UPGRADED MASCULINITY: A GENDERED ANALYSIS OF THE DEBRIEFING IN THE ISRAELI AIR FORCE

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This article examines the importation of new gender ideals into a highly masculine organization through top-down and bottom-up processes. We analyze how a dominant group of men undo and redo gender in order to reproduce their supremacy and create a new, "improved" form of masculinity. Based on qualitative research on the practice of debriefing in the Israel Air Force, we explore how new practices of masculinity are incorporated into a hegemonic masculinity by introducing so-called "soft" organizational practices and thus constructing a new form of "upgraded" masculinity. We show that pilots are involved in two continual and dialectical processes of performing masculinity. The first includes top-down practices neutralizing opportunities to execute exaggerated masculine performances, including new technologies allowing recording and documenting of all flights, a safety discourse emphasizing the protection of human life, and organizational learning based on self and group critiques aimed at improved performance. The second, a bottom-up process enacted by pilots, is aimed at restoring and mobilizing masculinity and includes rationalized professionalism, competitiveness and patronizing. Taken

together these constitute a hybrid, "upgraded" masculinity where "soft" characteristics are appropriated by men to reinforce a privileged status and to reproduce their dominance within and outside the military. Our case study focuses on the debriefing, a process in which air teams formally reflect on their performance after a particular task/event in order to improve it.

Key words: *hybrid masculinities, upgraded masculinity, military manhood, debriefing, men in organizations*

One of the most important sites for the production and reproduction of masculinity is the workplace. Indeed, since the 1980s increasing attention has been devoted to the processes by which masculinity is experienced, performed and negotiated in organizations (Collinson and Hearn 1994, 1996; Hearn and Collinson 1994; Kerfoot and Knights 1998; Morgan 1992; Simpson 2004, 2006; Whitehead and Barrett 2001; Wikhamn and Knights 2013). The dominance of masculine images in management is especially evident in military organizations, due to the common association between militarism, war and masculinity (Enloe 2000; Sasson-Levy 2008) and the perception of soldiering as embodying characteristics considered to be hyper-masculine, such as physical strength, toughness, aggressiveness, courage, self-restraint and emotional control (Barrett 1996; Hinojosa 2010; Hutchings 2008). However, new images of masculinity that have emerged in the last decades have challenged these ideals and garnered scholarly attention to contesting masculinities in various organizational contexts (Brod 1987; Hearn 2004; Hearn et al. 2011).

This article examines the importation of new masculine ideals and practices into a highly masculine organization by analyzing how a dominant group of men, pilots in the Israeli Air Force – (IAF), reproduces their supremacy (Bird 1996) through top-down and bottom-up processes and constructs a new form of masculinity. These pilots do so by actively appropriating the new ideals potentially threatening their dominant position into a new form combining older and newer elements. Exploring the practice of debriefing in the IAF—a process in which air teams formally reflect on their performance after a particular task/event—we analyze how new practices are incorporated into a new improved masculinity through introducing the so-called "soft" organizational practices of public confession, admitting mistakes or emphasizing safety. In the new version of masculinity, "soft" elements are used as power resources,

and it thus is perceived by the pilots as better than other masculinities within and outside the military.

Our contribution to the scholarly literature is threefold. First, while existing studies indicate that introducing new organizational practices threatening male hegemony within the organization are usually rejected in various ways, our case reveals how such practices are actively adopted and adapted by an elite group of men to preserve and enhance their dominance. We thus demonstrate how Israeli pilots respond to new "soft" practices and, instead of framing them as threats, how they integrate these practices into their own identity to gain advantage over other masculinities. We term this new form of masculinity *upgraded masculinity* to reflect the appropriation and internalization of "soft" practices to improve their masculinity and preserve their hegemonic status. Second, using the notion of "gender work" (Gherardi 1994) and "gender as practice" (Poggio 2006), we highlight the "remedial work" through which the gender order is restored when disrupted. By scrutinizing how men in a highly masculine organization implement "softer" ideals and behaviors—like expressing emotions or showing weakness—as mundane, everyday repetitive routines, we contribute to the growing understanding of gender as a result of ongoing work rather than of fixed categories. In this sense, we take Martin's (2001) argument about how masculinities as practices are relational, interactional, social and processual to show how they change over time not only as local adaptations but as new creations. Third, and perhaps most significant, we integrate scholarly contributions emphasizing processes of mobilizing masculinity (Martin 2001) not only vis-a-vis women/femininity but with reference to men. We argue that it is not only through discursive practices—often focused on individuals' statements—that men's dominant position is reasserted. Rather, we add the collective interactional dimension through

which common practices are negotiated, produced and then reproduced. Focusing on this collective/organizational level allows us to show how men mobilize masculinity interactionally. Theoretically, we follow Martin (2003) and ask what collective mobilizing (rather than individual doing) masculinity involves under conditions of social/organizational change threatening hegemonic models. By focusing on collective interactional practices through which men adapt to change, we demonstrate how men mobilize masculinity in a concerted fashion.

