the corporate culture constructed in the Silicon Valley ends up reinforcing the masculine characteristics of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990) rather than any egalitarian conceptualization. Functioning as a key mechanism of control in hi-tech workplaces, which rely on identity based forms of control, this culture associates extremely long working hours and the scarifying of one's extra-organizational and, especially, family life, with both masculinity and the ideal worker. "There's a lot of see haw many hours I can work whether or not you have a kid…" (p. 382).

Demanding these extra-long, irregular working hours from all its workers, as well as frequent and often unexpected trips to answer the immediate needs of supervisors, investors and customers around the globe, the hi-tech sector seems to perfectly fit the picture of the new world gender order portrayed by Connell and Acker, reinforcing the gender regime of

domesticity all over the world (Acker, 2004; Williams, 2000). Domesticity, Williams argues, constitutes a particular organization of market work and family work, as well as conceptions of femininity and masculinity that support breadwinner/primary care giver gender roles. Under global capitalism, Acker (2004) argues, capitalist organizations continue to ignore the needs of their own workers and their families and people in general unless forced to pay attention, either because "a critical need arose for certain labor power or because social movements, responding to crisis of reproduction… either directly or through state intervention challenged corporate power." (p. 26) Since such social movements are less likely to succeed and mobilize state intervention on a global level, she claims, the marginalization of women as care givers in the global economy is becoming ever more aggressive. The hi-tech sector, she argues, is a prominent example of that process (see also Cooper, 2000).

Nonetheless, Acker's analysis allows room for local variations. She herself recognizes that under differing welfare regimes, and given the lack of a certain type of manpower, variation in organizational behaviors may emerge, even within the framework of the global economy. To better understand global transformations, she submits, "connections must be established between local and global or the binaries themselves must be reconstructed. ("p. 22)

The case of Israeli hi-tech women offers such an opportunity to reconceptualize the binary distinction between the global and the local and to discuss the influence of unique local cultural and political characteristics, and of a lack of manpower, on the construction of gender and its social meanings within the context of the new economy.

Israel: between pro-natalism and the "new economy"

In the context of domesticity, in which work devotion and family devotion are conceptualized as mutually exclusive and care is seen as part of the private sphere, professional women are expected to perform a socially constructed masculinity if they wish to identify themselves as ideal workers. To do that, they either avoid having children, or (almost) fully delegate care responsibility to others (Blair-Loy, 2003). Alternatively, they are expected to quit their careers and enact an intensive motherhood (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hays, 1996). Combining professional work (mostly in masculine environments) and active motherhood often means coming to terms with a "mommy track", a less prestigious, and less rewarding career pattern that allows for part-time work (Gerson, 1985; Hochschild and Machung, 2003).

In the context of the professional middle-class in Israel however, childlessness, the full time delegation of care, and quitting one's prestigious and highly rewarding job to care for a child, are all socially frowned upon (Izraeli, 1997).

Since the early 1950s, the Israeli state has encouraged high fertility rates alongside the incorporation of women and mothers in the paid labor force (Berkovitch, 2001; 1997; Izraeli, 1997). Part of the struggle to attain a Jewish majority in the land of Israel on the one hand, and to establish an independent national economy on the other, women's contribution to the public good was formulated in terms of production and reproduction (Berkovitch, 2001; Shafir and Peled, 2002). The rationale behind women's integration into the workforce was not necessarily equal opportunities, but was rather related to the recruitment of potential labor power in order to further the project of nation building. To enable the successful integration of work and caring for one's family, employment sectors were created in Israel

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that allowed women to work full time while still caring for their children in the afternoon. In these sectors, mostly the public service sector and unionized workplaces, middle class women were able to have a career that involved full time work with limited hours, such that they could collect their children from the kindergarten. In conjunction with these labor arrangements, the state saw to the development of a system of subsidized daycare centers for working mothers' children. According to Dafna Izraeli, the widespread gender contract in Israel was one that expected women to do paid labor, but not to have a career. Since the 1970s, however, Israeli public discourse has changed, and the issue of equal opportunities and the opening up of professions and industrial sectors to women has become increasingly important. Nonetheless, the cultural ideal that calls for the integration of motherhood and paid labor has not changed. In line with this cultural ideal, and with the assistance of the welfare policies that have accompanied it, Jewish-Israeli women's fertility rates are among the highest in the industrialized world (2.9 children per woman). A recent survey found that Israelis see the ideal family as even bigger, with an average of 3.5 children. This survey exposed a surprising similarity in perceptions of the size of the desirable family across class and Jewish ethnic groups, and even across differing levels of religiosity (Bareket, 2005). An interesting expression of this cultural ideal and the immense power of the social control mechanisms that encourage the integration of motherhood and work can be seen in the extremely limited presence of childless women in the political, economic and academic elites in Israel (Herzog, 1999). Likewise, a list of the fifty most influential women in the Israeli economy compiled by the prominent newspaper, *Ha'aretz* in 2003, included only two childless women. In comparison, according to Hewlett (2002), about 40% of the women in the top percentile of wage earners in the US have never had children.

It is into this context that the global hi-tech industry has broken through, with all its masculine characteristics. Since the early 1990s, it has become the jewel in the crown of the Israeli economy, while turning the whole country into what industry members affectionately call "Silicon Wadi" (de Fontenay and Carmel, 2004). As early as the 1960s and 70s, it was large American companies, such as IBM and Motorola, that first made Israel into one of their leading development centers, while from the mid-80s the number of international companies operating in the country began to grow. Alongside them, thousands of local start-ups were founded, some of which went on to become independent multi-nationals that are traded on the NASDAQ and compete successfully with the global giants from Silicon Valley (de Fontenay and Carmel, 2004; Teubal and Avnimelech, 2003). The centrality of hi-tech to the Israeli economy can be seen in the fact that its exports in 2000 comprised approximately one third of Israel's industrial exports (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001), and that it employed around 6% of all workers in the country, the highest rate for any industrialized nation in that year (Abouganem and Feldman, 2002). Despite the importance of the Israeli army as a hotbed for hi-tech entrepreneurs and an important base for the construction of the local hi-tech culture, the Israeli hi-tech industry is umbilically attached to its American counterpart. In the 1980s and 90s, many local hi-tech entrepreneurs had previously spent years working in Silicon Valley, and the vast majority of Israeli companies were funded by American venture capital, and were involved in strategic business partnerships with American and European firms. The global masculine cultural characteristics of the hi-tech industry thus have a significant effect on the shaping of the local hi-tech culture; they are further strengthened by the jargon and work norms formed in the Israeli military hotbed (Teubal and Avnimelech, 2003). The emphasis on long working hours, numerous trips

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abroad, and making oneself constantly available for the organization is enhanced when dealing with overseas managers, colleagues, clients and investors who work in a different time zone.

This masculine culture does not prevent women from being incorporated into the hi-tech industry, as long as they enact masculinity. The growing presence of women in military units dealing with technology, and efforts made by the state to support the technological training of women and their integration into the industry, have led to a relatively high rate of women's participation in it. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the proportion of women working in hi-tech, in the broadest sense of the term, was about 34% in 2000, a proportion similar to many EU countries (The European commission, 2001), and significantly higher than countries such as England and Holland. Significantly, according to a survey of hi-tech women (Frenkel, 2004), 98% of those who are not mothers expect to have children in the years to come.

