

The Politics of Prosody: Language, Sexuality and National Belonging in Israel

Erez Levon
Queen Mary University of London

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Abstract

Dominant Israeli narratives of the nation exclude gay and lesbian subjectivities, rendering an identification as gay or lesbian normatively incompatible with an identification as Israeli. My research investigates the different ways in which people who identify as both gay/lesbian and Israeli understand the relationship between these two opposing affiliations, and how they use language to construct identities for themselves in practice that reconcile this conflict. My data is drawn from ethnographic fieldwork in Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem, where I spent 12 months observing various gay/lesbian activist associations ranging across the Israeli political spectrum, including everything from a centrist political lobby to a queer anarchist group. My goal was to examine the diversity of Israeli gay and lesbian experiences, and determine how individuals own political beliefs and feelings about the nation influence how they understand and perform their sexualities. My analysis of certain prosodic characteristics, based on extensive observations of group interactions and ethnographic interviews with 57 informants, reveals significant differences in how members of the different groups conceive of and construct their sexual subjectivities through language. These differences among groups correspond to the groups distinct positions within Israeli politics more generally, highlighting the ways in which individual sexual subjectivities in Israel are the result of a complex interplay of sexual and other national and cultural identifications. I go beyond examining just sexuality to explore the totality of social and discursive processes involved in the formation of gay and lesbian subjectivities in Israel.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite substantial scholarly evidence to the contrary, much sociolinguistic research continues to treat sexuality in isolation, detached from the socio-cultural context in which it is lived. In this chapter, I argue for a more situated understanding of sexuality – one that moves beyond an ahistorical examination of opposing identity categories (e.g., homosexual versus heterosexual; lesbian versus gay) and instead traces the multiple social, political and discursive processes involved in the formation of sexual subjectivities. My proposals are based on an analysis of sexuality in Israel, where, as has also been argued for elsewhere (e.g., Besnier 2004; Boellstorff 2005), sexuality is as much about the nation and national politics as it is about sexual desire. In what follows, I explore the interconnections between sexuality and politics in the Israeli context, and document the ways in which those connections are structured and circulated through spoken interactions. In doing so, my goal is not to describe a representative “gay-” or “lesbian-Israeli” style of speech, but rather to highlight the diverse and creative ways in which lesbian and gay Israelis use language to help constitute identities that are at once sexual and political. These identities, emerging as they do from a confluence of multiple and at times conflicting social identifications and affiliations, resist classification in static or binary terms, and instead force us to re-conceptualize the ways in which sexuality may be both experienced and linguistically materialized.

Israel is one of the most progressive nations in the world with respect to the rights of its lesbian and gay citizens. Successive legislative and judicial reforms, including the decriminalization of sodomy in 1988 (*Israeli Penal Law 1977, Amendment 22*), the equalization of partnership benefits for homo- and heterosexual couples in 1994 (*El Al Airlines Ltd v. Yonatan Danilovitch*, Israeli Supreme Court 721/94; *Adir Steiner v. Israeli Defense Forces*, District Court of Tel Aviv 369/94), and the passage of a comprehensive anti-harassment act in 1998 (*Law for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment 1998*) have all served to legally enfranchise Israeli gays and lesbians to a point where an almost total parity of rights has been achieved. Yet, despite these legal advances over the past 20 years, lesbian and gay Israelis remain largely excluded from full participation in Israeli society. This exclusion can be traced to a perceived incompatibility between a gay or lesbian subjectivity, on the one hand, and Israeli identity, on the other (Levon 2010). Though a modern democracy where freedom of religion officially exists, Israel is, first and foremost, the Jewish state, and an identification with a set of “traditional, Jewish values” is understood by many as a necessary component of Israeli identity and a precondition for acceptance into Israeli society. Preeminent among these values is a normative discourse of the (heterosexual) family as the only model of gender and sexuality (Berkovitch 1997; Pouzol 2008; Sered 2000). Lesbians and gays, at least stereotypically, exist outside of and in conflict with this discourse, and are thus seen as incompatible with what it means to “be Israeli” (Shafir and Peled 2002).

A conflict between what so-called traditional or religious values and homosexuality is not necessarily a new one, nor is it unique to the Israeli situation (e.g., Besnier 2004; Boellstorff 2005; Butler 2008; Gopinath 2005). Gay and lesbian activism in the United States, for example, has consistently attempted to portray homosexual identity as compatible with popular American discourses of gender and morality, and has done so by deploying the popular distinction between the public and private sphere, i.e., gays are just like everybody else in public who simply do something different in private (e.g., Duggan 1994; Seidman 2002; Vaid 1995). What makes the situation in Israel stand apart is the ways in which this tension between sexuality and traditional values is played out in the very public domain of citizenship and belonging to the nation. The principal goal of the Israeli state-building project was a transformation of an ethnic or religious affiliation, i.e., the Jewish people, into a modern nation-state (Shafir and Peled 2002; Yanai 1996; Yiftachel 1999). Part of the way in

which this was done was by recasting certain traditionally Jewish beliefs and practices, such as the primacy of the heterosexual family, as the core values of the new Israeli state. Thus, while in the American context, identifying as gay does not necessarily risk calling into question one's identity as an American (at least in the current historical moment, though this was not true during the Cold War, e.g., Corber 1997; Johnson 2003), the same cannot be said for Israel. It is for this reason, for example, that opponents of a gay pride parade in Jerusalem in 2006, were able to voice their opposition in terms of the ways in which gays and lesbian 'demean *Israeli* moral values' and to argue that things like gay pride parades 'shake the *country's* foundations' (Weiss 2006, emphasis added; see also Levon 2010). My examination of sexual subjectivity in Israel therefore focuses on how individual lesbian and gay Israelis conceive of the relationship between their sexual and national identifications, and how those conceptions are socially constituted through linguistic practice.

THE POLITICS OF BELONGING IN ISRAEL

In the speech he gave just after being elected Prime Minister in March 2006, Ehud Olmert claimed that his central goal was to ensure that Israel is and remains 'a Jewish state and a democratic state.'¹ This dual characterization of Israel, i.e., as both Jewish and democratic, is the backbone of standard Israeli conceptions of the nation, and itself reflects a fundamental paradox that animated the Zionist settlement of Palestine. On the one hand, Zionism sought to reinvent Judaism as a secular, national affiliation, rather than a religious or ethnic one, that would recast the commonly described "Jewish problem" (i.e., the discrimination and disenfranchisement experienced by Jews in Europe) as a modern, political issue (Kimmerling 2001). Yet, simultaneously, Zionism made extensive use of Jewish ethno-religious symbolism and mythology to justify its political goals. In other words, from its very beginnings, the Jewish national project in Palestine was built upon an inherent contradiction: it was a secular, modern movement that defined its legitimacy in terms of a distinctly pre-modern ethno-religious conceptualization of national destiny. With the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, this underlying contradiction was elevated to the level of dominant national narrative, and gave rise to the ideological structures that define membership and belonging in Israeli society to this day. This *politics of belonging* (Yuval-Davis 2006) is the discursive context within which subjectivities in Israel, sexual or otherwise, are formed, and therefore represents the analytical starting point for an examination of lesbians and gays in Israeli society.

Zionist Thought and the Jewish Settlement of Palestine

One of the most pervasive tenets of early Zionist thought was the belief that Jews in the Diaspora led a disembodied existence (Biale 1997). As such, a primary goal of Zionism was to ground the Jewish people, the quintessential *luftmenschen* ('people of the air'), in the land of Palestine. This principle of grounding made more than metaphorical reference to the body; the physical reconfiguration of Jewish corporality, including sexuality, was seen as a necessary precondition to the success of the Zionist national project. Zionism promised what historian David Biale (1997) calls an *erotic revolution* for the Jewish people, which would entail the creation of the new "Hebrew" man, the *sabra* – a strong, virile man who would be master of his own existence (see also Almog 2000; Pouzol 2008).²

The connection between the body, sexuality and Zionism is already evident in the writings of the earliest European founders of Zionism in the final decades of the nineteenth century. These Zionist theoreticians bemoaned what they described as the physical and emotional *degeneration* of European Jewry. For them, the only way to revitalize the Jewish

soul was to improve the health and physical power of the Jews. The image of a new Jewish body thus became emblematic of the new Jewish nation they wished to create. In his highly influential monograph, aptly titled *Entartung* ('Degeneration'), Max Nordau urged European Jewry to develop a 'Judaism with muscles' (as cited in Biale 1997: 179). Nordau believed that by developing their bodies, Jews would be able to surmount the perpetual nervousness (which he, interestingly, viewed as a genetic trait) that had kept them oppressed and subjugated for centuries. In this spirit, youth and physical prowess became symbols of Zionism, whereas degeneration and old-age were taken to characterize Jewish life in the Diaspora. Sexuality, in the form of eroticism, was also present in Nordau's formulation of muscular Judaism, since he maintained that the physical and the erotic are intrinsically related. Yet, while Nordau, among others, wrote about the necessity of sexual health, he was also very critical of libertinism. In his eyes, an excessive sexuality was equally as indicative of degeneration as an insufficient sexuality was. Nordau therefore proposed a simple solution for this problem: marriage. Under the bonds of matrimony, a healthy, but not excessive, erotic sexuality would be ensured, thus enabling the physical betterment required by the Zionist national project.