The case of pilots in the IAF seems especially suitable for examining contesting masculinities, since they are considered not only the military's elite, but also an ideal-type of sophisticated masculinity in Israeli society. On the one hand, they adhere to the stereotypic military masculinity emphasizing dominance through risk-taking, aggressiveness, competitiveness and a sense of invulnerability (Gill 1997; Hockey 2003; Howson 2006; Woodward 2000, 2003). On the other, they are not required to have physical strength but intellectual and technological abilities and thus are perceived as evincing elements of "white-collar" soldiers (Sasson-Levy 2008). As such, they represent a new type of hyper-masculinity, deviating from the masculine infantry military model while maintaining their dominance.

We point to three bottom-up processes—rationalized professionalism, competitiveness and patronizing—that are incorporated into the pilots' masculine identity with the aim of improving and upgrading their masculinity in their struggle for dominance over other masculinities.

TOWARD A NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF MASCULINITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Largely advanced through Connell's (1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) concept of "hegemonic masculinity"—a culturally idealized form of masculinity—many contemporary studies deal with social change and the emergence of multiple masculinities both within military and non-military organizations (Anderson 2009; Barrett 1996; Coles 2009; Deutsch 2007; Higate 2003, 2012; Howson 2006; Kachtan and Wasserman 2015; Martin 2001; Messner 1993; Pullen and Simpson 2009; Simpson, Slutskaya, and Hughes 2011). Broadly, studies of social change and masculinities often indicate how men adapt to threats to hegemonic (and other) masculinities in social life. Three types of studies deal with these kinds of questions regarding organizations: men in "feminine" occupations, organizations with a majority of women, and hyper-masculine organizations. First are studies of men in occupations thought of as stereotypically feminine. For instance, Lopez (2010) shows how men in interactive service work reposition their work as consistent with their masculinity by relabeling that work to sound more "masculine." A second type of scholarly literature deals with men in feminist organizations or organizations marked by a majority of women (e.g., Brown 2009; Cross and Bagilhole 2002; Lupton 2000; Pullen and Simpson 2009). These studies show how men adopt a variety of ploys to overcome discomfort deriving from the "feminine image" of their organization and restore their manliness. Dellinger (2004), studying men working in feminist magazines, shows how they cope with their "embattled" masculinity through joking about work or emphasizing their difference from women. Wozniak and Uggen (2009) analyze how non-lethal—i.e., less "manly"—weapons in police exhibitions were rebranded as suited to images of police officers as "heroes" going after discredited

"villains." A third kind comprises studies of men in hyper-masculine organizations facing social change; these analyze how hegemonic masculinities are threatened and how multiple masculinities emerge. Bird (1996) demonstrates how in such settings meanings centered on hegemonic masculinity are maintained while meanings related to non-hegemonic masculinity are suppressed, delegitimized or marginalized through a homosociality entailing emotional detachment and competitiveness. In contrast, others argue that even in hyper-masculine contexts masculinity is challenged and changed to include non-hegemonic behaviors. For instance, Knights and McCabe (2000) show that on a financial firm's call-center the dominant organizational discourse during change integrated ideals emphasizing competition, control and conquest *along with* new ideas about care, trust, creativity and teamwork. Ely and Meyerson's (2010) research on men working on an oil drilling platform examines how changes in safety policy destabilized the hyper-masculine identity entrenched in toughness and invulnerability and allowed the expression of vulnerability, emotions of fear, acknowledgment of physical limitations, and desire to learn from mistakes, thus allowing a broader repertoire of behaviors, including those that run counter to conventionally masculine scripts. We develop Ely and Meyerson's suggestion about the development of a new version of masculinity below.

In recent decades we have also witnessed shifts in combatant masculinity that maintains military aggressiveness but simultaneously substitutes bravado and invincibility with an openly articulated sense of manly vulnerability and human compassion (Godfrey, Lilley, and Brewis 2012; Higate 2003; Niva 1998; Smith 2016). These new forms of masculinity were enabled by changes in the roles of Western armies that lead to the growing engagement of soldiers in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations (Khalili 2011). Even in Israel's militaristic context, "softer"

forms of masculinities are emerging. For example, Perez and Sasson-Levy (2014), studying men who avoid conscription, show the emergence of a new anti-hegemonic masculinity displayed through anti-heroic traits perceived to be opposed to masculine ideals (such as sensitivity, vulnerability, and distancing from heroism). Sasson-Levy and Amram-Katz (2007), researching the integration of an officers' course, showed how men used a variety of approaches—such as gendered allocation of duties or gendered evaluation of performance—to reassert and regender their dominance. Mills (1998) found that since the 1930s we have witnessed a shift in pilots' behaviors from an emphasis on heroism, risk, and individualism to bureaucratic practices accentuating professionalism, experience, and teamwork. As a result, piloting has become identified with a new form of masculinity sanctifying technical and professional knowledge, careerism, and expertise, termed "techno-masculinity" by Messerschmidt (1993). At the same time, piloting has maintained women's exclusion and men's dominance. However, not many of these studies delineate the interactional processes by which these new forms emerge.