This article, then, examines the gender performance of Israeli hi-tech women as they move between the masculine global culture of the hi-tech world and their local culture, which expects them to combine full time work (though with limited hours) with their active participation in caring for their children in the after-school hours.

2. Methods

Doing gender is always an interactive process. While individuals contribute to this process, it is the interplay and negotiation between their individual contributions within the larger social context that constructs gender (Hollander, 2002: 478). From this point of view the construction of gender should be looked for in everyday interactions, read in relation to

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broader symbolic-cultural domains, and understood as the outcome of mediation and representation work in those domains (Bruni et al., 2004: 411).

To capture this collective human interaction, students of gender performativity typically rely on one of two common methods: participant observation in a specific and limited context (Bruni et al., 2004; Fletcher, 1999; Kondo, 1990), or individual interviews in which the respondent is asked to share her views and describe her and others' performances in a given situation (Cooper, 2000; Ely, 1995). In this study, however, I build on a focus group method that possesses elements of both techniques while at the same time helping researchers to overcome some of their disadvantages (Gamson, 1992; Madriz, 2000; Morgan, 1988; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005).

The use of focus groups is a research technique that collects data through group interaction around a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan, 1996: 130). Owing to their collective nature, focus groups are excellent sites for social scientists to observe human interactions (Madriz, 2000) and the processes by which people construct and negotiate shared meaning while using their natural vocabulary (Gamson, 1992). Participants in focus groups both perform and negotiate their identities in an interactive manner, as well as referring to their own or others' performances in different social contexts.

Compared with participant observation, focus groups offer an opportunity to observe a large quantity of interactions based on a certain topic in limited period of time (Morgan, 1988: 16). They allow the researcher to ascertain to what extent the observed interaction is endemic to a specific organizational context or, alternatively, whether it should be considered widespread in the social context relevant to most participants.

Compared to individual interviews, the clear advantage of focus groups is that they make it possible for the researcher to observe interactive processes among participants. Often these processes include spontaneous responses from members of the group that help the researcher to put her interpretation of the situation in a context that the participants would find adequate.

Data Sources

This study is grounded in the analysis of ten focus group discussions conducted between 2001 and 2004 with men and women who work in the Israeli hi-tech sector and were invited to discuss work-family issues. Groups varied in size from 5 to 17 participants, and all were facilitated by a female leader (the author or her research colleague). Following Gamson's strategy (Gamson, 1992) in recruiting focus group participants, we asked a contact person to organize a group of his/her acquaintances from the industry to discuss work-family matters. We left it to the contact person to decide how to recruit these people, but after observing five women-only groups and three mixed-sex groups, and given the wide literature on the difference that the group's sex composition can make to the type of interactions that occur in it (Ely, 1995; Kanter, 1981), we made a special effort to arrange two men-only groups to control for the sex composition effect.[3]

Five of our contact persons chose to invite their coworkers, often using their firm's intranet communication network to invite people from different departments in the organization to participate. In these instances the group meetings took place at their

[3] It is important to recall that while I see gender as socially constructed, it is constructed by historically situated men and women who are aware of the generally available cultural repertoires concerning femininity and masculinity. Under these circumstances we assumed that sex composition may be an important factor in the gender performance process.

workplace after work hours. Others chose to invite old friends from the industry (often former colleagues). These meetings took place in private homes. Our analysis showed no significant differences in the way the discussion evolved in the different locations in terms of people's reactions and their level of participation.

In both cases the recruitment process took the form of snowball sampling. Since the population in which we were interested is widely homogenous in terms of class, education, and even age, this recruitment method does not create a deeply problematic selection bias. However, the subject itself influenced the likelihood of participation, and our sample thus included more married people and parents than their proportion in the hi-tech worker population in general.

Furthermore, as a result of the snowball recruitment method, our groups had the advantages and disadvantages of some personal acquaintances among the groups' participants. The presence of prior acquaintances may have prevented participants from sharing their most profound and deeply personal emotions and thoughts with the group, but at the same time it quickly generated a friendly and warm environment that encouraged vibrant interactions with minimum involvement from the mediator. In that sense, the presence of acquaintances imitated participants' "natural" environment (see Gamson, 1992 for a detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of this sampling method).

As mentioned above, participants volunteered to take part in a discussion of work-family issues in the hi-tech industry, and were simply asked to share their experiences in managing relations between the two. The issue was purposely not presented in terms of conflict or balance between work and family in order to examine the extent to which conflict constitutes as deep and unchallenged a frame as the literature tends to suggest.

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Group discussions were recorded and notes were taken by a research assistant during the meeting. The researcher also made notes immediately afterwards in order to document important non-discursive events and other impressions. Tape recordings from the focus groups were transcribed verbatim. Participants' names were changed in order to retain anonymity. The transcripts were read in conjunction with the recorded data and field notes.

It is important to note that the original aim of these focus groups was not to observe gender performativity, but rather to acquaint the researchers with the strategies applied by hi-tech workers in balancing work and family, and with the vocabulary they use to discuss these issues, as an initial phase in a survey study (see Morgan, 1988). Furthermore, in the spirit of Acker et al's (1983) call for more "research by, about and for women", we also hoped to provide hi-tech women and men with a friendly environment in which they could discuss the difficulties they experience in balancing work and family in this highly demanding environment, share their idiosyncratic knowledge, and support and empower each other (Madriz, 2000). However, as soon as we started conducting the group meetings, it became clear that for most of the mothers in the groups, balancing work and family is more that just a technical issue; it is a marker of their feminine identity, distinguishing them from their male colleagues. We therefore reanalyzed our focus group data with the framework of gender identity construction in mind.[4]

Data Analysis

When transcribed, the focus group discussions ran to more than two hundred pages. I content-analyzed these data to identify interactions in which participants were involved in gender categorizations, such as defining femininity and masculinity, explaining what makes

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[4] Group discussions took place in Hebrew. Excerpts were translated by a bilingual sociologist with a special sensitivity to the cultural meanings words and phrases may have in the two languages.

one a good mother or father, or laying out the characteristics of a desirable worker in the hi-tech context. These interactions are analyzed here as reflecting the process of gender identity construction and gender performativity.

Attempting to track not only those situated interactions in which gender identities are reproduced, but also those in which identities are challenged and reconstructed, special attention was given to those sayings and expressions that were consensually agreed with – that is, statements that provoked acquiescent nodding and similar stories from other participants – versus challenging performances that stimulated question and debate. Disagreement between historically situated "men" and "women", mothers and childless women, and native Israelis and immigrants, helped expose the process through which a new hi-tech femininity is being forged.

Furthermore, drawing on Butler's view of performances of self as fashioned after the cultural representations of masculinity and femininity that we see all around us in modern society, an attempt was made to identify the different discourses and cultural repertoires on which participants seem to rely while categorizing the world into men and women, good and bad parents, and ideal versus under-functioning workers.

I treated talk and behavior in the group context in a similar way to performances in external contexts that were reported to the group. This was for two main reasons: A) Reports about one's performances in another context should be seen as part of the negotiation over the meaning of social identities in the group context itself. Indeed, reports of gender performance in the workplace often spurred lively discussion in which participants could clarify their view of the "ideal" woman or man, father or mother, or worker. B) Given the collaborative nature of the focus groups under discussion, and the mutual interest researchers

and group participants had in better understanding the work-family strategies available to them, I have no reason to question the reliability of participants' reports.