The idea of an erotic revolution is also to be found outside of those thinking in degenerationist terms and among those early thinkers who described Zionism in terms of a critique of existing societies. In these more socialist-influenced writings, erotic revolution was grounded in an ideology of anti-materialism, and the Jewish woman was placed at the center of the debate. Writers such as Hans Goslar criticized the objectification of women throughout the Diaspora, which had led them to become 'beasts of luxury' (as cited in Biale 1997: 182) that men acquire instead of the Jewish wives and mothers these women were born to be. Similarly, Martin Buber lamented the disappearance of the traditional Jewish family with the Jewish mother as its guardian. For Buber, Jewish women had become selfish and vulgar, and only by returning to the traditional value of motherhood would they hope to find salvation (Biale 1997: 182). An idea of equality between women and men therefore emerged, though it was one that was not cast in modern or liberationist terms, but rather in moral ones. Zionist thought held that only by returning to their traditional roles would Jewish women escape the gilded cages of materialistic oppression. In both the anti-materialist and the degenerationist accounts, we see that the Zionist desire to break off from the evils of Jewish life in the Diaspora gets actualized by reference to the traditional Jewish (and bourgeois) values of maternity and marriage. In essence, early Zionist theories called for a return to tradition that would, paradoxically, enable the re-making of the Jewish people in a new national homeland.

These ideas about sexuality and maternity were transplanted to Palestine by the Jewish settlers arriving from Central and Eastern Europe during the first two decades of the twentieth century. These settlers, who came during what are called the second and third *aliyot*, or waves of immigration, to Palestine, are normally referred to as the *halutsim* (Heb. 'pioneers').³ Though they were neither very numerous nor representative of the majority of the (Jewish) population of Palestine, these *halutsim* quickly established themselves as the ruling elite. They built many of the structures of the pre-state society, known as the *Yishuv* (Heb. literally 'settlement'), including the first *kibbutzim* (collective, normally agricultural, communities, from the Heb. 'gathering') as well as the labor federations, the healthcare, education and welfare systems and the armed militias that would become the official apparatuses of the state upon its establishment. Their thoughts, beliefs and ways of life became the normative values of *Yishuv* society, and later of the State of Israel. Though their overall influence has perhaps fluctuated over the past 60 years (cf. Kimmerling 2001; Shafir and Peled 2002), the *halutsim* remain the standard reference for the values of Israeli society.

In the writings of these *halutsim*, we find the same appeals to break with the Judaism of the Old World via a sexual and erotic revolution. In a speech he gave in 1918 to other prominent Zionist leaders in Palestine, Meir Yaari, one of the founders of the highly influential *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsair* (Heb. ‘youth guard’), claimed:

We want to educate this generation to be tough and strong, and not soft and wallowing in their imaginations. Only the [strong] arms of heroes will accomplish this work and not poets ... I view with great trepidation the groups of *HaShomer* that are dominated not by men, but by angels of beauty and love (as cited in Biale 1997: 186).

Zionism for the *halutsim* was thus identified with masculinity and virility, and was set in opposition to the perceived feminine weakness of the Diaspora. Yet, exactly like the European Zionist thinkers mentioned above, the *halutsim* were equally critical of libertinism and too much sexual freedom. While calling for a new kind of sexuality, they insisted that this sexuality be what they described as “ripe”, a rather winsome euphemism for “procreative.” In other words, the *halutsim* believed that only sexuality that has procreation as its ultimate goal is appropriate. Eliahu Rapoport, a prominent Zionist philosopher and one of Martin Buber’s former students, affirmed that the principal goal of sexuality is reproduction. He claimed that traditional morality considered sexuality to be far from God because of the physical pleasure that it entails. Yet, he argued that in ignoring the reproductive function of sexuality, traditional morality had defiled the sexual act and ‘robbed it of its divinity’ (Biale 1997: 189). For Rapoport, only by restoring reproduction at the heart of sexuality was it possible to unite the body and the soul, and achieve the ultimate Zionist goal of self-realization in the new nation (i.e., Heb. *hagshama*).

Note that for the *halutsim*, as for the European Zionists before them, the brand new nation was, paradoxically, characterized by a return to seemingly traditional values. Maternity served not only a practical demographic purpose, but also a highly ideological one, encapsulating the salvation of the Jewish people. It is interesting, moreover, that for these self-proclaimed secular *halutsim*, discussions of sexuality and maternity were frequently cast in spiritual and/or religious terms, where the Jewish Bible itself was strategically deployed to justify their ideas. As Biale (1997) reports, biblical stories such as that of Tamar, the daughter who seduced her own father so that she could give birth to the ancestors of King David, or of Lot’s daughters, who committed incest in order to give birth to the founders of the nations of Moab and Ammon, were used by the *halutsim* to promote their vision of maternity as the ultimate act of Jewish holiness. By linking their views about sexuality to these kinds of biblical stories, the *halutsim* linked the Zionist national project in the twentieth century to the Israelite nation described in the Bible.

Biblical stories about maternity were not the only ones appropriated to serve modern Zionist purposes. Frequent, and selective, reference was also made to other religious narratives, such as the Book of Joshua and its story of how the ancient Israelites defeated the Canaanites who had previously occupied the “Promised Land” or the (apocryphal) Book of Maccabees and its story of the Jewish revolt against Greek occupation in the second century BCE. These stories epitomized, and were used to justify, the physical and militaristic understanding of Judaism that the *halutsim* advocated (i.e., “Judaism with muscles”). Part and parcel with a return to tradition, the bi-millennial history of Jews in the Diaspora was symbolically minimized. Instead, emphasis was placed on biblical heroes, who through strength, courage and military cunning conquered their foes. The erudite and sensitive European Jew hunched over in a long, black coat or floor-length skirt was symbolically

replaced by the young, strong and suntanned Hebrew man (and it is always a man; Pouzol 2008), willing to die in the service of the land (Almog 2000).

Even from this brief historical outline, we see that the *halutsim*'s sexual revolution and their resulting creation of a "New Jew" managed to break with some aspects of what they described as the 'domestic bourgeois eroticism' (Biale 1997: 185) of Jewish life in the Diaspora. Nevertheless, the *halutsim* were steadfast in their convictions that men must be sufficiently virile and that women must bear children.⁴ By grounding these convictions in a particular configuration of Jewish historicity and continuity, the *halutsim* succeeded in inextricably linking a normative understanding of gender and sexuality to the new nation, and in making gender-appropriate social and linguistic behavior (what is often called the "men as soldiers/women as mothers" model) a dominant structuring principle of the soon-to-be established Israeli state. It is this principle, then, that gives rise to the perceived conflict, introduced above, between being lesbian/gay and being Israeli.

In emphasizing the importance of the "men as soldiers/women as mothers" model, I am not claiming that these are the only parameters with which to construct and evaluate gender in Israeli society. As in many, if not all, places around the world, gender and sexuality in Israel are tightly imbricated with a variety of other social and cultural factors, not the least of which include race and ethnicity (Dahan-Kalev 2001a, 2001b; Shadmi 2003), religion (El-Or 1994; Yuval-Davis 1980) and socioeconomic class (Azmon and Izraeli 1993; Bernstein 1993; Liebllich 1993). For my present purposes, though, I abstract away from some of this complexity and focus on the "men as soldiers/women as mothers" model insofar as I argue that it is the most significant factor in determining men's and women's respective "Israeliness." I contend that "Israeli" is itself a gendered (and sexualized) category, and that the extent to which a man behaves like a soldier (including, but not restricted to, engaging in active military service) and a woman behaves like a mother (including, but not restricted to, engaging in maternity) is the benchmark against which socially sanctioned articulations of gender are measured in Israel (Fogel-Bijawi 1999; Kahn 2000; Sasson-Levy 2002, 2003). In other words, despite the fact that neither "man" nor "woman" is a monolithic category in Israel and that in their daily lives people embody gender in dramatically different ways, tolerance with respect to various gender performances and the evaluation of these performances as being "authentically Israeli" always end up boiling down to how well they compare to the normative "men as soldiers/women as mothers" model.

Zionism and Language

Language has always played an important part in the Zionist national narrative. Grounded in late nineteenth century Romantic ideals, Zionism made productive use of the notion of a single people united through a common cultural and linguistic history that could be 'gathered together' (Heb. *kibbutz galuyot*) in a new national homeland. In practical terms, this meant that Jewish settlement in Palestine was accompanied by a massive language planning effort, through which Hebrew, the liturgical language of the Jews, was revived and modernized as the language of the new nation (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999). Diaspora languages, such as Yiddish, Ladino and Arabic, were symbolically minimized, if not actively suppressed, because of their association with the impotence and passivity of Jewish Diaspora life. Yiddish, especially, was a major target of ideological erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000) since it was in reality the native language spoken by the vast majority of Eastern European Jews who first came to Palestine (Fishman and Fishman 1978; Pilowsky 1985). Hebrew, in contrast, was idealized as a "pure" and "clean" language – one untainted by the Diaspora experience, and thus an appropriate icon of Jewish national rebirth (Katriel 1986; Myhill 2006; Spolsky and Shohamy 1999).

History, however, was not quite as neat as early Zionist leaders portrayed it to be. Though not the native language of Jews for over two thousand years, Hebrew had never been fully extinguished and remained a central component of Jewish ethnic and religious practice. There was a need, therefore, to symbolically differentiate the Hebrew spoken in Israel from the Hebrew of the Bible and the Hebrew spoken, at least ritually, in Jewish communities around the world (Katriel 1986). This was done in a variety of ways, including the simplification of the grammar and phonology of biblical Hebrew and an expansion and “purification” of the lexicon (e.g., Fellman 1973; Spolsky and Shohamy 1999). Yet perhaps one of the most pervasive ways in which Modern Hebrew was made to stand apart was in the development of a new *style* of speaking, which Katriel (1986) has labeled *dugri* speech (after the Arabic word for ‘straight’). *Dugri* is an aggressive, laconic, “plain” manner of speaking that is normatively associated with Israelis. Purportedly rooted in the language practices of the soldiers in the *Palmach*, the Jewish paramilitary forces in pre-state Palestine, *dugri* speech is characterized by an overall ‘devaluation of language and speech, so that terseness and inarticulateness become valued verbal traits’ (Katriel 1986: 16). This terseness is taken to exemplify the “simplicity” and “naturalness” of a speaker who has no time or concern for dramatic or embellished language; a speaker who is more interested in actions than in words. *Dugri* speech, which can be characterized by the generalized use of unmitigated face-threatening speech acts and a lack of terms of deference or other negative politeness mechanisms, is thus synonymous with the independent, empowered New Israeli Jew, who stands in symbolic contrast to the weak, emasculated Jew of the Diaspora.