To deepen our understanding of these processes, Deutsch (2007) alerts us not only to the continuity of gender ideals and practices ("doing gender") but to their change and the emergence of new forms and practices ("undoing gender"). Accordingly, we examine the active role of organizational members in reconstructing gendered categories through a focus on "how gender is constantly redefined and negotiated in the everyday practices through which individuals interact" (Poggio 2006, 225). We do not only use this notion to refer to the "remedial work" (Gherardi 1994) carried out through rituals to restore the symbolic gender order, but also we analyze what kind of new order and practices emerge, the creative aspect of gender work. Accordingly, we ask not only about reproduction (of dominant relations) but

also about change, not only continuity but also transformation. Furthermore, we show how emergent forms are used as resources for men in dominant/hegemonic positions. In this respect, Ashcraft's (2005) analysis of American airline pilots grappling with changes in work offers a way to develop these arguments further. She shows how pilots maintain the traditional image of the masculine, potent pilot as the organization is emasculating them through techniques of human resources management and empowering members of flight crews. Ashcraft argues that pilots use two concurrent discursive strategies to deal with this tension: actively adopting institutional change and espousing a rhetoric justifying empowerment of crews, *and* attempting to undermine and oppose the threat of emasculinization. Theoretically, her model emphasizes simultaneity (embracing change and undermining emasculinization), the agency of actors (pilots actively embracing change but also resisting it), integration (new elements are amalgamated with older ones) and production (not only reproducing older forms but producing new ones). Yet, what seems to be missing in her analysis, and something she only hints at, is the level of interactions between pilots.

Like Ashcraft we focus on members of a hegemonic organizational masculinity to show not only how men adapt to potentially threatening changes, but also how they frame and interpret their reaction/adaptation as part of their agency—embracing change out of choice and using it as a power resource. We take this as one of our starting points by asking a more interactive (rather than only discursive) question: what happens among groups of hegemonic men interacting and collectively doing gender? By focusing on interactional practices, we analyze what happens when pilots meet together and ask how their behavior actually has changed vis-à-vis new challenges to their masculinity. Thus we observe not only what they talk about, but

also how new actions have been incorporated into the organization and changed their masculinity. This, we believe, opens up questions about the collective level of dynamics and processes—that of mobilizing masculinity.

METHODS

Debriefing is the process in which an individual or team formally reflects on their performance after a particular task/event. While debriefings have been adopted in a variety of contexts, such as psychological intake settings or high-risk organizations, their origins lie in the military where they are still ubiquitous. Debriefings are used in the IAF as techniques of organizational learning, as sites for collective and systematic analysis of actions, and as lessons learned about specific missions—all aimed at improving the performance of military units (Dismukes and Smith 2000). The debriefing is employed daily as an essential precondition for constant improvement. Each day begins with a squadron-wide briefing including general information and reminders of safety rules, orders assigning flight crews to teams, the flight routes planned, the results expected, and the timetable for the day. When the team returns to base, a small team debriefing—followed immediately by a squadron-wide debriefing—takes place in which video and audio recordings documenting the actions of each member of the flight crew are collectively analyzed. Following a presentation of safety events, the results of the team and each pilot's reflection on his/her performance (including admitting mistakes), as well as the lessons learned during the day, are summed up. All of these meetings require a substantial amount of time during a typical day, and debriefings have become a deeply rooted, highly glorified institution for Israeli pilots who are socialized into its prerequisites from the earliest stages of their training.

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This study is based on interviews, observations and text analysis used in conjunction to examine the IAF's debriefing process. Thirty-nine interviews were conducted with male pilots and navigators as well as with seven organizational consultants who regularly participate in daily debriefings and have a wider perspective on changes debriefings have undergone due to their longer period of organizational employment. Each of the interviews lasted 1–2 hours and were recorded and transcribed. To avoid biases arising from similarity between the interviewees, we used snowball sampling of pilots from a variety of hierarchical positions, ages and type of military service (conscripts, regulars and reservists). Since one of the authors worked in the IAF, we obtained official approval to conduct this project on the condition that for security reasons we ensure the pilots' anonymity and provide pseudonyms. Since the advantage of opening up the military for research is worthwhile—theoretically, methodologically, and politically—we decided to accede to these requirements. All pilots participated in the research of their own free will and the IAF was not involved in the research at any stage. The interviews were semi-structured, and interviewees were presented with a number of similar questions while at liberty to expand beyond what they were asked and encouraged to provide examples and stories to enrich our data. Interviews began with a general question about interviewees' experiences as air-crew personnel, and then specific questions followed regarding the most characteristic features of daily routines, especially in regard to the debriefing. The pilots' preoccupation with masculinity was something raised during interviews of the pilots' own accord, and only afterwards did we directly ask about it. Since the debriefing structure is repetitive, 21 random debriefings were selected, and we were allowed to video record four provided we maintained security rules. In addition, 93 media articles

including the word "debriefing" were found using search engines of three popular Israeli newspapers and the IAF's magazine.