Given the limitation of our sample and the predetermined subject of the group discussions, it is important to stress that the while the following themes were indeed central in the doing of gender in the group context, and in the Israeli hi-tech context in general, there may be other important aspects of gender performance in the hi-tech sector that went below the radar of this study.

4. Findings

Parenthood as the core of gender performance

The most notable finding from the analysis of the groups' discussions is that the distinction between masculinity and femininity in the Israeli hi-tech world is entirely organized around the issue of parenthood and its influence on what is defined as work devotion.

While other studies of gender identity at work report a variety of gender markers, such as different psychological characteristics, management styles, aggressiveness, competitiveness, orientation to profit or technology, analytical skills, and concern for people's well being (Bruni et al., 2004; Ely, 1995; Kendall, 1999; 2000; Wright, 1996), these markers of gender identity were not mentioned in any of the group discussions. Instead, the issue of parenthood was constantly brought up as the only source of gender difference.[5]

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[5] It might be argued that this finding resulted from the subject matter the group participants were asked to discuss. However, given the open and lively discussions and the many subjects brought up by the participants themselves, and bearing in mind the selection bias in entering the world of hi-tech, and the long socialization many women in this sector undergo in other masculine environments (such as high school and

This construction of gender is primarily articulated in the ways that childless women performed their gender identities, or that mothers described their pre-motherhood performances. Similarly to biological women in other culturally masculine contexts, Israeli hi-tech women describe themselves as enacting social masculinity. An excellent example of this can be found the words of Dina, a single, childless, 29 year old production manager, who portrays the group to which she herself belongs as an exclusively masculine one:

"there aren't any women… certainly not in those kinds of jobs, because sometimes the line goes down and you have to be in at 7 in the morning, and sometimes you have to be available for the evening shift at 8 because problems crop up… because it's really expensive to stop the production line… because a customer in Japan can call you at any time of day or night…" [Dina, Group 8]

In her words, her only association with the absence of women is the long working hours demanded by the job.

In a similar vein, Noa, a mother of two, describes her pre-parental performance:

"I worked every day from 10 in the morning until 11 at night. At first I became the support manager, later on the programming manager, it was meteoric… and also because my partner worked like that, if not even more, I mean, if I stayed at work until 11 we'd both leave at the same time and go out for a drink, or to eat, to do things" [Noa, group 9].

Thus, when describing the pre-parental period of her life, Noa, like most other women in the groups, associates masculinity with long, uninterrupted working hours and depicts her past self as "masculine," working like a man. In the above short extract, she associates her masculine performance with her meteoric promotion, insinuating that as long as she could enact the "ideal worker" like a man, her "biological" affiliation had no social significance in the context of her workplace. This self-categorization and gender

university), one can quite safely argue that hi-tech workers have come to treat gender in the organizational context as associated first and foremost with parenthood and its social significance.

performance fits very well into Cooper's (2000) depiction of the world of hi-tech as adhering to a gender egalitarian ideology. As long as they enact the new man, biological women may be seen as ideal workers and are more than welcome.

Childbearing, however, is represented by most female participants as the turning point in women's, but not men's, gender and work identities. It is around this experience that the cultural repertoire of the Israeli middle class invades the organizational environment and makes these "surrogate men" start categorizing themselves as "feminine", and reconstruct normative femininity in a new was. Noa, who used to work around the clock and would organize her personal and family life around her hi-tech career, describes the change:

> "….And then I gave birth for the first time in 1995, and of course I worked up until the day I gave birth. We went straight from my office to a caesarean section. And I took it for granted that I would take it upon myself to look after my daughter and later for my other children. It didn't cross my mind that there might be another possibility… and at first, for the first 6 months, I didn't work at all, but I saw that that was no good, so I started working for an hourly rate. No matter how much I work, I get paid by the hour. I started with very little, but it grew and grew".

In the US, senior women in masculine environments are described as disassociating themselves from the feminine features associated with motherhood (Blair-Loy, 2003); in Israel, however, they seem to embrace and publicly display a maternal femininity. As expected in the general context of the Israeli middle class, Noa anticipated that as soon as she gave birth she would become the primary care giver for her newborn daughter. Moreover, describing her ex-husband as a "hi-tech tycoon," there were no immediate financial pressures to go back to work. But, in congruence with local cultural repertoires, she also felt uncomfortable with staying at home.[6]

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[6] Note that under Israeli law Noa's employer is forced to keep her job for her for 12 months after she gives birth.

As well as returning to work for increasingly longer hours and, following her employer's wishes, taking on more professional responsibility, in her group performance Noa chooses to emphasize her feminine identity and the difference between her and the other workers. From her words it would seem that this has characterized her performance in the workplace as well. Despite the work hours she actually put in after returning from her maternity leave, working "by the hour" and stressing the differences between her behavior before and after the birth of her child enable Noa to put forward a self-presentation as someone who is adapting herself to the role of motherhood, as expected by Israeli society. "I always told them, I don't want to take on any more, I want to spend time with my daughter in peace and quiet, and then I took on something else".

In some cases, it was not the woman herself who initiated the change in identity. Some participants insisted that it was their employers who forced them to re-categorize themselves. In these cases, an identity shift is seen as imposed by the more powerful employer onto the less powerful worker (Jenkins, 1994). The following is from Yael, a chemist and mother of three, two of whom are twins who were born while she was already working for her present employer:

> When I got pregnant for the second time, which was a complicated pregnancy with twins, I think that's when, I mean, *that they* [her employers] made it *clear that I'm a woman* in a kind of way… [group 6, my emphasis, M.F.].

It is especially important to note here that, as Yael interprets it, her impending childbirth led her employers to change their expectations of her. This interpretation hints that not only female workers but also the Israeli hi-tech organization itself should be interpreted as operating in a bicultural environment in which its managers move between the expectations of the global hi-tech world and those of Israeli society. The renegotiation of

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gendered identity around pregnancy, or even the expectation of future pregnancy, is also

clearly expressed by Orit, a project manager in a large software house:

> When I went into management I started working on a project that was meant to last 8
> months but that went on and on. That happens with lots of projects. I'd already been
> married for some time and was over 30 years old, and each time I saw my boss I
> noticed how she'd look at me, like that, checking me out really well, has she just put
> on weight, or is she pregnant [Group 3].

Note again how the middle class cultural repertoire of Israeli society invades the

global world of the hi-tech sector. Since motherhood is so utterly taken for granted by

professional Israeli women, it is around that issue, even if it belongs in the unforeseen future,

that gender identity issues are negotiated in the workplace. Women expect that giving birth

will transform their work patterns. This assumption is not applied to men, and therefore does

not seem to affect their identity performance. Despite the fact that they have voluntarily

joined a group that was called to discuss work-family issues, and although some of them

presented themselves as being extensively involved in caring for their children, none of the

male participants referred to the birth of a child as a crossroads in their career.

Seeing pregnancy and childbearing as turning points in women's professional

identities and as endangering their performance of the ideal worker is of course not unique to

the Israeli context. The organizational conceptualization of this bodily expression of

femininity as a deviation from the ideal worker figure as imagined in management models

and organizational narratives constitutes the core of Acker's (1992; , 1990) theorization of the

gendered organization. Given its pro-natalist characteristics, what may be unique to the

Israeli context are the unchallenged expectation of all social actors that professional women

will become mothers, and mothers' public emphasis in their professional context of the

transformation they have undergone.