Katriel has argued that *dugri* speech is not itself gendered, but is instead a standard that applies equally to both women and men. I, however, disagree. Like every other aspect of the Zionist foundational narrative, *dugri* is infused with a strict separation of gendered practice – an insistence that women focus on the needs of family and children while men are left to tend to the rest. This gendered division of labor is, I think, tellingly illustrated by prominent Israeli author Netiva Ben-Yehuda’s discussion of typical campfire songs sung by members of the *Palmach* (as cited in Feldman 2000). In this discussion, Ben-Yehuda, who was herself a celebrated *Palmach* soldier, describes how in these songs women are either totally absent or, when they do appear, are always pictured waiting for their man, saying good-bye to their man or standing alone in the kitchen. Commenting on these songs, and the cultural ethos they represent, Ben-Yehuda states, ‘I don’t think that there has ever been any other underground movement in the world in which male chauvinism triumphed so powerfully; and so proudly’ (cited in Feldman 2000: 146). I would argue that *dugri*, the symbolic embodiment of the *Palmach* and hence the New Israeli Jew (Katriel 1986: 159), is the linguistic manifestation of the chauvinism described by Ben-Yehuda. In other words, with all due respect to Katriel, I contend that *dugri* is a gendered ideology of language, an ideology of what men’s speech should be like: powerful, straightforward and to the point. Women’s language, on the other hand, is seen as not *dugri*. Rather, while perhaps stereotypically more aggressive or outspoken than its North American or northern European counterpart, the language style normatively associated with women in Israel is one that symbolically connotes Israeli ideas about women’s secondary or support-based status: emotional, caring or even superficial (cf. also Inoue 2002, 2004 on so-called “Japanese women’s language”).

What does this mean in concrete linguistic terms? Katriel, in her discussion of *dugri*, focuses exclusively on various lexical and interactional components that she argues characterize that style of speech. I would argue that an equally salient aspect of *dugri*, and hence of gendered speech in Israel, has to do with certain prosodic characteristics, specifically those pertaining to pitch and voice quality. Recall that *dugri* is an interactional style. As such, it is comprised of a constellation of formal linguistic features that all

contribute to the portrayal (and subsequent perception) of a particular indexical stance on the part of a speaker (Agha 2005; Eckert 2008) – a stance that is most easily described as one that is powerful, aggressive and even uncaring. As has been shown to be the case in many other ethnographic situations (see Besnier 1990 and references cited there), pitch and voice quality in Israel also carry these kinds of indexical meanings. Emotionality and superficiality, for example, are linguistically characterized in Israel by such things as breathy and high-pitched voices, thus making these qualities stereotypical of (a non-*dugri*) “women’s speech.” In contrast, hoarse and monotone voices are affiliated with such masculine traits as directness and aggressiveness, making them key elements of (a *dugri*) “men’s speech.” In short, then, I suggest that prosody plays a crucial role in the elaboration of Israeli gendered speech styles.

These normative links between language and gender comprise the backdrop against which Israeli lesbians and gays create their sexual subjectivities, and provide the pool of linguistic resources with which to do so (cf. Cameron and Kulick 2003; Ochs 1992). As in many other national contexts, the heteronormativity of Israeli nationalist discourse is such that gendered linguistic practices are also linked to gay and lesbian subjectivities. As the popular reasoning goes, since gay men, for example, are men who desire men, and since desiring men is a quintessentially feminine activity, gay men embody some sort of femininity. Therefore, what ends up being perceived as a “gay” way of speaking is a disruption or inversion of linguistic gender norms (e.g., gay men talk like women).⁵ In the analyses that follow, I focus on one aspect of pitch and voice quality in the speech of lesbian and gay Israelis – mean pitch. I concentrate on this variable both because of its prevalence in the literature on language, gender and sexuality, and because of its salience, both ideological and ethnographic, in the Israeli context.

LANGUAGE AND SEXUALITY IN ISRAEL

Analyses of mean pitch are drawn from a sociolinguistic ethnography of politics and sexuality in Israel, where over the course of a year I observed and recorded the members of 12 different Israeli gay and lesbian activist associations. In the interest of space, I limit my discussion here to the members of nine of these associations, which I group into two larger clusters: what I call the Mainstream and the Radical groups. The Mainstream cluster is made up of six different activist organizations: the Association of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgender People (known in Hebrew as the *Agudah*), the Lesbian Feminist Community (Heb. *Klaf*), the Political Caucus for Gay Rights in Israel, Education and Change (Heb. *Hoshen*), Israeli Gay Youth and the Gay Forum of *Meretz* (a left-wing Israeli political party). I group these organizations together as a cluster based on what I understand to be a set of common institutional goals and a shared conceptualization of sexual politics in Israel. This conceptualization is most easily summarized as an assimilationist approach to lesbian and gay politics. In other words, Mainstream organizations work to promote the idea that “gays and lesbians are just like everybody else,” and to achieve full integration of lesbians and gays in society (cf. Seidman 2002; Vaid 1995; see Levon 2010 for a detailed description of each of these groups).

The Radical cluster, on the other hand, has no interest in integration, and explicitly rejects an assimilationist formulation of sexuality and sexual politics. This cluster is made up of three self-described radical, queer organizations: Black Laundry (Heb. *Kvisa Schora*), *Queerhana* and Red-Pink (Heb. *Adom-Varod*). The central goal of all of these organizations is the transformative reevaluation of Israeli society (Ziv 2005). In their activities, these groups stress the interconnectedness of the different struggles in Israeli society (e.g., queer struggles, Palestinian struggles, women’s struggles), and are united in a condemnation of standard

Israeli models of gender and sexuality. For them, the goal of gay and lesbian emancipation is only realizable through the total reconfiguration of society into one in which allotments of rights and privileges are no longer defined in terms of things such as race, ethnicity and gender, in addition to sexuality.

The talk that I examine for mean pitch below comes from individual ethnographic interviews that I conducted with 20 of my informants (13 from the Mainstream cluster and 7 from the Radical cluster). These interviews all took place four to five months after I began observing and participating in group activities, and all of my informants were by that time already well-acquainted with me and with the fact that I was there as a researcher studying sexual activism in Israel (though they were unaware of my work’s precise linguistic focus). The interviews all shared a similar modular structure, depicted schematically in Figure 1. Interviews began with speakers providing a general history of their lives, normally in chronological order from their childhood up to the present day. While the specific contours of these life histories varied, all speakers discussed such things as family life, schooling, friends, military service, etc. In addition, in all of the interviews, informants spoke about their own realizations of their sexual desires, their sexual encounters and their experiences with the Israeli gay and lesbian scene. All the talk during this portion of the interview was narrative in nature – it was temporally past-tense and sequential with non-immediate deictic reference. Following this more episodic portion, we turned to discussions of the informants’ opinions about various current events and Israeli society more generally. Talk in this opinion portion was structurally very different from the narrative talk before. Here, speech was all temporally in the present and the deictic reference was very much local – we were talking about here and now.

Figure 1. Schematic Structure of Interviews

NARRATIVES		OPINIONS	
<u>Personal History</u>		<u>Israeli Politics</u>	<u>Israeli Gay Politics</u>
	Personal Geography	Palestinian-Israeli conflict	<i>Gay Rights</i>
T	Family Life	Race/Ethnicity	<i>Gay Visibility</i>
O	Schooling	Religion	<i>Social Acceptance</i>
P	Army	Israeli Political Parties	<i>Communal Structures</i>
I	Work	Violence	<i>Intra-Communal Ties</i>
C	Social Life	Zionism	<i>Personal Definitions</i>
S	“Coming Out”	<i>Gender</i>	
	<i>Dating</i>		
	<i>Activism</i>		

But I would argue that the biggest difference between these two phases of the interviews was the imagined audience of each. In narratives, informants were recounting private and personal information about themselves that was not necessarily intended for widespread consumption. In opinions, however, informants were engaged in what I would call a more public discourse style, where the presumed goal of talk on opinions was to project a particular attitude, or even persona, in the public sphere.⁶ That informants understood the two phases of the interviews as perhaps oriented to more private versus more public spheres, respectively, was evidenced by a host of linguistic and non-linguistic cues. On the most basic

level, numerous informants verified that the interviews were confidential while recounting narratives, though none did so when stating opinions. In linguistic terms, speech on narratives was often slower and quieter than speech on opinions; narrative talk was also almost exclusively set in the first person singular, while talk on opinions was often in the first person plural or second person (generic; imperative); and, finally, speech on narratives was characterized by a greater proportional use of colloquial and non-standard forms than speech on opinions. Based, then, on this combination of both topical and structural differentiation between the two phases of the interviews, I propose that narratives and opinions may actually represent different speech contexts of sorts within the interview setting, each with its own set of constraints on what kind of language is appropriate or expected (see Coupland 1980, 1988). In the analyses below, I examine whether this distinction between narratives and opinions, what I call conversational frames (e.g., Goffman 1974), may in fact approximate distinct events or situations of talk within the interviews (see Levon 2009 for a more complete discussion of the narrative and opinion frames).