To answer our research questions, we based our analysis on an interpretative-inductive approach and a hermeneutic reading well suited to examining the subjective point of view of individuals operating within frames of meaning. This approach involves searching for repetitive patterns in order to decipher concealed meanings, and its main advantage is that it provides a rich description that enables the researcher to derive broader theoretical conclusions from specific experiences (Age 2011). Collecting data from several sources allowed us to frame changes that debriefing has undergone in gender terms and build a grounded theory that is indeterminate and emerges from the interviews and our observations (Charmaz 2014). This methodology involves sifting, charting and sorting material according to key themes and allows new issues and theoretical framings to emerge from the data. This open-ended approach allowed us to reach beyond induction and an iterative process of data collection to re-consider our theoretical framework after realizing gender as our main framework for analysis. Our thematic analysis included only references from at least a half of the interviewees to provide a solid and evidence-based analysis. Observations were systematically analyzed with reference to the order of speakers, what was said and by whom, spatial arrangements and bodily gestures. The articles were chronologically arranged to track the historical development of debriefings over thirty years. In our analysis we were particularly meticulous about the implications of technological changes.

DEGENDERING AND REGENDERING THROUGH THE DEBRIEFING

Our data revealed that pilots are involved in two continual and dialectical processes of performing masculinity: one enforced from above/outside neutralizing opportunities to execute exaggerated masculine performances, and a second enacted bottom-up by pilots to restore their masculinity and reproduce their dominance but also constantly to improve and upgrade their masculinity. Even though these processes intertwine, we differentiate them for analytical purposes. Accordingly, we begin with the top-down processes, namely, the three major changes that the debriefing in the IAF has undergone: technological changes substituting self-reporting with recording of flights; emphasizing safety to avoid casualties and discouraging risk taking; and adopting organizational learning technologies. We next demonstrate that these changes were not gender-neutral and led to the entrance of "soft" practices and ideals into the hyper-masculine organization and to the gradual reduction of what the pilots named the "macho performances" encouraged in the past.

TOP-DOWN PROCESSES NEUTRALIZING MASCULINE PERFORMANCE

Changes in the Technology

Since the mid-1970s, technological developments have facilitated the recording and documentation of flights in a new way. While in the past debriefings and documentation of flights relied on pilots' self-reports (often biased and boastful), technological changes became a main catalyst in "objectifying" debriefings. Many interviewees perceived this change as a gendered process that changed the pilots' masculine identity. For example, Shoval, a young pilot, said:

> There are great [technological] tools that show almost everything. It used to be
> that people talked with their hands but nobody really knew what happened…

Back then you could actually invent any version you wanted to show-off your

manhood … People used to tell stories that were incredible but mostly

invented. All of this [was aimed] at boasting, "What a hero I am" … Today

things are much more objective. Everything's seen in proper perspective, a real

performance. It's difficult to show off but much easier to learn from.

Shoval's description, a common organizational narrative of the past, exemplifies how

the introduction of new technologies was commonly perceived as non-neutral from a

gender point of view and as contradicting the infallible male image previously

expressed in the (often invented) bragging success stories. Similar to Ashcraft's (2005)

findings, pilots distanced themselves from the previous type of masculinity by

appropriating the technological change enforced on them and reframing it as an

opportunity for (rather than a deterrent to) changing norms ("difficult to show off but

easier to learn from"). Oren, another young pilot, reinforced this point:

These stories used to be called "veranda stories" because they [pilots] used to

hang out on the veranda [outside the operations room] with coffee and a

cigarette after a sortie [and tell their stories]. This doesn't exist anymore.

Everything's recorded.

And Eli, a senior pilot, added:

There used to be a guy, that if you put him on stage, he would invent a war on the

spot. He used to be a remarkable speaker. Rhetorical skills—unbelievable! He

could have been a great success as Prime Minister. But you say to yourself, "Come

on!" If you begin to sift through the guy, all that remains is the button on his pants;

You say to yourself, "OK, so he downed a plane but all that is around it is … like

[Salvador] Dali's pictures." Everything's exaggerated.

These quotes reflect the central role of technology in prohibiting the possibility (and legitimacy) of inventing heroic stories. Interestingly, as opposed to much of the organizational scholarship emphasizing "techno-masculinity" (Messerschmidt 1993) where technology enhances masculine performativity, in our case technology defuses extreme masculine behaviors such as boasting.