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An expression of the importance of cultural differences regarding attitudes to motherhood among professional women can be found in an event that took place in group 9. In that focus group Sharon, a newlywed, 28 year old website designer expressed her general doubts concerning motherhood, especially in professionally uncertain times when the hi-tech bubble was bursting. A new immigrant from England, Sharon voiced what would seem to be a standard conceptualization of the work-family issue among professional women in her native country. The stormy response of the other, veteran Israeli participants, reveals the differences in the underlying assumptions in these two societies. Moreover, the group's tempestuous reaction teaches us how important and central the issue is to the participants, who interrupted each other so much that it was difficult to gather who was speaking and when.

> Sharon: I'm not sure I want children. Hi-tech doesn't look stable right now and it's impossible to know what's going to happen. I think I need to put all my energies into my work to make sure I'm successful, and if I have a child I'm not sure I'll be able to do that like I should.
> Response 1: No, no, no. Don't think like that. You shouldn't link children to your situation at work.
> Response 2: Don't put it off because of work. Maybe later you won't be able to and it's not worth it.
> Response 3: Yes, don't…
> Response 4: Everybody here has got children, it's got nothing to do with it. We mustn't let work change us on that issue.
> [Group 9]

Bearing in mind that Sharon is relatively young and had only just got married, and noting that the participants in the group were all hi-tech women, their passionate response was surprising. It would seem that it mainly related to the idea of relinquishing childbirth altogether, and the linkage between forgoing motherhood and having a career. While the veteran Israeli women relate to childbirth as an essential and positive stage in their lives that

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is worth highlighting in the organizational world, Sharon sees children as a potential

inconvenience in the development of her career.

A similar, if less emotional response, was aroused by a comment made by another

immigrant that she would be happy to quit her job and spend more time with her family.

Hanna, the marketing manager of a large American multi-national hi-tech company, and

mother of two elementary school children, had migrated to Israel and married an Israeli. She

told the group about her difficulties in raising her children while having to travel so often for

business.

> Hanna: It's only in Israel that even though my husband works in hi-tech and earns
> fine I have to work too. We can't live off one salary. In America it's not like that. My
> sister-in-law, for example, stayed at home with her kids. My brother's salary is
> enough for them to live comfortably. She doesn't run around the world like I do and
> she's got time for the gym and play groups. Lots of times I've suggested to my
> husband that we go back to the States for a few years, but he says to me, have you
> gone mad, raising children there…
> Response 1: It's true, who would want to raise children there? Over there, if you have
> got small children you can't work. Daycare is incredibly expensive. And who wants
> to stay at home with their children all day? I'd go mad.
> Response 2: Your job really does sound too much, with all those trips, but to go back
> home completely is definitely not the solution. What would you do with all that time?
> Hanna: OK, so maybe I'm exaggerating, I wouldn't like to stop working altogether,
> but I would be happy to spend more time at home.

The group discussions clearly show that both forgoing childbirth for the sake of a

successful career, or giving up entirely on paid work in order to look after small children –

the two "solutions" that are usually represented as the acceptable ways to resolve the work-

family conflict in the USA and Britain (Blair-Loy, 2003; Gerson, 1985; Hays, 1996;

Williams, 2000) - are met with strong resistance in Israeli society, even among professional

women, who are constantly exposed to the cultural repertoire identified with the world

gender order. It is equally important to stress that even though Israeli women refrain from

seeing childbearing as interrupting their career, they venerate the differences between mothers' work patterns and those of others. Accordingly, the other women in the discussion group think that Hanna ought to carry on working in the world of hi-tech, but her current job, which takes her away from home so often and for so long, is seen as "too much".

Israeli hi-tech women thus adopt the cultural repertoire of their country's middle class, with its emphasis on the strong link between femininity and motherhood, and the corresponding importance of production and reproduction. However, their working lives in the new economy allow only a few of them to work limited hours, an option available to many women working in Israel's traditionally feminine sectors, such as the public sector. In these conditions, their doing of gender should be understood in terms of the bicultural experience: the movement between the world of hi-tech, which defines the ideal worker in terms of long working hours and identifies this style of work with masculinity, and Israeli society, which defines femininity in terms of limited working hours and allows for active participation in after-school childcare. As I show in the following section, in conditions such as these femininity is defined through an experience of conflict between work and family, and through making use of the work-family practices offered by the organization in order to overcome this conflict.

Doing femininity by embracing the "work-family conflict" narrative

The centrality of the work-family conflict in distinguishing masculinity and femininity is not unique to Israel and has been expansively described in the work-family literature. Indeed, this conflict was the background of sex-differentiation in all the group discussions. Both mothers and fathers expressed the difficulty of maneuvering between work and family, though they all emphasized that it was more difficult for women than men.

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Sentences like, "Of course I drop everything and run to pick him up from the nanny while he puts in overtime, because that's how it is" (Dana, systems analyst and mother of an 8 year old girl, group 8), or, "I really try to get home while they're still awake, but mothers who work with me obviously try much harder" (Natan, development team leader, group 4), were variously repeated in each group. Notably, the significant difference in the way men and women represented the conflict they were experiencing touches on its force and centrality in the participants' identity. While men represented it as a technical problem stemming from contradictory external pressures, most of the mothers represented the work-family conflict as internal and emotional.

This difference is made tangible through the following short discussion about the need to look after children when they get back from school. In both cases the speakers describe the constant conflict between the needs of their workplace and the needs of their family, which ends up with them making the necessary time to spend with their family.

Yonatan, who earlier in the group discussion had remarked how important it is for him to spend time with his children, describes leaving for home at 5pm, something he does several times a week. However, a daily telephone call is needed to get him out of the office: "It's simple, at 5 I pick up the phone and then for half an hour it's, when are you leaving, when are you coming home?" In response to a question about what would happen were the phone not to ring, Yonatan answered, "I would forget myself". Responding to Yonatan's words, Hila, a project manager and mother of two, describes going home to her children in a completely different way:

> Hila: I have a very powerful clock that tells me if I don't go and get him from the kindergarten he'll be there on his own, so I don't have the privilege of staying late at work.

Moderator: and what is it that reminds you? Someone here said that the phone nags him

Hila: My internal clock [group 2].

Yonatan and Hila, who work in the same company, describe a similar situation of leaving work early (in hi-tech terms) in order to meet the needs of their children. During the group discussion they both mentioned that spending time with and looking after their children is important to them and constitutes a meaningful part of their world. In Hila's response to Yonatan's comments, she intentionally stresses the gender difference between them in a situation where it would seem to be unnecessary. The existence of the conflict and its centrality in Hila's life are for her an important identity marker that she wishes to highlight, and not blur, as part of her identity construction. Without questioning the genuineness of the power of the conflict that Hila experiences, the choice to stress it when doing so was not essential testifies to its centrality in constructing feminine identity.

One of the expressions repeatedly used in the groups to describe situations where a mother is unable to attend to her child's needs was, "it tears me apart". Tali, marketing manager and mother of two school-aged children, said:

> "I'm on a trip to Singapore, trying to make my trips as short as possible, running from meeting to meeting. Anyway, I call home when I think the children will be in so I can talk to them for a bit, and my husband answers. What are you doing at home so early? Nothing special, Inbal had a small accident at school and I had to take her to hospital, don't worry, it's nothing really, she's already completely fine. And then she came to talk to me, and she sounded pretty fine, but it still tears you apart" [Group 5]

Tali's account immediately aroused a flurry of stories about similar incidents. Such stories did not come up in the men's groups, nor were they brought up by men in the mixed groups. However, descriptions of the conflict as characteristic only of women and as a marker of their gender identity came up a number of times. Noa, who defined her ex-husband

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as a hi-tech tycoon, bitterly described the circumstances that led to her eventually leaving the industry.