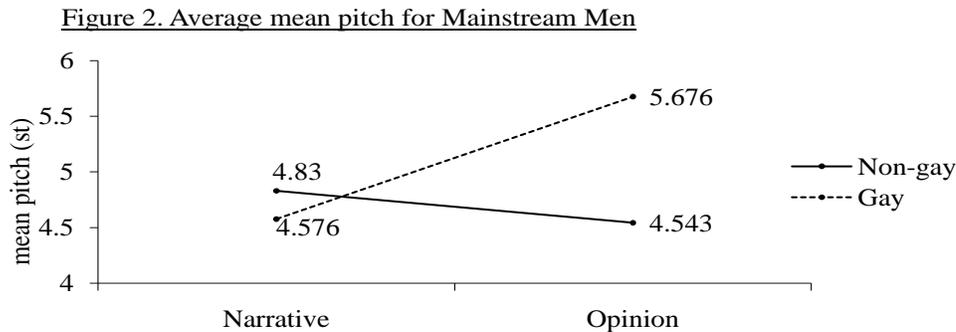
In addition to these differences in terms of conversational frame, the interviews can also be segmented according to speech topic. In Figure 1, those topics printed in italics represent instances when informants talked about their sexual histories, experiences and subjectivities. As a shorthand, I refer to these as *gay* topics, while those in Roman type, i.e., when informants were talking about things other than sexuality, are called *non-gay* topics. I argue that this division between gay and non-gay topics allows me to explore the ways in which speakers may be using language to perform their social and, in this case, sexual identifications. Similar to Bakhtin's (1981) concept of voicing, an examination of variation across topics is premised on the notion that speakers adopt different patterns of linguistic behavior as a function of what they are talking about, so as to variably align themselves with the social groups and identities referenced through their talk. Put simply then, talk about sexuality could provide an example of the kind of language that speakers associate with, and thus perhaps use to express, sexuality. Examining how my informants talk on gay versus non-gay topics could therefore offer crucial insight into how they linguistically perform their sexualities.

I should note that there may be an apparent contradiction between the fact that above I argue against a conceptualization of sexuality as solely related to sexual practice or desire and that here I am classifying speech on precisely these topics as "gay" speech. I concede that in doing so I am grafting a potentially artificial structure onto the informants' speech and thus running the risk of creating salience where in fact there is none (i.e., making "gay" topics important by virtue of examining them). I would argue, however, that this kind of artificial structure is a necessary heuristic when examining speech patterns across speakers in an effort to devise as "objective" an analysis as possible (cf., for example, Schilling-Estes 2004). In other words, what I am doing is essentially delineating a category that I think may be relevant to my informants, and then examining the extent to which they are (or are not) in fact linguistically making it so (see Cameron and Kulick 2003). I believe, moreover, that the way to ensure that this kind of imposed structure does not lead to an essentialized or inaccurate analysis is to consider an apparent lack of linguistic relevance as significant as its presence – a topic I return to below.

The Mainstream Cluster

Figure 2 presents the results with respect to mean pitch variation for the Mainstream men.⁷ Note that I consider the men and the women of each of the clusters separately in my analyses. I do so in an attempt to represent the fact that women and men are presumably orienting themselves to different sets of linguistic stereotypes and expectations. For example, while for men, higher mean pitches would stereotypically be associated with femininity and thus gay

identity, for women, lower mean pitches would stereotypically be associated with masculinity and thus lesbian identity. In order, therefore, to avoid the imposition of an artificial gender effect in the data, I quantitatively analyze men’s and women’s speech separately, and then interpret the results together.



Examining Figure 2, the seemingly most obvious result is that the Mainstream men appear to be using pitch differently on narratives (left-side of the figure) than they are on opinions (right-side of the figure). We also notice, however, a consistent differentiation in terms of mean pitch between talk on gay topics (dashed line) versus talk on non-gay topics (solid line). What we have, then, is a four-way distinction in the Mainstream men’s mean pitch between non-gay narratives, gay narratives, non-gay opinions and gay opinions (for non-gay narratives, $n = 345$, for gay narratives = 458, $F(1, 791) = 4.516$, $p = 0.034$; for non-gay opinions, $n = 405$, for gay opinions, $n = 423$, $F(1, 816) = 29.393$, $p = 0.000$).

I argue that this four-way distinction among the Mainstream men can be taken as evidence that they are using mean pitch to engage in multiple and interacting processes of stylistic variation (Levon 2009). Recall that we are examining the Mainstream men’s speech across two external parameters: discourse type and speech topic. Let’s begin with variation across speech topic. We see that in both narratives and opinions, the Mainstream men significantly differentiate their mean pitch levels between gay and non-gay topics. I would argue that this consistent differentiation across topics corresponds to a process of *initiative* style-shifting, whereby the men in effect present linguistically different “selves” when speaking on gay versus non-gay topics (e.g., Bell 1984, 2001, *inter alia*). We also notice, however, that the linguistic manifestation of this differentiation changes depending on the conversational frame. In narratives, gay topics have a lower (and hence stereotypically more masculine) mean pitch than non-gay topics (4.576 st versus 4.83 st, respectively). In opinions, gay topics have a higher (and hence stereotypically more feminine) mean pitch than non-gay ones (5.676 st versus 4.543 st, respectively). What this means is that we have an apparent *interaction* between the Mainstream men’s initiative style-shifting (i.e., the differentiation between gay and non-gay topics) and the particular contexts of speech in which that shifting occurs (i.e., narratives versus opinions). In other words, we have evidence for an interaction between speech topic and discourse type.

I describe above how narratives and opinions arguably engender two distinct “contexts” of speech, each potentially associated with its own formal characteristics and/or expectations. The fact then that the Mainstream men alter their behavior with respect to mean pitch across the discourse types would seem to indicate that they are engaged in a process of what can be called *responsive* style-shifting – a change in their use of language that arises as a response to a change in the speech context.⁸ What is interesting about what the

Mainstream men are doing is that their responsive style-shifting appears to be linguistically manifested by a change in their initiative shift. In other words, they are reacting to the differences between the narrative and opinion frames by altering how they initiate a style shift between gay and non-gay topics.

In order to try and unpack these interacting processes of style-shifting more concretely, it would be useful to develop an understanding of the motivations underlying the observed patterns of language use. Let us begin, then, with the first of the effects described above, namely that mean pitch on gay topics is significantly different from mean pitch on non-gay topics throughout (i.e., in both narratives and opinions). It seems to me that this result could be related to a particular epistemic stance that the Mainstream men maintain with regard to their sexualities. Consider, for example, what Yaniv, a 30-year old Mainstream member from Jerusalem, has to say about how he understands his (gay) sexuality:

[to be gay is] to be attracted to men. It's not necessarily to sleep with them, or to live in a certain way, a specific way. It's first of all a question of sexual attraction. And that's it. It's a very limited definition in my eyes. It doesn't include all those other ideas or beliefs or states of mind. We have a lot of identities and it's hard to put all of our identities out there and to make a list. But to be gay means who a person is attracted to. It's an issue of sexual desire.

זה להימשך לגברים וזה לאו דווקא נשאב ממני או לחיות באיזושהי צורה מסויימת. זה קודם כל שאלה של משיכה מינית. אה, וזהו, כאילו זאת הגדרה מאד מצומצמת בעיני. לא דוגל בכל התפיסות לאדם יש הרבה זהויות ש-וקשה לשים זהויות על אותו, אחד ליד השני, לעשות מיון. אבל לכן כאילו להיות הומו, אז בשבילי מדברים על למי אדם נמשך, מה מגרה אותו מינית.

We see from Yaniv's comments that gay sexuality, to him personally, exists as something separate and discrete. Though it is not the entirety of his social persona (*We have a lot of identities*), gay sexuality is its own compartmentalized phenomenon that is always present (*it's hard to put all of our identities out there*) but does not interact with other aspects of his subjectivity (*It's a question of sexual attraction. And that's it*). This is a sentiment common to all of the men in the Mainstream cluster – that the “gay” part of who they are is isolated and distinct from the rest. I suggest then that the distinction with respect to mean pitch on gay versus non-gay topics could be a sort of Bakhtinian ‘voicing’ of a subjective difference that the Mainstream men maintain between their gay and non-gay personae. In other words, the difference observed in terms of mean pitch across gay and non-gay topics might be a linguistic manifestation of the distinction that Yaniv and the other Mainstream men maintain between what they view as separate “gay” and “non-gay” selves.

If we accept this proposal, we are then faced with the fact that the Mainstream men are apparently portraying two different kinds of “gay” personae: one in narratives and one in opinions. In narratives, the Mainstream men have lower, more stereotypically masculine mean pitch levels, whereas in opinions they have higher, more stereotypically feminine ones. In this instance, I believe that this change in directionality of the gay/non-gay distinction may be related to the particular affective stances that the Mainstream men adopt in the two conversational frames. Consider first the Mainstream men's mean pitch pattern in opinions, what I believe represents a more public, or even “out-group,” language style. Here, their use of higher mean pitch levels on gay topics corresponds to Israeli stereotypes of gay men's “feminine” speech. In a certain sense, then, the Mainstream men seem to be embodying Israeli gay stereotypes and adopting a speech style that is perceptually salient as “gay.” When I asked him what he thought about stereotypes of gay men in Israel, Gilad, a 31 year-old Mainstream member from Tel-Aviv, replied:

I don't think we need to be ashamed or run away from stereotypes. It's a way of thinking about people, a personal way of thinking. And yes, I think there are stereotypes and I don't think there's a lot to do against them. And it's a good question whether we should try to change the image and try to show gays who are more natural, more masculine, more straight – if that's the way to. I think that at some point we also have to realize that this is how it is.

אני לא חושב שצריך להיבהל מסטראוטיפים בסך הכל, זו חשיבה אנושית. וכן אני חושב שתמיד יהיו סטראוטיפים. אני לא חושב שיש הרבה מה לעשות כנגד זה. זאת שאלה טובה אם צריך לנסות בכוח לשפר את הדימוי ולהראות הומויים יותר טיבעיים, יותר גבריים, יותר סטרייטיים אם זו הצורה הנכונה. אני חושב שבאיזשהו מקום צריך גם להבין שזה המצב.