Eli's mocking of exaggerated stories of heroism also reflects the role of technology in changing the ideal-type pilot. While in the past a successful pilot was one who told the most heroic stories, nowadays it is a pilot who is objective about the quality of his performance and learns best from his (technologically documented) mistakes. Technology thus undermined the ability to maintain manly discourses fortified through heroic storytelling. Following Murgia and Poggio (2009), who argued that men's stories can be instruments of change or a means of maintaining dominant masculine models, in this case pilots' stories in the past are subject to cynicism, so that by distancing themselves from these stories, pilots facilitate the change in their masculine identity.

Changes in Safety Discourse

Since the mid-1980s, the discourse in high-risk organizations has shifted towards safety and the protection of human life as the highest priority. This new discourse entered the IAF as part of this wider move and joined the emphasis on safety and casualty aversion in all of the armed forces of the industrial democracies (Ben-Ari 2005). However, this discourse was not perceived by our interviewees as gender-neutral as in the studies by Ely and Meyerson (2010) and Catino and Patriotta (2013), because in all these cases safety consciousness was perceived by men employed in hyper-masculine jobs as underscoring their vulnerability and hence was not gender-

neutral. Furthermore, as in Ashcraft's (2005) study, many of our interviewees perceived the change as emasculating. Eli, stated:

> It resulted from the many accidents that people died in because they were showing-off … Pilots aren't immortal. That's why you need to be very careful and behave in a much more balanced and restrained way than before. All the macho showing-off was no longer acceptable … [Safety] underscored their bravery, their macho image of the superman hero. It was perceived as un-manly.

Roni, a relatively young pilot, added:

> Some [veteran pilots] say that nowadays pilots fly like "pussies" who worry about not breaking their nails, and the feeling of "a knife between the teeth" has disappeared …I think it's good that it's no longer those men who used to sit with their [flight suit] zipper open and their chest exposed showing-off their achievements. That was a huge risk for everybody.

The new safety discourse was integrated into the debriefing to prevent the loss of human lives often resulting from what pilots perceived as (too) masculine behaviors (e.g., showing-off and lack of fear). It was against this background that the IAF's debriefings consolidated a new model of "good warriors" emphasizing caution instead of stereotypically masculine behaviors. The recognition that macho behavior is dangerous, thus unacceptable, led to changes requiring pilots to moderate their bravado and display modesty and self-restraint during the flight and afterwards.

However, as evident in Roni's words, despite the feminized embodiment of the "new pilot" (e.g., breaking nails, zipper closed) and the weakening of the "killer instinct" (e.g., "the knife between the teeth") that were required of combatants, only a few (especially veteran pilots) rejected the new model of masculinity. Most pilots

interpreted the de-legitimation of show-off behaviors as an imperative to move from a reckless, risk-taking manhood to a more mature and responsible masculinity, as is also evident in Ashcraft's (2005) findings. However, as we later demonstrate, since in elite Israeli combat units maneuverability and risk-taking are much more appreciated than caution and safety (Kachtan and Wasserman 2015), such changes were perceived by some pilots as emasculating and necessitating a reconstruction of masculinity.

Changes in Managerial Discourse and the Entrance of Organizational Learning

In the 1980s new managerial techniques were introduced into the IAF by organizational consultants and a few commanders who saw the debriefing as an ultimate tool for organizational learning (Lipshitz, Popper, and Friedman 2002; Popper and Lipshitz 2000; Ron, Lipshitz, and Popper 2006). The debriefing promoted the idea of equality between all ranks, with everyone subject to the same documentation and forms of critique aimed at improved performance. As an egalitarian practice, everyone was given the right to express their opinion and to acknowledge that everyone is bound to make mistakes (regardless of age, rank or military profession). Erez, one of the seniors, elucidated:

> The debriefing is based on the idea of equality and openness. I can tell a major general, "Listen, you made this mistake" … It's not the same macho atmosphere as in the past where military hierarchies were the most important thing …There's no longer anything like, "Because I'm a lieutenant colonel and you're [just a] lieutenant then you can't voice [criticism]" … It's impossible to learn something this way.

And, according to Lotam, another senior pilot:

It's based on everybody admitting their mistakes … it stands against the typical manly position in the army ... [but] a commander who doesn't encourage confession of mistakes may well lead his squadron into mediocrity … You might say it's more the way women manage things.