> "I said to him, look, I'm working around the clock and slaving away here, maybe you can come home early one day a week to be with her so that I can work normal hours and go to sleep like a human being. Then he said to me, what's the problem, take a live-in. You don't need to tear yourself apart. And I wanted to scream, a live in? Your daughter needs you. For him it's just a technical issue…"

According to Cooper, sacrificing family life for the sake of professional advancement is part of the construction of hi-tech work as an expression of masculinity, but also part of the demonstration of loyalty to the organization, which rewards the worker with organizational remunerations. Emphasizing the conflict and the sacrifice it implies for women may serve a similar function in stressing loyalty to the organization and its needs despite pressing family needs.

Representing the work-family conflict as internal and deep is also not unique to the Israeli case. In interviews that have been reported in the literature, when free from the social control of other colleagues, men and (mostly) women also raise the issue of the conflict and its deep impact on their lives in other cultural contexts (Blair-Loy, 2003; Cooper, 2000). However, what would seem to be singular about the Israeli case is the way the conflict is highlighted in the professional context and in the presence of colleagues in a way that could affect the speaker's professional future.

While stressing the conflict as a feminine identity marker, Israeli hi-tech women make widespread and ostentatious use of the work-family practices offered to them by the organization in order to manage and regulate the work-family conflict. Before showing how the description of the way that FFO (family friendly organization) management practices

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make up a notable element of hi-tech workers' gender performance, it might be useful to

depict the model in short.

The FFO discourse and related practices

The FFO discourse and its related set of organizational policies was institutionalized

in the US in the 1980's as a response to the failure of affirmative action to bring a gender

egalitarian labor market to fruition (Glass and Estes, 1997; Hochschild, 1997; Kelly, 1999).

Theoretically, the model ties together a set of organizational policies aimed at allowing

workers to better balance their work and family needs, and a more general discourse that, at

least according to feminist advocates of the model, attempts to radically transform the figure

of the ideal worker such that it would include active care givers, who could thus fully reap

the benefits of their professional positions (Rapoport, 2002; Rapoport et al., 1996).[7] Thus, at

the practical level, the model encourages employers to introduce policies such as employer-

sponsored parental leaves, leaves to care for ill family, childcare centers and referral services,

flextime, and telecommuting. At the theoretical level, it builds on the more general discourse

of diversity in order to try and reconceptualize the employee with caring obligations as an

alternative ideal worker, one who is more effective and loyal, and who brings into the

organization abilities and qualifications that other workers do not possess (Kelly, 1999;

Rapoport, 2002; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005).

The broad support for the model from a wide range of groups, such children's rights

advocates, feminist groups, HR managers and the US state, as well as its representation as

making a significant contribution to organizational performance and increased productivity,

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[7] It is most important to note that feminist groups and scholars constitute only one of several social actors involved in the institutionalization of the FFO. For other social actors, such as children's advocates and HR managers, dismantling the image of the ideal worker has not been a major goal (see Kelly, 1999).

have led many organizations to adopt the practical aspects of the model. Indeed, in a 1997 survey of 389 US organizations, Kelly (1999) found that half of the respondents reported that the CEO or top executive of their organization fully supported corporate involvement with work and family issues. Hi-tech organizations were among the first to adopt this model. Seeking to keep hold of and re-recruit professional workers in conditions of a tight labor market (Hochschild, 1997), and wishing to portray themselves as advanced and gender egalitarian, leading hi-tech firms such as IBM, Digital, Intel and others, adopted some of the organizational policies associated with the model. More importantly, they also publicly celebrated their commitment to family friendliness and work-life balance in their web sites and mission statements. Moreover, since some FFO practices, such as telecommuting or even flextime, are technologically related, it was easier for hi-tech firms to present work structures that they were implementing in any case as an expression of their commitment to family friendliness.

The extent of the influence of the radical feminist family friendliness discourse, however, is still debatable, with most critics referring to it as a component in the reproduction of the ideal worker as a man, and not as a factor in its deconstruction (Glass, 2004; 2000; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005) . Since many of the policies associated with the FFO are offered only to women, or used almost exclusively by them, with the result that they have become associated with femininity, critics argue that the model actually helps to reproduce the traditional gender division of labor.

Focusing on the point of view of the hi-tech worker, and not that of the organization itself, this study cannot validly evaluate the extent to which the model has been adopted throughout the Israeli hi-tech sector. Having said that, the high rate at which practices such as

reduced working hours, telecommuting, and flextime are used, as transpires from the

workers' statements in the discussion groups, might provide a good measure for the high

proportion of the adoption of the practices themselves. A further significant indicator of the

way that the discourse is adopted in the Israeli hi-tech sector is provided by Aron's

comments, a human resources manager. In the group discussion Aron displayed mainly

professional interest, and did not reveal many of his experiences at work, despite having

three children of his own. Instead, he interweaves his experience as a father with his

experience as an HR manager in the practices that he offers to women working under him:

> I've got a woman in senior management, the R&D director, she's in charge of three
> team leaders… she's pregnant with her first child. From my own experience from
> home I know that everything you say beforehand, like my wife was saying, yes, I'll
> come back after 3 months, or, I want to spend a lot of time at home… it doesn't
> matter when it comes to the reality of it. Only after giving birth do you know… so she
> can't make commitments to me… and I don't want her to commit now about what
> will happen afterwards. I did say to her, during your maternity leave, if you decide
> that you want, that you think of coming back and that you want to get back into
> things, take a lap-top, start working from home… keep up to date all the time. If you
> decide to take 6 months at home, no problem, we're very open [group 2].

Aron once more exposes the bicultural context in which hi-tech organizations operate.

As VP of human resources in a large international firm, Aron simultaneously draws on his

experience as an Israeli father, or, more accurately, on his wife's experience as a mother, in

order to offer support to a senior manager who is about to have a child. If they reflect the

organization's position, as would be reasonable to expect, his comments also express the

adoption of FFO practices and their perception as taken for granted, alongside a more

hesitant adoption of the radical feminist discourse that accompanies them.

The two practices brought into the discussion by Aron are maternity leave and

telecommuting. In the Israeli context, the senior manager's maternity leave is non-negotiable.

The Israeli welfare state guarantees 12 weeks of fully paid mandatory maternity leave. It is

forbidden to return to paid work during this period, unless the worker forgoes the allowance she is entitled to. The option of extending maternity leave, though without pay, is also recognized by the law, which obliges the employer to keep the mother's position for her. However, while the "ideal worker" discourse means that Aron should have demanded that the senior manager return to work after 12 weeks as an expression of her work devotion, the FFO discourse offers him a normative framework in which he can represent the option of extending maternity leave while making use of telecommuting (taking a lap-top and keeping up to date) as no less an expression of work devotion. In keeping with the FFO discourse, the existence of commitments external to the workplace, especially those to do with one's family life, does not damage the image of the senior manager as an ideal worker. At the same time, family friendliness is blatantly gendered. Aron's offer is made to a woman, part of a minority among the organization's managers, and not to one of his numerous male colleagues, many of whom, like Aron himself, are fathers to children who were born while they were at their current job.