In Gilad's reply, we can detect a sort of complacency and acceptance of stereotypes (*I don't think there's a lot to do about them*). While he questions whether stereotypes should be changed, Gilad seems to end up giving into their inevitability (*this is how it is*). When I continued and asked him whether he thought stereotypes were demeaning or degrading to gay men, he replied:

In Tel Aviv, being gay is not only easy or accepted, it's almost desired or admired. And not only because people are trying to be open or liberal. Both because there are so many of them but also because it gets seen- I mean really in the past few years I think there was this transition, so now it's seen as something cool or hip. Everybody likes gays. Gays look good, gays are nice.

בתל-אביב זה לא רק שזה קל זה לא רק שזה מקובל זה גם רצוי נראה לי ואני חושב שבסך הכל מקבלים את זה לא רק בעין יפה אלא הסביבה באיזשהו מקום מעודדת בגלל שיש כל-כך הרבה וגם בגלל שזה נחשב... ביחוד אני חושב שבשנים האחרונות נהיה איזשהו טרנזישן, תופסים את זה כמשהו קולי, מגניב. כולם אוהבים הומואים. הומואים נראים טוב, הומואים נחמדים.

From Gilad's response, we see that for the Mainstream men standing out as distinctively "gay"-identified can be a positive thing: *Everybody likes gays. Gays look good. Gays are nice*. When speaking on opinions, then, it might be the case that the Mainstream men are in fact motivated by a desire to embody what they view as the stereotype of the "nice, good-looking" Israeli gay man. The use of higher mean pitch on gay topics in opinions, which I argue is associated with an avoidance of a normatively masculine (or *dugri*) pitch style, may therefore allow the Mainstream men to index affective stances such as "friendliness" and "affability," which in turn help constitute the kind of "gay" image the Mainstream men wish to project.

The story is different, however, when it comes to narratives. In narratives, Mainstream men are shown to have lower, and hence stereotypically more masculine, mean pitch levels on gay topics. In an effort to understand why this may be, consider what Ronen, a 46 year-old Mainstream member from Haifa, says about desire and masculinity among Israeli gay men:

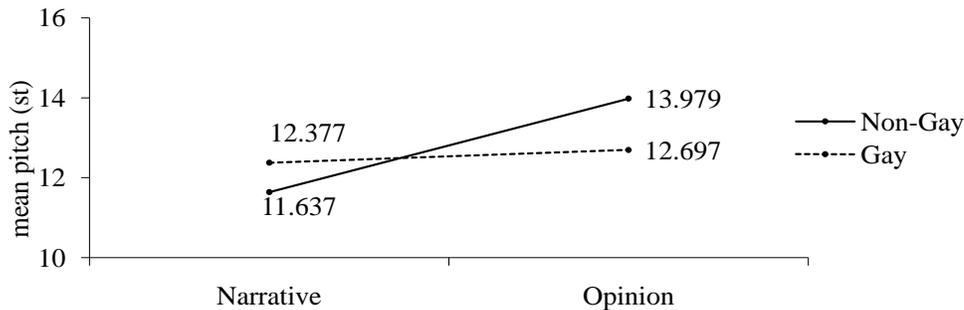
I think that we don't accept ourselves enough, us – I mean as men who are attracted to men. Like, I'm a man who looks straight, who acts straight, I don't act gay. I mean, why? It's ingrained in us. It's ingrained in us from the days of the Palmach. We're descendants of the Palmachniks. We need to be Palmachniks so we'll be attractive.

אני חושב שלא מספיק ננחי אנחנו מקבלים את עצמנו כאילו במובן הזה. אנחנו כאילו כגבר שנמשך לגבר. אני נראה סטרייט, אני מתנהג כמו סטרייט אני לא מתנהג כמו הומו. כאילו, למה? וזה טבוע בנו. זה טבוע בנו לדעתי מיימי הפלמח. אנחנו הדור של הפלמחניקים. אנחנו כמו הפלמחניקים, אנחנו צריכים להיות כמו הפלמחניקים כדי שימשכו אלינו.

In this extract, Ronen describes how in order to be attractive to others an Israeli gay man needs to be a *Palmachnik*, the iconic image of the Israeli masculine soldier. In other words, Ronen is saying that among gay men in Israel, that which is prized and esteemed is a normative, masculine virility, and that this desire has been ingrained in them all their lives. In what Irvine and Gal (2000) would call a process of fractal recursivity, it seems as though larger Israeli schemes of gender stratification are replicated among the Mainstream men. Gone is the image of the “nice” (or even “feminized”) gay man Gilad spoke of above. Instead, Ronen claims that amongst themselves, gay men must reproduce hegemonic notions of Israeli masculinity. Linguistically, it therefore seems possible that the use of lower mean pitch levels on gay narratives may help the Mainstream men index affective stances such as durability or virility with which to constitute “desirable” masculine personae. That they do so in narratives and not in opinions (and in fact do the opposite in opinions) I argue may be related to the particular interactional context engendered by the narrative frame, which I believe to be a more private or “in-group” one. Yet regardless of whether my proposed correlation between narratives and opinions and a more private versus a more public speech style, respectively, is borne out, what we can say is that the Mainstream men are apparently working to constitute two linguistically distinct “gay” voices – one on opinions that seems to correspond to (positive) Israeli stereotypes of gay men, and one on narratives that seems to correspond to dominant Israeli ideals of masculinity.

When we turn to the Mainstream women, we see that their results with respect to mean pitch variation are comparable to those for the Mainstream men (see Figure 3). First of all, we once again find a four-way distinction between non-gay narratives, gay narratives, non-gay opinions and gay opinions (for non-gay narratives, $n = 244$, for gay narratives, $n = 248$, $F(1, 486) = 8.731$, $p = 0.003$; for non-gay opinions, $n = 231$, for gay opinions, $n = 251$, $F(1, 476) = 39.423$, $p = 0.000$).⁹ In narratives, the Mainstream women’s mean pitch levels on gay topics are significantly higher (and hence stereotypically more feminine) than they are on non-gay topics (12.377 st and 11.637 st, respectively). In contrast, on opinions, the Mainstream women’s mean pitch levels are significantly lower (and hence stereotypically more masculine) on gay topics than on non-gay ones (12.697 st versus 13.979 st, respectively). Linguistically, this pattern for the Mainstream women is the reverse of what was found for the men. If, however, we think in terms of the patterns’ perceptual effects, we see that they are in fact analogous: in narratives, gay topics manifest stereotypically gender “appropriate” pitch levels (i.e., higher for women, lower for men), whereas in opinions, gay topics manifest stereotypically sexual identity “appropriate” pitch levels (i.e., lower for women, higher for men). In other words, the fact that the Mainstream women’s pitch patterns mirror those found for the Mainstream men need not be taken as evidence of a gender effect. Quite the contrary, I argue that if we consider the perceptual ramifications these patterns may have, we realize that Mainstream women and the Mainstream men are doing very much the same thing.

Figure 3. Mean Pitch Variation Mainstream Women



When we examine the Mainstream women's comments about sexuality, we also find that they resonate strongly with those of the Mainstream men. Consider Miriam, a 50 year-old Mainstream woman from Tel Aviv, when I asked her what her lesbianism means to her:

It's part of my whole life. I work, I sleep, I eat, I go shopping, I clean my home, I go to the bathroom— but I also have sex with people of my own sex. It's not that my life is all about sex. It's true that in terms of sex, my attraction is for women. But my lesbianism is not just a sexual orientation, it's my lifestyle. My lifestyle- but my lesbianism doesn't come out when I'm working. My work isn't connected at all to my lesbianism.

אלה החיים שלי, וזו חלק. אני עובד, אני אוכל, אני ישן, אני עושה קניות, אני מנקה את הבית, אני הולך לשירותים ואני גם עושה סקס עם בן המין שלי. זה לא שהחיים שלי "all about sex" זה נכון שבחלק של הסקס הנטיה שלי היא כלפי נשים, לכן הלסביות שלי זה לא רק נטיה מינית, כאילו, -זה סוג החיים שלי. סוג החיים שלי והוא הלסביות שלי לא באה לידי ביטוי כשאני עובדת, העבודה שלי היא לא בהכרח קשורה ללסביות שלי

In her reply, Miriam takes pains to describe how her lesbianism is only one part of the many things that make up her life (e.g., *working, shopping, cleaning, going to the bathroom*). And while her initial description of lesbianism involves defining it in terms of sexual object choice (*I have sex with people of my own sex*), she then immediately clarifies herself to state that lesbianism is not only about sex. Rather, Miriam describes lesbianism as her *lifestyle*. This lifestyle, however, is not prominent in every aspect of her life, and Miriam is quick to point out that her lesbianism has nothing to do with her work, for example. Taking Miriam's comments as representative, we therefore seem to have evidence for the same kind of epistemic stance with respect to sexuality among the Mainstream women that we observe among the Mainstream men: namely, the belief that sexuality is an isolated and distinct aspect of social subjectivity that does not interact with the rest of whom a person is or what she does.¹⁰

When it comes to defining sexuality and lesbian politics in the public sphere, we also find among the Mainstream women the same kind of acceptance of Israeli sexual stereotypes as we found among the Mainstream men. Consider what Shira, a 34-year old Mainstream member from Haifa, said when I asked her about the status of lesbians in Israel:

In terms of acceptance, you have to take it. Nobody is going to say, 'come be a part of things.' You want to be accepted? Establish yourself. And for me, I do it everywhere I go. And so people say to me, why are you always bothering with the lesbian thing? Why are you always making such a big deal about it? Because I know a lot of people don't have the courage to stand up and say this is how I am. So I do it- I have the strength, I have the self-esteem, I have the voice- so I do it. I mean, I have a good kind of visibility. I can make progress because I live in the consensus.