These statements not only allude to changing perceptions regarding the equality needed for successful learning; they also highlight how organizational learning is not gender-neutral, and past debriefings are described as arenas for masculinity performances and organizational hierarchy. While researchers studying organizational learning emphasize the importance of equality in learning processes and point to obstacles in achieving it (Argyris and Schön 1997), they overlook the role of masculine performances in hindering meaningful learning, as evident in these quotations. Our interviewees indicated that the repression of physical and mental weakness is no longer acceptable, and it is seen as harmful for meaningful learning and for the development of good warriors. Ohad, a senior pilot, even said, "The whole model is more feminine in its nature." Furthermore, the gendered interpretation made by the pilots hints to what Martin (2003) terms "liminal awareness," where pilots are only partly aware of their own gendered behavior. On the one hand they are reflexive about how masculine boasting hinders learning, but on the other they attribute it to other pilots' behavior (in the past), which ostensibly does not apply to them.

In sum, our data shows that pilots seem to accept the three-abovementioned changes and even appropriated them despite the potential threat to their combatant masculinity. Following Connell and Messerschidt (2005), the findings show that hegemonic masculinity is constantly reconstructed through the circulation of various practices: it is a hybridization of ideas that together allow adaptation and adoption of new emerging forms of masculinity. Thus, as we shall next demonstrate, pilots were

not "passive consumers" of new masculine ideals, but rather, they negotiated and "practiced their masculinity" (Martin 2003) in other ways to restore, reconstruct, reinforce and upgrade their hegemonic masculinity.

BOTTOM-UP PROCESSES RECONSTRUCTING AND UPGRADING MASCULINITY

Along with the top-down processes defusing the performance of hyper-masculinity (that may be interpreted as practices of "undoing gender"), our data reveal that pilots found various bottom-up ways to reconstruct an improved masculinity and maintain their dominance. (This thus is understood as "re-doing gender.") As suggested by Deutsch (2007), however, restoration in this case was not aimed at reproduction of gender but rather at creating a *new* form of masculinity that challenges the previous one. We scrutinize three such practices—rationalized professionalism, competitiveness, and patronizing over other types of masculinity—restoring masculinity but also updating and improving it to gain renewed dominance.

Rationalized professionalism

One of the ways used by the pilots to reconstruct and upgrade their masculinity was by not only moving from a reckless, overconfident masculinity to a mature, father-type model, but also by rationalizing behavioral change as more professional. Rafi, a senior pilot, said:

> [In the past] they wrote down how many hits each pilot had ... a good pilot was the one who downed [the opponent] most … today a good pilot is a professional pilot who knows how not to be hit … Older pilots from my generation had many problems with this change … but eventually they

understood that it's better and much more professional to restrain boasting …

[Professionalism] helped them to maintain their image and remain in control.

New practices neutralizing masculine performances were met with emotional responses from pilots who felt threatened. However, by rationalizing the top-down demands to restrain hyper-masculine behaviors and interpreting them as increasing professionalism, pilots reframed the change enforced on them as a tool for self-improvement. By so doing, they did not just comply with the demands, but were able to appropriate them and gradually reconstruct their masculinity as an improved version of former pilots who were (too) boastful, and thus less professional. This interpretation is reinforced by Moshe, a young pilot. He said:

There was no use seeing [the change] as a threat. How will that help us? You don't want pilots with no self-confidence. Do you? ... If you let people share their insights, even if it's a mistake, you become better the next time you fly … Our debriefing is the hallmark of a professional and sophisticated unit. It makes us better, better than everybody else ... a way of constant improvement. This suits the Air-force.

As in Catino and Patriotta's (2013) study, mistakes in training missions are grounded in the broader organizational culture that provides supportive contexts for reporting errors and encourages sharing information and knowledge. However, in our case these were subsequently rationalized and reframed as professionalism to maintain the pilots' dominance over "everybody else." Since the IAF's culture is entrenched from its foundation in an achievement-based and self-improvement ethos, framing the debriefing as a hallmark of the pilots' professionalism and seeing change enforced from above as a way "to become better" was expected. However, Moshe also implied that being emotional and threatened is useless and even harms

pilots' self-confidence. Thus reframing the change as a resource and an opportunity for self-improvement was another strategy to cope with the changes in the debriefing.

Following Bird (1996)—who analyzed homosocial interactions among heterosexual men to maintain their hegemonic position via emotional detachment and competitiveness—the debriefing too is used as a collective performance of hegemonic maintenance. Although the two quotes above do not refer directly to masculinity, they exemplify how masculinity is done and practiced (Martin 2003) through stereotypical masculine behaviors, such as rationalizing and emotional detachment. During observations we noticed that debriefings are practiced in a scripted manner with everyone using an interactional style that is seemingly very emotionally controlled: questions and their order are unvarying, the pilots' answers are short and clear-cut and dispassionate, and all participants adhere to a fixed hierarchical sitting arrangement. This description exemplifies how professionalism enables pilots to integrate masculinity processes with working processes: work thus fosters "a better" way of doing masculinity. Furthermore, mobilizing masculinity through professionalism, rational discourse, and calm and collected behavior reinforces their dominant status as an elite unit.