Moreover, in his supposedly generous offer, Aron also draws on a stereotypical conceptualization of femininity, suggesting that a female employee will undergo a transformation around childbirth that will change her from being a senior manager who makes rational decisions on a daily basis, to being a woman who cannot commit to a professional future.[8] There is not enough evidence from the focus groups to determine the extent to which this approach is common in other organizations, though from comments

[8] It is particularly interesting to compare Aron's comments with those of the CEO of a very big multinational company as analyzed by Joan Martin in her article on the suppression of gender conflict in organizations. The senior manager she analyzes also "allows" a senior employee of his to make use of telecommuting technologies so as to carry on working from the maternity ward. However, while Aron's basic assumption is that his employee will be absent for 12 weeks and will then use telecommuting to keep herself up to date, the CEO of this international company expects his employee to use telecommuting in order to carry on working as if she had not just given birth.

made by other men and women, it appears that in the Israeli context it is indeed taken for granted that women will make use of work-family practices, varying only to the extent that they are punished in terms of promotion.

Congruent with critiques of the FFO discourse, its implementation in Israel does indeed reproduce the identification between femininity and caring for the family, though analysis of hi-tech women's performance shows that it is precisely this characteristic of the discourse that makes it a central component in the construction of "femininity" in the masculine world of hi-tech. The following sub-section thus demonstrates how ostentatious and accentuated use of FFO practices at the workplace constitutes part of doing femininity in this specific context. However, in contradiction to the theoretical expectations that this femininity should imply women's marginalization at the workplace, my findings reveal how the FFO discourse allows them to resist such marginalization and to begin sketching out a new femininity, which simultaneously incorporates images of the "mother" and the "ideal worker".

Performing femininity through the use of FFO practices

Having discussed the identification of femininity with motherhood, and having noted differences between women and men in terms of the depth of the work-family conflict that they experience, we come now to hi-tech men and women's attitudes to the use of FFO practices. Gender differences are constructed around this issue in two ways: the very use of FFO practices (frequency), and the complexities of using them. While masculinity is identified with extremely limited use of FFO practices (see also Cooper), and while men

represent them as a simple technical solution, femininity is identified with the broad use of such practices and the multitude of problems that this creates.

A very powerful expression of this affinity between masculinity and minimal use of FFO practices can be found in the comments made by two senior women bio-tech workers, both of whom said that they work around the clock without taking advantage of the FFO practices available in their organization. After talking at length about the long hours they put in at work and the price this exacts from their families, the moderator asked:

> Moderator: So, what does it mean to you being a mother?
> R1: Like fathers (laughter)
> R2: My relationship with my children is like what I would want their relationship to be with their father. [Group 6]

For these two women, abstaining from work-family practices means that their performance is part of the behavioral repertoire associated with masculinity. The laughter in the group and the responses from other participants show that they accept this association between using FFO practices and masculinity.

A few minutes later, the participants of this group were asked what tips they would give to a woman who was about to join the world of hi-tech. The answers to this question also hint at the way the use of FFO practices is perceived as an expression of femininity.

> – I would recommend that she decides what she wants to do with herself… I mean, if she wants to be a careerist or a mother of two. That's the first thing.
> – To decide priorities. What's more important for her, children or work. And if it's the children, then first of all to work until 4 every day, to pick the kids up from the nursery at 4. That's how I see it. And anything that happens, or if the child is ill or something, then the child comes first…
> – First of all to decide what you want, where to want to go with your work. I mean, if it's a career or something completely different, that's a different way of thinking. If it's to bring money home, a salary from 8 'til 4, you get up and go home, you don't care what's happening at the office [group 6].

The first point to notice from this short discussion is the absolute identification of femininity with motherhood. Even though the question asked for general recommendations for women, the immediate answers dealt with mothers. Femininity is expressed through the decision to work reduced hours and to persist in fulfilling the role of the normative mother in Israeli society by caring for one's children when they get home from school. While they accept the contradiction between "career" and family, these three women represent the use of the FFO practice available to them – a shortened work day, in this instance – as enabling them to balance work and family.

However, not all the participants in this group agreed with the first three speakers. The discussion that developed highlights even further the identification between using a range of FFO practices and performances of normative femininity/motherhood.

> R4: It seems too black and white to me, I don't think that a mother who gets home every
> day at 7 in the evening is a bad mother. Obviously. Like, if I was developing my
> career and realized that I'm a bad mother, then I wouldn't be there. Today, I think, in
> our company at any rate, I think you can be a good mother and develop a career,
> because your work can allow that. The firm understands working mothers and lets
> you work from home. For instance, they gave lots of people in our company a
> computer at home.
> Moderator: Does it help, working at home?
> R4: Of course.
> R5: It's a nightmare. Listen, it's great, but your commitment to work is even greater once
> they put that machine in your house…
> R4: You can be with your child and do some work at the expense of your health, at the
> expense of your sleep, and not at the child's expense. So it doesn't hurt the child. It's
> bad for you because you don't rest after 8.30 or 9, when the child has gone to bed. It's
> bad for you. The child goes to sleep, and you go to work. But it's not every day.
> [group 6]

Similarly to working reduced hours, the option of working from home in order to make up necessary work hours is also seen by the participants as an expression of good

motherhood. The sacrifices implied by using these practices – whether it be sacrificing the possibility of promotion in order to be a good mother, or sacrificing one's personal time and health in order to be a good mother and good employee at the same time – are also a marker of feminine identity in the organizational environment. While men sacrifice their family life on the altar of career devotion, women sacrifice their health and free time on the altar of work-family integration.

The motif of sacrifice returns in comments made by Sarah, a technical writer and mother of one, who also describes her use of work-family practices as an expression of her femininity:

> Sarah: Because everyone knows I'm a mother, everyone gives me that legitimacy. If I leave earlier then they take that into account when setting up meetings.
> Moderator: No one complains about it?
> Sarah: They are considerate to me. I pull a face, and I get what I want right away. If I complain about something…
> Moderator: Is that considerateness, or also high regard?
> Sarah: I think I'm highly regarded because of what I do. I don't think anyone would say "very good, very good" if nothing I did was any good, and that they are only considerate because I'm a woman, like, "what can you do, it's hard for her", it really isn't like that
> Moderator: Is the subject of motherhood valued, is it seen as difficult, or it's just that they are considerate?
> Sarah: Yes, I think so. I think they really accept it. Also, I always do what I say I will. I'll never finish something late because my child was ill. That has never happened, and they know it. I proved to them that what I take on I do, and do it on time. So they've got no problem when I come and say that my child isn't feeling well, they've got no problem to say OK, go home, that's fine" [group 1]

It is important to note that Sarah's self-presentation through her use of FFO practices was performed in the presence of her direct boss, Daniel, also a participant in the group. In his immediate response, Daniel backed up Sarah's presentation of self as a good worker but provided an important addition to her self-conceptualization by saying, "Sarah is very responsible, I try and get her out of the office, so she'll go home and be with her kid, but she

says, no, no, I've got to finish this." Daniel's words hint that his high appreciation of her is

grounded in the fact that her use of FFO practices is taken for granted. If she refrains from

making use of the benefits her organization offers her, she is seen as sacrificing other needs

in the name of devotion to her work.

Sarah's comments right after this further strengthen the identification between

femininity and broad usage of FFO practices, as she rails against the fact that men are not

allowed, normatively speaking, to make use of them.

> Mostly it's difficult for men… [my husband] shares responsibility at home completely equally with me, but it's easier for me to get legitimacy because I'm a woman. And they don't understand, what do you mean, a man, let his wife do it, let her be there. It's harder to accept [group 1].