אני חושבת שקבלה לוקחים, זאת אומרת, כאילו אף אחד לא יגיד לך, בוא בבקשה כאילו- אתה רוצה להתקבל תשים את עצמך שם. כאילו ואני איפה שלא דרכת, כאילו לפעמים אמרו לי למה את מנפנת בלסביות? מה את עושה מזה "ביג דייל"? הסיבה היחידה שאני עושה מזה "ביג דייל" היא כי אני יודעת שלהרבה אין אומץ לבוא להגיד אני כזאת. אז אני יכולה, יש לי את הכוח, יש לי את הביטחון העצמי, יש לי יכולת דיבור. כאילו יש לי הנהירות חשובה, יש לי אפשרות. אני חושבת שאני מקדמת יותר את הקהילה מעצם העובדה שאני חיה במקום של קונצנזוס.

For Shira, as for the other women in the Mainstream group, positioning herself as a lesbian in Israeli society involves actively staking a claim and forging a space for herself (*nobody is going to say, 'come be a part of things'*). And this space that she forges is a strongly lesbian-identified one (*why are you always bothering with the lesbian thing?*), where the distinction between lesbian and non-lesbian subject positions is affirmed and valorized. The way in which this valorization takes place, however, is one firmly grounded in the norms of Israeli society (*I can make progress because I live in the consensus*). Being part of the consensus is a recurrent theme in Shira's comments, and she uses it to describe the fact that she is in a committed monogamous relationship and has children and so lives a "normal" life. Like the other Mainstream women, Shira feels that her ability to be accepted into society derives from the fact that she embraces Israeli social norms. Throughout our discussion, Shira contrasts her beliefs and experiences with what she describes as the "left-wing feminist lesbians," as she does when I ask her whether she feels that homophobia is a problem in Israel:

I say that the gay and lesbian community is responsible itself for homophobia. Women are responsible for their own status. ... I mean, so what happens is that, the women who are activists- they're the left-wing feminist lesbians who only care about the Arabs and not about themselves. They say, 'Since we're discriminated against, then we need to support all of those who may be suffering.' And I disagree, I mean, yeah, of course there are a lot of people who are suffering but I say- fine, but I'm interested in my own rights and not in the rights of any Palestinians. If they die of hunger, that's their own problem. In the end, I want my own right to get married.

אני אומרת שהקהילה ההומו-לסבית אשמה בהומופוביה, ושהנשים אשמות במצב שלהם ... עכשיו מה קורה? הנשים שהם כבר פעילות הם שמאלניות פמיניסטיות שאכפת להם מהערבים ולא מעצמם. כאילו אם אנחנו נופלים אז אנחנו צריכים להיות בעד כל המסכנים. אז אני אומרת לא. כאילו עם כל הכבוד יש הרבה מסכנים ואני אומרת: סליחה לא. עם כל הכבוד מענין אותי הזכויות שלי ולא של הפלסטינים, שימותו ברעב זאת בעיה שלהם. אני רוצה זכות להתחתן לצורך הענין.

Shira views any homophobic discrimination as emanating from individuals' own inability to adequately fend for themselves (*people are responsible for their own status*). She

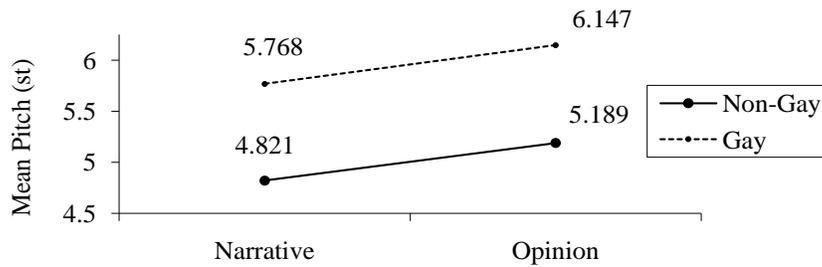
goes on to describe the ways in which the *left-wing feminist lesbians* distract themselves with the issue of Palestinian rights in Israel, rather than devoting their energies to the more “consensus” activity of homosexual marriage (*That’s their own problem. In the end, I want my own right to get married*). Though formulated the most explicitly by Shira, these themes are recurrent in the comments made by all of the Mainstream women. They all understand lesbian activism to be separate and distinct from any other sort of political or social organizing in Israel. While they differ in their level of sensitivity to the plights of other social groups, all of the women argue for the need to consider lesbian rights and lesbian politics on their own. In terms of the shape lesbian politics should take, they all express a firm belief in the integration of lesbian identity into the Israeli consensus. In other words, while they affirm the distinctiveness of lesbian identity, they see it as wholly compatible with dominant Israeli social structures. The Mainstream women thus seem to present a clear example of how an individual’s experience and practice of sexuality is linked to her experience and understanding of the nation.

Linguistically, therefore, I would argue that for the Mainstream women, as for the Mainstream men, the use of mean pitch corresponds to particular epistemic and affective stances adopted with respect to sexuality and sexual politics in Israel. Both the Mainstream women and the Mainstream men consistently differentiate between gay and non-gay topics in narratives and opinions. I suggest that this result may be the linguistic manifestation of an epistemology of sexuality that views lesbian or gay identity as separate from other aspects of social subjectivity. In other words, by altering mean pitch levels between gay and non-gay topics, I argue that the Mainstream men and women in a certain sense construct distinct “gay” and “non-gay” voices with which to portray distinct “gay” and “non-gay” selves. What these voices translate to linguistically then appears to depend on the kinds of “lesbian” or “gay” personae that the Mainstream women and men wish to project in the two different conversational frames. Overall, a pattern emerges where in narratives, mean pitch levels adhere to Israeli sociolinguistic stereotypes of gender (i.e., women with *higher* mean pitch levels on gay topics; men with *lower* mean pitch levels on gay topics). In opinions, however, the pattern is reversed, and the Mainstream men’s and women’s use of pitch appears to correspond to Israeli stereotypes of gay and lesbian speech, respectively. Ultimately, then, it seems possible to characterize the mean pitch patterns observed among the members of the Mainstream cluster in terms of *accommodation*, whether to Israeli sociolinguistic norms of gender (narratives) or sexuality (opinions).¹¹ Moreover, I propose that these patterns of linguistic accommodation could themselves be linked to the Mainstream members’ overarching belief in the possibility of integrating lesbian and gay identities into the already existing Israeli gendered order, and of the need to adapt themselves and their politics to fit within the Israeli “consensus.”

The Radical Cluster

The members of the Radical cluster, on the other hand, do not wish to integrate themselves into the existing Israeli gendered order, and instead seek its total reconfiguration. Interestingly, we also find an entirely different pattern with respect to mean pitch among the Radical speakers. In Figure 4, we see that the Radical men consistently distinguish mean pitch levels between talk on narratives and talk on opinions (for narratives, $n = 207$, for opinions, $n = 215$, $F(1, 414) = 29.585$, $p = 0.000$). Unlike the Mainstream women and men, however, the Radical men make no significant distinction between gay and non-gay topics in either narratives or opinions, as indicated by the gray shading in Figure 4. In other words, speech topic appears to have no effect on the Radical men’s mean pitch levels (Radical Men: for non-gay narratives, $n = 98$, for gay narratives, $n = 109$, $F(1, 203) = 1.762$, $p = 0.186$; for non-gay opinions, $n = 112$, for gay opinions, $n = 103$, $F(1, 211) = 3.048$, $p = 0.082$).

Figure 4. Mean Pitch Variation Radical Men



I propose above that the distinction between gay topics and non-gay topics in the speech of members of the Mainstream cluster is potentially related to their understanding of sexuality as a separate, disconnected aspect of their social subjectivities. Could the lack of differentiation for the Radical men, then, be perhaps linked to a lack of this kind of subjective distinction on their part? Put another way, could the linguistic non-differentiation between gay and non-gay topics be somehow related to a subjective non-differentiation between their “gay” and other identifications? Consider what Tzvi, a 22 year-old Radical member from Haifa, has to say about how he understands lesbian and gay politics in Israel:

[My worldview is one where] there is a collective viewpoint. Where the LGBT struggle is seen as part of the general struggle about the character of Israeli society itself. Where it is connected to the other struggles – against the Occupation, in support of rights for the Arab population, in support of social justice in all of Israel. In my view, I don't see the issue of social rights as disconnected from the rights of the Arab population, just like the issue of the Occupation is not disconnected from the bigger issue of violence in Israeli society, such as violence against women. I don't think the LGBT issue just came out of thin air.

של ראייה כוללת של המאבק הלהט"בי כחלק ממאבק כללי יותר על האופי של החברה הישראלית ולחבר אותו עם מאבקים אחרים נגד הכיבוש בעד שיוויון לאוכלוסיה הערבית, בעד צדק חברתי. כמו שבעיניי, הנושא החברתי או נושא של זכויות חברתיות אני לא רואה אותו במנותק מהזכויות של האוכלוסיה הערבית והנושא של הכיבוש אני לא רואה אותו במנותק מנושאים כלליים של אלימות בחברה הישראלית למשל אלימות כלפי נשים ואני גם לא רואה את הנושא הלהט"בי כצף באויר.

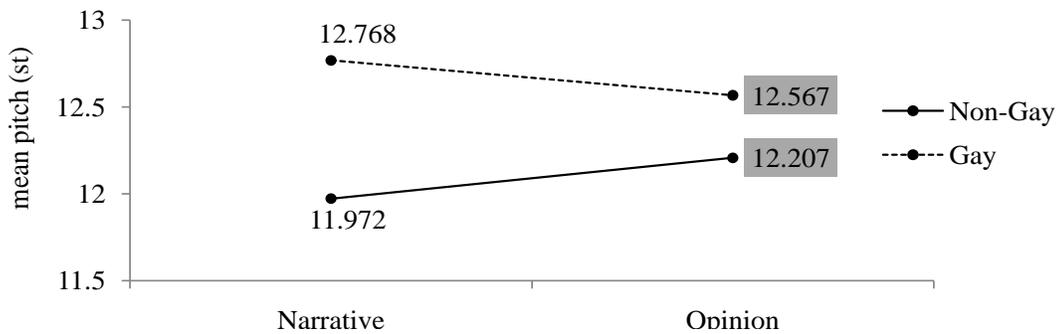
We see in Tzvi's comments the idea that sexual politics are intimately bound up with all sorts of other social struggles. And though I am not reproducing them here, the Radical men also describe their own personal understandings of sexuality in similar terms – as a part of who they are that is inextricable from, and even mutually constitutive of, all the rest. These comments, therefore, lend credence to the notion that the Radical men may not be differentiating linguistically between gay and non-gay topics because for them there is no difference subjectively. In raising the possibility that the Radical men may not subjectively differentiate between their sexual and other identifications, I am not suggesting that the Radical men “lack” sexuality, or that their identifications as gay are somehow unimportant. Rather, I argue that their “gay” identifications may not be as neatly compartmentalized as those of the members of the Mainstream cluster appear to be, and may therefore not correspond to a linguistically differentiated “gay” voice.