Redefining Manhood through Competitiveness

A second bottom-up process enabling pilots to cope with the changes enforced on them is mobilizing masculinity through reframing self-exposure and public confession during debriefings as masculine acts of courage and heroism marked by a competition wherein the "winner" is the bravest pilot who exposes himself more than others. Sapir, one of the senior pilots, explained, "It's tough, unnatural to get up and

tell [others] what happened … You end up being stupid. It's hard to live with constant exposure, so part of the business is to be man enough to stand up and say, 'I made a mistake.'" Erez, another senior pilot added:

> Everyone makes mistakes ... But when a squadron commander admits to mistakes you say, "Wow, what a jock. He has no problem coming forward and telling the whole truth"… In general, you can say that the one who exposes himself is the real man.

These excerpts show how heroism and warrior masculinity are redefined/reframed so that only tough, manly warriors can withstand the difficult situation of constant exposure. Reflexivity and public acts of admitting mistakes are not perceived as expressing vulnerability; rather, they necessitate courage akin to heroic bravery. Each one has an active responsibility for being reflexive if one wants to be regarded as a "jock." By mobilizing their competitive masculinity, they gain a renewed control over the external demand to expose their mistakes. In other words, pilots take on the debriefing not only because they follow orders, but also because they understand—due to the interactional nature of the debriefing—that others appreciate them according to their ability to be exposed and acknowledge their faults. However, pilots constantly balance between being reflexive enough to be regarded as "jocks" and being careful not to "over-confess" and to be regarded as unprofessional and "stupid," as Sapir attested. Furthermore, our observations indicate that along with competitiveness, pilots also demonstrated empathic behaviors such as attentiveness, accepting others' faults, mutual respect, a pat on the back and the use of humor to relieve tension. These two contradicting behaviors resonate with Martin's (2001) distinction between affiliating and contesting masculinities, but, in our case, pilots simultaneously mobilize both types and constantly negotiate between them.

According to Eli, "Eventually, in the morning you don't care if the other pilot is your grandmother or your best friend … when in the sky you fight to kill, but during the debriefing he is your friend, and in the evening you even walk your dogs together."

Udi, a young navigator, added:

> We never insult each other [during debriefings] even if someone really sucks … I'll push him gently to admit his mistake if he doesn't do it by himself like a man … this is what makes it so complicated, to be "soft" and sensitive but strong to fight … that's what makes us better than pilots from the old generation—we're attentive to each other and learn from our mistakes to be better pilots.

The tension between affiliating and contesting masculinities also is manifested through the gap between the flight and the debriefing, as well as between the saying and doing. Specifically, while during the aerial clashes pilots are supposed to compete among themselves to simulate combat, and while contending intensely is legitimate, explicit, and openly spoken about, on the ground they are supposed to cooperate, be reflexive about their mistakes and connect to each other. However, while in the past boastfulness was legitimate and explicit, today—due to its denunciation—pilots are compelled to use an alternative mechanism to manifest their masculinity. As a result, as our observations show, competition is implicit, interactional and done, but not talked about.

Patronizing Other Masculinities

A third way to underscore and update their hegemonic masculinity vis-à-vis changes enforced on the pilots is by turning debriefings into power resources that improve them in comparison to other men, in and outside the army. By integrating

new egalitarian practices (introduced through organizational learning) into the rigid military hierarchy, pilots develop a model better suited, in their eyes, to contemporary organizations. By offering and behaving according to updated values and at the same time imparting a masculine image of traditional hierarchical power relations, pilots see themselves as superior to other military units and even civilian managers. According to Erez, a senior pilot, "[The debriefings] are unique to flight crews … an amazing managerial tool ... it's our advantage … something we take with us to civilian workplaces … that's why the IAF is the best unit not only in the Israel, in the world." During the interview, Erez continued to advocate the debriefing, suggesting that they are not only effective for organizational learning but also a managerial skill that pilots acquire during military service that gives them advantages over other managers who "stick to old managerial ideas of hierarchy," as he phrased it. Haim, a senior pilot, added:

> None of the other Corps in the army has our ability: they don't know how to learn from mistakes or to manage … The debriefing is what we bring to the world, but it requires a kind of sophistication that many other "grease-monkeys" [i.e. technicians and infantry troops] in the military don't have and never will. This is a much more updated model of manhood, which is much better since it includes femininity [laughs].

The "new" masculinity described is presented by pilots as more "progressive" than both their own previous version of masculinity and that of other soldiers who they referred to using derogatory labels like "grease-monkeys," hinting at their oily hands and their unsophisticated manual work. The "new" masculinity is better since it strikes a balance between sophisticated manhood and femininity. Pilots, who are very highly motivated individuals, accept and internalize these criteria for success and see them as

advantages over other forms of military and civilian masculinities. By presenting the debriefing as their "message to the world," they improve their image not only within the army, but also outside of it, thus gaining dominance over other forms of managerial or military masculinities.