The emphasis on the use of FFO practices as an expression of good motherhood, but

also as a measure of the high esteem in which the worker is held by her organization, can

also be seen in remarks made by Donna, a marketing manager who, according to her own

narrative, got her job in hi-tech by presenting herself as an "ideal worker" despite being a

mother. Her wide use of FFO practices after the birth of her second child is seen by her as

proof of her employers' high regard of her:

> "After I had my second child I was ready to resign so I could look for a position that would suit me in terms of raising my kids. And they persuaded me to stay and I got carried away with the idea that they would promote me to a more senior position and make me sales manager for Asia. I drew up a list of conditions, but I didn't expect them to agree. But, to my surprise, they did, and I actually worked from home until my child was 1, and I got to the office whenever I could" [Group 8].

In her self-presentation as someone who was prepared to give up a senior position in

order to raise her children, Donna enacts femininity in keeping with the repertoire of the

Israeli middle class, which sees full time work, though not in a demanding career, as

normative behavior. When, according to her perception, her employers enable her to fulfill

this normative femininity and use FFO practices to develop her career, she sees the opportunity given to her as an expression of their esteem.

However, gender performance goes beyond the use of FFO practices and includes the way in which they are used as well.

In the world of hi-tech, some practices that can be considered part of the FFO are actually available to all workers, whether or not they are subjected to family pressures. Thus, for instance, flextime is a practice available to very many hi-tech workers, as is the option of undertaking certain tasks at home. However, the ways that men and women present their use of such practices and their meaning in defining parental identity are utterly different. A notable example is that while most mothers take advantage of flextime to arrive at the office early in the morning (sometimes as early as 5.30 or 6am), which allows them to leave early enough in order to spend the afternoon with their children, many childless workers and fathers use the practice to arrive at work late. The following exchange is from group 4:

> Miri: I'm lucky that we have flextime here. I get to the office at 6, 6.30, at least that's the idea, it depends if I can drag myself out of bed. So at 3, 3.30 in the afternoon I've already done my 9 hours' work and I get to pick up my children from childcare. The morning hours are the best, there's no one here to drive you crazy and I get so much done. But of course when my boss arrives at 10.30, 11, and sees me leaving at 3.30, to him it doesn't really look like I'm working. On the other hand, by the time I get to my children in the afternoon I'm a rag. I mean, I got up at 5 and as far as I'm concerned it's already late in the evening.
> Uri: Flextime is also very significant for the time I can spend with my children. My wife leaves really early, so I get the kids ready in the morning and drop them off at the nursery, then I stop for a coffee and avoid the morning traffic. No one needs me there before 10 anyway, and I stay late so I can be involved when the offices open in the states.
> Miri: Yes, that's what my boss does as well. I wish I could have a relaxing cup of coffee in the morning and that someone else would pick up my kids while I'm on the phone to America. As it is, I have to make all my calls from my cell phone with the kids screaming in the back seat. I'm sure the boss in America doesn't think it's very professional.

A further difference in the way men and women employ the same practice in different ways can be seen in descriptions of how people work from home. One of the characteristics of the hi-tech industry is wirelessness, that is, the ability to work anywhere at any time. While the option of telecommuting is often presented by Israeli hi-tech workers as a work-family practice that allows parents to spend more time with their children without that affecting their complete devotion to the workplace, wirelessness also serves to allow full communication with people in different time zones. Both men and women describe their work from home after regular hours as a demonstration of their work devotion and something which raises their value as workers. For instance, Dorit, an informationist in a large hi-tech company and mother to five year old twins, said:

> I was nearly fired because I work until 3 in the afternoon, even though I'd make up the hours at home at night, and my boss, who is also a mother, and my age, she told them, but you know she works at night, you see the emails she sends at 1 in the morning, that's what saved me at that point. [Group 9]

However, men and women's descriptions of working at home are completely different. Sarah (mother of one), who only works from home during periods of exceptional pressure at work, said:

> Sometimes I work with my child on my lap, banging on the keyboard and pulling the cables, breaking the disks. I don't do it much, but there are periods of pressure, and I have to go home to pick up the children from the kindergarten, and it's difficult, and they don't like it… [Group 1]

Compare this to Moshe (father of two), who described the way he works from home in an entirely different and conflict-free fashion:

> I work at home when I need to, if there's something overseas, different times… I've got a study, I've got a computer, I'm online, I do what I need. I close the door behind me and I'm at work… [Group 1]

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While most of the women participants in the focus groups described working from home (after regular office hours) as a necessity which involved conflicts with their children and physical difficulties to do with tiredness, most of the men described it as a simple and conflict-free process (see the above extract describing telecommuting as a "nightmare"). Having been asked whether anyone at home complains about work coming at the expense of time spent with his children, Leo (father of two) answered: "No, that goes with the job, what are you talking about…" [group 1].

In her depiction of masculinity in Silicon Valley, Cooper argues that "the successful enactment of this masculinity involves displaying one's exhaustion physically and verbally in order to convey the depth of one's commitment, stamina and virility" (Cooper, 2000: 383). In the context of Israeli hi-tech, it seems, the successful enactment of femininity involves displaying similar levels of exhaustion as a result of attempting to integrate good motherhood and ideal hi-tech work.

It is crucial to stress here that the claim that there is an element of gender performance in the public enactment of the difficulties of integrating work and family is in no way meant to take away from the very real difficulties experienced by men and women who are deeply committed to both their family and career in hi-tech. It may be that men who combine market work and care work experience a deep emotional conflict that they are forbidden from conveying in public. What I wish to emphasize is that in conditions of a bicultural experience that requires contradictory patterns of behavior from women but not from men, biological women with significant social resources can move between the two cultural repertoires so as to enact a femininity that does not entirely fit the stipulations of

either of them. In the space created in the encounter between two cultures, the FFO discourse is a base from which these women can challenge the two cultures that see them as deviants.

Disruptions, digressions and the alternative ideal worker

As mentioned above, one of the harshest and most widely heard criticisms of the organizational work-family discourse makes reference to its role in reproducing the existing gendered social order (Glass, 2000; Glass and Riley, 1998; Lewis, 1997; Rapoport, 2002; Williams, 2000). The available practices are mostly adopted by women, thus increasing the identification of masculinity with the ideal worker. Feminist activists and researchers agree that in order to seriously challenge the regime of domesticity, the seemingly "natural" linkage between hours invested in work and laborer productivity must be questioned, thus challenging the organizational discourse that defines the ideal worker in terms of the number of hours he spends at the office. As we have seen throughout this article, when discussing and enacting the FFO, hi-tech workers in Israel for the most part do indeed reproduce a traditional division of labor that takes the association of care and femininity for granted. In stressing the different ways biological men experience the work-family conflict and make use of the FFO in managing it, the group participants seem to perform a hegemonic discourse of masculinity and femininity. Thus, for example, the link made by hi-tech women between "careerism" – the popular epithet for work devotion – and long work hours, including refraining from making use of available work-family practices, sharpens and reproduces the icon of the ideal worker as free of family commitments. However, building on the bicultural context, the discourse and performances of Israeli hi-tech women also bear a challenge to this social order.