When we turn to the Radical women, we see that their descriptions of sexuality and sexual politics in many ways echo the sentiments expressed by the Radical men. Consider, for example, Tova, a 30 year-old Radical member from Tel Aviv, as she describes the goals of her activism:

I think that in a really meaningful way we are trying to make the connection between sexual radicalism and political radicalism. I mean like the whole issue of one struggle. Like connecting the mentality of the Occupation and the mentality of militarism and the mentality of capitalism with all of the ways in which the heterosexist society normalizes lesbians, gays and transgendered people. Society requires you to select a gender role that then supports the war machine and economic subjugation.

אני חושבת שבאופן מאד מהותי לעשות את הקישור בין רדיקליות מינית לרדיקליות פוליטית, כאילו הענין של מאבק אחד כאילו את הקישור בין מנטליות של כיבוש ומנטליות מניטריסטית ומנטליות קפיטליסטית לכל המקום שבו חברה היטרוסקסיסטית ובעצם הופכת.. עושה א-נורמליזציה של לסביות, הומואים וטרנסג'נדרס, מכריחה אותך לבחור בתפקידי מגדר משמרתים את מכונת המלחמה והדיכוי הכלכלי.

Figure 5. Average mean pitch of Radical Women



In Figure 5, we see that while the Radical women do not differentiate mean pitch levels between gay and non-gay topics in opinions (making them similar in this respect to the Radical men) they do distinguish between gay and non-gay topics in narratives (for non-gay narratives, $n = 254$, for gay narratives, $n = 246$, $U = 27815.0$, $Z = -2.122$, $p = 0.034$; for non-gay opinions, $n = 249$, for gay opinions, $n = 249$, $U = 29365.0$, $Z = -1.019$, $p = 0.308$).¹² What this means is that, in contrast to the Radical men (yet like the members of the Mainstream cluster), the Radical women appear to be engaged in interacting processes of both responsive and initiative shifting. Up to this point, I have been arguing that initiative shift is evidenced by a significant differentiation between gay and non-gay topics, whereby a change in average mean pitch levels could be indicative of distinct “gay” and “non-gay” voices. For the Radical women, however, this process of initiative shift only appears to be operative in the narrative frame. When speaking on opinions, the Radical women make no distinction at all in terms of mean pitch across topics, thus pointing to an analysis in which context of speech (i.e., discourse type) is linked to whether or not initiative shifting across topics takes place.

I do not have a fully developed account for the pitch pattern observed among the Radical women. Based on the arguments I have been making thus far, I would expect the Radical women to behave in ways similar to the Radical men given that they share the same over-arching beliefs and practices with respect to sexuality and sexual politics in Israel. And,

at least to a certain extent, the Radical women are behaving similarly to the Radical men - neither of them distinguishes mean pitch levels across gay and non-gay topics in opinions. Where this similarity breaks down, however, is on narratives. There, the Radical women are making a significant differentiation between gay and non-gay topics, thus making them more similar to the members of the Mainstream cluster (who distinguish between gay and non-gay topics in both narratives and opinions). In fact, on narratives the Radical women produce the identical pattern as the Mainstream women whereby mean pitch levels on gay topics are significantly higher than those on non-gay topics. Taking narratives and opinions together, we therefore find that the Radical women's pitch pattern seems to contradict what we would normally expect if we were thinking purely in terms of either political group membership (i.e., it is different from what the Radical men are doing) or gender (i.e., it is different from what the Mainstream women are doing).

This partial dissimilarity between the Radical women's pitch pattern and those of both the Radical men and the Mainstream women leads me to suspect that the Radical women's pitch practices may in fact reflect a subjective tension on their part between their political and their gender identifications. In terms of gender, though the Mainstream and the Radical women all self-identify as "women" (and "lesbians"), the Radical women also take pains to distance themselves from the beliefs and practices of the women of the Mainstream cluster. In the following extract, Tova, the Radical woman cited above, explains how her political views differ from those of the Mainstream women:

And I really quickly understood that I don't have any connection to Klaf [a Mainstream organization]. They are, you know, this 1970s feminism, it's Dworkin feminism. There never was the battle for the lesbian sex in Israel; there never was Pat Califia. Klaf is a very conservative feminism, and as a group, Klaf has never tried to challenge the straight world. They've always been involved in the whole issue of children and families. But I think that instead of saying that we want to take part in their oppressive institutions, we should struggle against established beliefs, and we should do that in partnership with progressive elements of the heterosexual society in order to change the system into something that's less oppressive for everyone, and that way we will also be helped.

ואני מאד מהר הבנתי שאין לי חיבור לקל"ף כי זה פמיניזם של שנות ה-70, זה פמיניזם של דורקין. בוא נגיד שכאילו לא היתה פה אף פעם מלחמות הסקס הלסביות, לא היה פה פאט קליפיה. אבל באופן מאד מובהק קל"ף היתה פמיניזם מאד שמרני. כארגון למיטב ידיעתי, אף פעם הם לא איתגרו את תעשיית הסטרייטים. תמיד היו מאד בענין של ילדים ומשפחות. כי אני כן חושבת שבמקום להגיד אנחנו רוצים כאילו לקחת חלק במוסדות הדכאניים שלכם, אנחנו צריכים להאבק עם כוחות פרוגרסיביים בקהילה ההיטרוסקסואלית כדי להפוך את המערכת שם כלל לפחות דכאנית ועל ידי כך להפעיל אותנו.

In Tova's comments, we see a rejection of the Mainstream women's approach to sexual politics based on the belief that these politics are grounded in an outdated and essentialist understanding of gender (*this 1970s feminism, it's Dworkin feminism*). This point is further reinforced by Tova's description of how she understands her own sexuality, which she defines as 'queer lesbian':

I'm a lesbian in terms of my desires, both sexual and emotional, that are geared towards women. However, in terms of my community affiliations, my affiliation is to men and women and other such whose primary identity is not straight. So I have a much stronger connection to queer heterosexuals, or heterosexuals who embody different kinds of gender roles, than I do to lesbian and gay straights.

זה אומר שאני לסבית ברמת מושאי התשוקה המינית והריגשית שלי הינן נשים. However, קודם כל מבחינת החיבור הקהילתי שלי נגיד, החיבור הקהילתי שלי הוא לנשים, גברים ונבילים שהבסיס, הזהות הבסיסית שלהם היא לא סטרייטית. כלומר, יש לי הרבה יותר חיבור להיטרסקסואלים קווירים, כלומר להיטרסקסואלים שמאתגרים תפקידי מגדר ואת איך העולם עובד מאשר ללסביות או הומואים סטרייטים.

Tova's definition of her sexuality begins in terms that are in fact strikingly similar to many of the Mainstream women: as an affective and sexual desire for women. She quickly goes on, however, to qualify this definition by describing the ways in which her personal affiliations and attachments are more strongly influenced by a shared (re)conceptualization of gendered practice (*queer heterosexuals*) than they are by a purportedly shared sexual identity (*lesbian and gay straights*). In other words, though the Radical and the Mainstream women may share an identification with womanhood and lesbianism, the differences in how they understand these identifications are sufficient to preclude the formation of a feeling of commonality, or even unity, among them.

It would be inappropriate, however, to then conclude that gender is of no importance to the Radical women and that their social practices could be characterized solely in terms of their political affiliations. Consider how Leah, a 28 year-old Radical member from Tel Aviv, describes radical activism in Israel:

[It's turned into] this very masculine, very forceful sort of thing where people aren't really looking for feminist alternatives. It's like they just buy into the whole masculine, hegemonic, hierarchical game in ways that's really difficult for me to identify with ... and now it's all about these very masculine things, a clear leadership structure, a hierarchy. All kinds of activities that are based on force and violence that aren't appropriate for everyone- not for kids, and not for parents, and not for the handicapped and maybe not for women. And it's becoming apparent that a lot of women are leaving the movement. And there's a desire for something else, and I think women are starting to look for something else.

דברים מאד גבריים, מאד כוחניים, שמאד לא מחפשים אלטרנטיבות פמיניסטיות או... כאילו הם קונים את כללי המשחק הגבריים והכוחניים וההיררכיים באיזשהו מקום, שקשה לי להשלים איתם דברים שהם מאד גבריים ועוד דברים של היררכיה ברורה, ההנהגה שהיא גברית ברובה. פעולות שהן כוחניות ואלימות שלא מתאימות לכל אחד, לא לילדים ולא לנכים ולא להורים ולא לנשים אולי. וזה בא לידי ביטוי בכך שהרבה נשים נפלטות מהמערכת הזאתי וגם ויש רצון ויש חיפוש עכשיו בזמן אחרון למסגרות שיותר מתאימות לנשים

We see from Leah's comments that while the Radical women may reject the Mainstream political approach, they are also not comfortable with the traditional Radical one. Leah, for example, describes the ways in which radical organizing is lacking what she calls a *feminist alternative*, having instead been co-opted by *hierarchical, hegemonic, masculine* structures.

From these comments, we are therefore led to understand that the Radical women are unprepared to totally ignore considerations of gender in their lives despite their misgivings about the sometimes essentialist use of gender as a social categorization.