CONCLUSION

In this article we analyzed a specific organizational practice—debriefings—to show how in a hyper-masculine organization new gender practices are imported into the Israeli army in a complex process of top-down and bottom-up changes. Our data highlight the argument that masculinity is constructed and reconstructed through mundane practices that both transform and preserve its dominance. These results underscore four theoretical contributions.

First, our focus on the agency of the pilots in actively embracing change shows how their dominant position was not only reproduced but also involved the creation of something new: a novel form of upgraded masculinity integrating older and newer elements. This new configuration is more complex than found in previous research that theorized it dichotomously as either accepting or rejecting new gender behaviors that challenge hegemonic ones (an exception is Ashcraft 2005). Our findings highlight a more nuanced understanding of how men of a hegemonic group actively mobilize their masculinity and use a daily organizational practice as a power resource to improve themselves. By declaring that they welcome change and even appropriating it, pilots enhance their agentive power and allow new "embattled masculinities" to emerge and be "released" from older forms of masculinities.

Second, with an analysis of interactions we complement analyses of the discursive tactics by which men adapt to organizational change. This has allowed us

to investigate explicitly how men mobilize masculinity collectively and in concerted fashion. To reiterate, this is not only a case of "doing gender" by individuals but the outcome of combined, mutual social action on the part of the men. Indeed, jointly using the new practices in the debriefing as a means for superior professionalism, the new practices are not only discursively framed as improvements, but also adopted interactionally like any other technology that fighter pilots readily adopt to advance performance. Since the debriefing is a daily, repetitive act and perceived as a core element in the pilots' professional identity, it is not gender-neutral but rather a main element of "doing masculinity" reflected in discursive and non-discursive practices. This insight resonates with the fact that men routinely conflate masculinities and work dynamics and are only liminaly aware of how they do and mobilize masculinity in their daily routines (Martin 2001).

Third, our emphasis on interactional *and* discursive dynamics underscores how the outcome is not only an *upgraded masculinity* (compared to the older version) at one point in time, but also a masculinity with the potential to continue on and on, to be one centered on continuous upgrading. Empirically, this continual process of upgrading is expressed in the actions of the pilots, based on their assumption that they can and actually do constantly improve their competence and professionalism. Thus, the new upgraded *and* upgrading masculinity allows pilots to see themselves as incessantly (getting to be) better than pilots in the past, other men and other forms of masculinity. The very open-endedness of this process—the idea that men are not only constantly improving but can always upgrade themselves—implies that in principle any new element introduced from now on can be fitted into their view of themselves of as upgrading (not only upgraded) professionals and men. Whereas Demtriou (2001) distinguishes between two types of hegemony—external (superiority over women)

and internal (superiority over other groups of men)—our data add a third form of hegemony according to which the group perceives its present masculinity as superior to the previous one held by themselves as a group. This form of hegemony, we argue, is an "upgraded masculinity," as it refers to a new improved masculinity that is distanced from their previous ideals and behaviors. Indeed, even new pilots who enter the organization after the changes the debriefing has undergone experience the new forms of masculinity as an improvement. This is evident in the heroic stories of the past that are still used as organizational myths to which they compare themselves today. This process of self-improvement also reinforces Bird's (1996) call to move beyond processes of doing and undoing gender, and to highlight how these two processes are intertwined in a sophisticated and complex manner that in aimed at transforming hegemonic masculinities.

Fourth, we end with a somewhat sober observation. Our findings move us to cautiously argue with previous rather optimistic conclusions about how new practices "released"/liberated men from the constraints of traditional masculine ideals (e.g. Ely and Meyerson 2010; Godfrey, Lilley, and Brewis 2012). Specifically, we argue that although previous studies have shown that hegemonic masculinities in general, and in the army in particular, may sometimes be contested in today's late-modern societies (see Kachtan and Wasserman 2015), we need to be wary of the exaggerated optimism about the entry of "softer" elements into the army (or any other organization). Our data show that while hyper-masculine performances are defused from above, at the local micro-level actors seek to restore masculinity and male dominance. In this sense, our empirically based argument supports the contention of Bridges and Pascoe (2014) that hybrid masculinities integrating elements identified with femininities or non-hegemonic masculinities are a strategy that is open to the almost exclusive use of men

in hegemonic positions; and, this works towards maintaining their hegemonic position vis-a-vis other men and to hiding this process. What pilots do, in Bridges and Pascoe's term is "discursive distancing" from the hegemonic masculinity through adopting qualities identified with femininity and non-hegemonic masculinities. Yet, this move is in effect a strategy to maintain their hegemonic position in the social hierarchy of the organization. To reiterate, this is important since a widespread argument in the scholarly literature sees hybrid masculinities as changes in ideas and practices leading to greater gender equality. Thus the entry of new ideas regarding what is "appropriate" and "right" for a "real man" in the new millennium—in the military and in other organizations—is not to be taken for granted.

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