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In her discussion of gender performance, Judith Butler stresses that even though the repetition of linguistic codes and existent cultural repertoires usually precedes the reproduction of the accepted social meaning of belonging to a gendered category, every performance of identity is also always potentially disruptive or disturbing. It is in this context that Butler seeks to give some specifically political weight to her feminist analysis (Elliott, 2001). Adopting this point of view, it is possible to argue, albeit with caution, that the repetition of the conventional, gendered FFO discourse in their professional context has some potential for the disruption of traditional femininity (in its Israeli version) and the figure of the ideal worker in its hi-tech version.

. The data from this study do not allow us to ascertain the extent to which this alternative is perceived as legitimate in the organizational context of the Israeli hi-tech world. Remarks made by mothers and the few managers who participated in the focus groups paint a complex and by no means one-dimensional picture. It would seem that in some instances employers reject the wider interpretation women give to the organizational FFO discourse and see women who make extensive use of FFO practices as deviating from the norms of the organizational culture. In other cases, such as those that Sara and Donna reported (page 39), the employer is portrayed as accepting the new schema and as recognizing the worker's contribution as that of an ideal worker, despite deviating from the code of required behavior. This complexity can be seen in the following incident, as described by Irit, manager of the process engineering team at a large bio-tech company, and mother of two:

> In this company they know I leave earlier, and once my CEO quipped to me: how do you expect to get everything done by three o'clock? And there were other people there. And I was already on my way to the car, but I turned around and said to him: that's the last time you do something like that to me in front of people… and you know you get your productivity one way or the other. You always get what you need.

I was really angry and I went to pick up my kids at 4, and even before I'd arrived he'd called me to say, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it [group 5].

From their reactions, it would seem that other participants in the group had been in similar situations and could identify with the anger and helplessness they provoke. "And he said that in private, right?" one of the participants asked sarcastically, referring to the CEO's apology. Irit's answer to this bitter comment tells us something about the extent to which the repetitive performance of maternal femininity affects what is taken for granted in their work environment: "No, he went and told the other people who were there [what a good worker she is and how unfair he had been]. He sorted that out". According to her, Irit's boss seems to accept her conceptualization of femininity at work, that is, that you can actually be both a devoted mother and an ideal worker.

Irit told her story in response to a discussion that had developed in the group about strategies for enabling mothers to balance work and family in the best possible way. The women in that women-only group all agreed that "we should stop working like men, and teach them to work like us". Irit's ability to stand up to her manager should be seen in the context of a serious lack of hi-tech manpower at the time, which virtually guaranteed her job security. The availability of the FFO discourse that presents a successful work-family balance as potentially contributing to the organization's performance, together with the Israeli middle class cultural repertoire that makes childlessness, the full delegation of care, and the forfeiting of one's job for the sake of full time childcare socially censured, allowed Irit, as well as other successful hi-tech women, to experience the artificiality of the link between work hours and productivity, and to convince their employers that it is problematic. Within this context, a new femininity would seem to be evolving, one that tries to bridge the

complicated work-family conflict, despite the hardships. Being a "new women" means not only balancing family and work, but balancing one's family care with a career.

Furthermore, the use made by women of work-family practices is slowly allowing men to turn to this mode of action as well, and to define their parental identity in contrast to the conventional breadwinner discourse.

Ohad, a programmer and father of an 8 month old baby, said:

I got a new boss a month ago. Before then I'd had older bosses with kids, and now I had a boss who was a kid, 26, single, who would fix interviews and meetings at 8pm, so I send him rejections… without going into details, nothing, I just won't go to meetings at that time of day, period… it's not about making excuses, my daughter gets tired, period, I don't need to make excuses to anyone. I just won't be at the office [group 1].

Ohad's remarks once again highlight the difference between feminine and masculine performances in relation to the FFO: unlike women, who emphasized the difficulty and struggles involved in using FFO practices, he represents his attempt to balance his work and family life as simply a matter of decision. Unlike the women participants in the focus groups, who highlighted their family needs as a reason for leaving work, Ohad represents himself as not needing to offer any excuses. Nonetheless, through their performances, both Irit and Ohad give examples, albeit not very common ones, of a return to the radical version of the work-family discourse in a way that challenges the existing social order. Through their use of the work-family practices offered to them by their respective organizations, they challenge the perceived correlation between long work hours and high productivity, as well as that between masculinity and permanent availability to the workplace. Maneuvering within the organizational work-family discourse itself, they create the radical possibility of reconstructing gendered professional-parental identities.

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5. Conclusion: Gender performance in a bicultural context

Research into gender identities in organizations, and especially that focusing on masculine professional organizational environments, has shown that in order to cope with the demands of an environment that identifies the image of the ideal worker with masculinity and utter devotion to the workplace, biological women adopt behavioral patterns and worldviews that both they themselves and their surroundings identify as masculine. According to most studies, femininity is defined by default as the opposite of masculinity and the image of the ideal worker, as a set of properties identified with concerns that belong outside the organization. With the strengthening of the global economy and the appearance of a world gender order, most researchers assume that this pattern of gender identity will continue to characterize masculinity across national and cultural borders (Connell, 1998).

In this article, I have examined the extent to which the global masculine work environment shapes gender identities when local workers and managers are subject to an additional cultural repertoire with differing and even contradictory assumptions. Based on an analysis of the gender performance of Israeli hi-tech workers as they move between the transnational repertoire of the new economy, which connects the image of the ideal worker with disassociated and egocentric masculinity, and the local repertoire, which sees the integration of work and family as expressing normative femininity, this research shows how the local cultural repertoire significantly influences gender performances in work environments that, on the face of it, seem similar to their overseas equivalents.

The space created between the two cultural repertoires that shape gender performance is seen as allowing Israeli hi-tech women to redefine the meaning of femininity in the workplace. This new femininity, which relies on the FFO discourse, posits the image of the

woman struggling to juggle active family caring with a career as worthy of imitation and as the cultural hero of the new economy in Israel. An examination of their gender performance reveals that the repetition of the family friendly organizational discourse does indeed reproduce the traditional gender division of labor that associates femininity with family care. However, this repetition also bears the potential for disrupting the dominant discourse by challenging the accepted characteristics of both good motherhood and the ideal worker. By openly and demonstratively making use of FFO practices in keeping with the traditional Israeli perception of motherhood and femininity, and by publicly rejecting the claim that by doing so they are less worthy workers, hi-tech women at least partially succeed in extracting themselves from the social role of surrogate men that is imposed on women in other masculine environments, and manage to create a limited space in which to maneuver their doing of gender and their self-classification. Nonetheless, it is important to note that both Israeli society and the Israeli hi-tech sector are not free from gender discrimination and a gendered perception of the image of the ideal worker. However, studies suggest that the tension and conflict felt by Israeli career women is slightly less acute in comparison to their counterparts from the American middle class, for instance (Lieblich, 1987). In this sense, the findings of this research reveal an important and unspoken aspect of the social role of the FFO discourse: even though it has been shown to reproduce certain elements of the social order, it may also play a significant role in constructing a new femininity that neither forgoes family caring nor accepts the marginalization of care givers in the organizational context.

This study also makes a contribution to the discussion of gender identity in bicultural contexts. While most studies into ethnicity and gender in organizations focus on the experiences of women from weaker groups, especially immigrants and ethnic minorities, and

discover an unbridgeable fragmentation in their life experiences, this research deals with the

strongest group of women in Israeli society, namely women from the professional middle

class, who mostly belong to the European cultural elite, and who work in a desirable

profession in which there was a manpower shortage for quite some time. From this position

of power, they are able, to a limited extent, to advance a social discourse that bridges the

contradictory demands of their organizational and family environments.

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