In short then, I would argue that the Radical women's beliefs and practices defy classification in simple or binary terms: both gender and politics seem to be playing pivotal, if at times contradictory, roles in the formation of the women's sexual subjectivities. It is, moreover, interesting to note that the Radical women's pitch pattern also defies straightforward classification. On opinions, the Radical women seem to be behaving like the Radical men (making no distinction between gay and non-gay topics) while their significant differentiation across topics in narratives parallels what we find in the Mainstream cluster (and, more specifically, among the Mainstream women). I concede that further research is required to try and understand precisely how the Radical women's beliefs about sexuality and sexual politics may then be linked to this characteristic and seemingly "blended" pattern with respect to mean pitch. I nevertheless believe that even on a descriptive level, the Radical women present a compelling example of the ways in which sexuality is the product of multiple systems of belief and identification operating simultaneously. This finding is doubly relevant in the context of the current volume since it underscores how we must not only take care to avoid simple sexuality-based oppositions (between homogenous categories of "homosexual" and "heterosexual," for example), but that in doing so we must also ensure that our analyses do not ignore persistent, if admittedly often over-simplified, distinctions that are culturally salient (e.g., between lesbians and gays; see Zimman 2009). Rather, the Radical women, and in fact all the Israeli activists described here, highlight the need to treat sexuality as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

I state at the beginning of this chapter that my goal is not to identify or describe an Israeli "gay" or "lesbian" style of speech, but rather to examine how language participates in the *practice* of sexuality in Israel (cf. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). This means that my examination of language use among gay and lesbian Israelis necessarily passes through a simultaneous investigation of what sexuality means to the speakers studied, in an effort to try and understand why they may be using language as they are. Though limited in scope, I believe that the analyses above succeed in demonstrating that significant differences, both linguistic and subjective, exist among lesbian and gay Israelis: linguistic differences in terms of how mean pitch levels vary across conversational frames and speech topics; and subjective differences in terms of how sexuality and sexual identity are conceptualized. My basic argument, then, is that these differences may in fact be related – that the distinctive pitch patterns observed for the Mainstream men and women, the Radical men and the Radical women may both influence and be influenced by the different ways in which these three groups define and experience gay and/or lesbian sexuality.

In the Mainstream group, the women and men both describe their sexuality as an isolated and distinct identification that while important does not influence or interact with other aspects of their social subjectivities. When it comes to describing the particular shape that these sexual identifications take, the emphasis is placed on how lesbians and gays should *accommodate* to normative Israeli conceptualizations of gender and sexuality. Shira describes how she can act as a good role model for lesbian Israelis because of her commitment to what is perhaps best described as Israeli "family values." Similarly, Gilad talks about how being gay in Israel can be seen as something "trendy" or "hip," though both he and Ronen underscore the fact that in order to be "appropriately" gay, one must be sufficiently

masculine. Linguistically, the Mainstream women and men consistently differentiate their mean pitch levels between gay and non-gay topics in both narratives and opinions. By doing so, they are in a sense creating a separate and distinct “voice” for speaking on gay topics. The precise nature of that voice, moreover, changes depending on whether they are speaking on narratives, which I argue may reflect a more private speech style, or on opinions, which I argue may reflect a more public one. I propose, then, that the observed pattern with respect to mean pitch among Mainstream speakers is the linguistic correlate of their subjective understandings of sexuality. Rather than representing some generalized and disembodied “gay” or “lesbian” language, I argue that the Mainstream speakers’ distinctive pitch pattern both reflects and constructs Mainstream members’ own particular brand of gay/lesbian identity.

My argument remains the same for the Radical women and men, though what I believe changes is what sexuality means to them. The Radical men describe how for them sexuality is an inextricable and interconnected part of who they are. Linguistically, the Radical men make no distinction in terms of mean pitch between gay and non-gay topics in either narratives or opinions. I suggest that this lack of a linguistic distinction could therefore perhaps be correlated with their apparent lack of a subjective one. The Radical women, on the other hand, seem somewhat more conflicted in their understanding of sexuality. While they explicitly reject the identitarian isolation of the Mainstream approach, they are also not entirely comfortable with what they perceive as the Radical movement’s disregard for gender issues. And while I do not make any specific proposals as to how their beliefs about sexuality may link up with their use of language, I point out a potential correlation between the Radical women’s views and their characteristic pattern with respect to mean pitch.

Abstracting away from the details of my proposals, I am arguing that there is a connection between how individuals conceptualize and experience sexuality and the linguistic practices through which those conceptualizations are socially realized. Whether one then chooses to view language as determined by social experience or itself as a structuring element of that experience is to a large extent a matter of theoretical preference. Yet whatever the theoretical position taken, I believe that the analyses above make the larger point that just as the experience of sexuality is not the same for all Israeli gays and lesbians neither is their language. In other words, sexuality alone, as a variable disconnected from others, is insufficient to describe the sociolinguistic reality of lesbian and gay life in Israel. Rather, I argue that it is the interaction of sexuality, politics and, to a certain extent, gender that undergirds the patterns of linguistic variation described above. Through this chapter, I therefore hope to have demonstrated the need for sociocultural research, linguistic or otherwise, to consider nationalism and politics in the study of sexuality. Doing so will, I believe, allow us to move beyond examining sexuality in terms of static and/or durable binaries (e.g., homosexual/heterosexual; woman/man; lesbian/gay) and to more accurately depict the ways in which “identity” is experienced by people in their daily lives.

NOTES

- 1 Victory speech given by Ehud Olmert on March 28, 2006 after the elections to the 17th Knesset. Available on the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website [<http://www.mfa.gov.il/>]. Accessed on June 10, 2008.
- 2 *Sabra* (Heb. *tsabar*, ‘prickly pear’) is the word colloquially used in Israel to refer to native-born Israelis. It also refers, especially in the academic literature (e.g., Almog 2000), to the children of Jews who immigrated to Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century, i.e., the first generation of native born Jews in modern Palestine.

- The term *sabra* carries a great deal of symbolic weight in Israel and is associated with precisely the “new” type of Jew that Zionism sought to create.
- 3 *Aliya* (Heb. literally ‘going up’, plural *aliyot*) is the term still in common use for immigration to Israel. This is a highly loaded term, given its implication of ascension, and it exists in opposition to the term for emigration from Israel, known as *yerida* (Heb. literally ‘going down’). While *aliya* can be used to refer to any individual immigration to Israel, in a historical sense it is used to refer to specific, defined periods of large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine/Israel. The second and third *aliyot*, i.e., those that brought the *halutsim*, took place from 1903-1914 and 1918-1924, respectively.
- 4 It should be perhaps be noted that women (like all other Israeli citizens, except for those who are granted exemptions for religious reasons) are required to serve in the Israeli military. Research, however, has shown that in their military service, women are restricted to predominantly secondary and support-based roles, thus replicating (and in many ways reinforcing) the gender-role stereotypes of society at large (e.g., Sered 2000).
- 5 Note that in describing stereotypical images of Israeli lesbians and gays in terms of gendered “inversion,” I am in no way making an ontological or epistemological claim. In other words, I am not arguing that Israeli gays and lesbians in fact manifest “inverted” gender behavior nor that they conceive of their sexualities in this way. What I am doing, however, is reporting the popular ideological conceptualization of gay and lesbian identity in Israel, and suggesting that lesbians and gays themselves may make use of these ideological links between language and social categories to construct and perform perceptually salient sexual identities (e.g., Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Cameron and Kulick 2003; Eckert 2002).
- 6 Informants were however aware that all interviews were recorded, meaning that all talk during the interviews could potentially make its way into a more public sphere.
- 7 Mean pitch is measured as the average F0 of an intonational phrase (corresponding to a level 4 break in the Tone Break Indices coding system). Pitch measurements were executed using a semi-automated script in Praat version 4.5.02. Pitch is measured on the logarithmic semitone scale so as to more closely approximate the way the human hear perceives pitch (e.g., Henton 1989).
- 8 The notion of responsive style-shifting undergirds a variety of more specific theoretical frameworks, including Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson’s (1974) model of recipient design; Bell’s (1984) model of audience design; and Labov’s (1972) conceptualization of the style continuum. For my present purposes, I remain agnostic with respect to precisely what kind of responsive shifting I believe is taking place among the Mainstream men, though I refer the reader to Levon (2009) for a discussion of this very topic.
- 9 Note that for the Mainstream women, gay topics are *not* significantly different across discourse types (for gay narratives, $n = 248$; for gay opinions, $n = 251$; $F(1, 493) = 2.347$, $p = 0.126$). While this result is important, it does not detract from the significant difference with respect to gay versus non-gay topics in both narratives and opinions. A discussion of the full implications of this non-significant result is beyond the scope of this chapter.
- 10 The Mainstream women’s compartmentalization of sexuality does, however, seem somewhat less complete than that of the Mainstream men. Miriam does open her comments with the statement that her lesbianism is ‘part of [her] whole life,’ though she later seems to separate it off from other things she does. While this may be

indicative of an important subjective difference between the Mainstream women and the Mainstream men, a full exploration of the implications of this difference is beyond the scope of this chapter (though see the discussion of the Radical women and men below).

- 11 I admittedly leave the question of why they may be accommodating to norms of sexuality in opinions and norms of gender in narratives open. This may be related to my proposal above that narratives represent a more private, in-group discourse whereas opinions represent a more public, out-group discourse. Under this scenario, part of adopting “consensus”-driven behaviors could include the integration and reproduction of gender norms within Mainstream lesbian and gay groups, along with the simultaneous adherence to sexuality norms in more out-group contexts. At this point, however, this analysis is no more than conjecture and I leave a full treatment of this issue for subsequent research.
- 12 Note that in contrast to the Mainstream women and men and the Radical men, the Radical women’s distribution of mean pitch levels across categories is non-normal. Analyses were therefore conducted using non-parametric Mann-Whitney tests.

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