

Talking Spaces: Israeli Women Activists between Enabling and Disabling Public Spaces

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Abstract: The historical phenomenon of women's exclusion from the public sphere has placed the issue of voice at the center for feminist literature and thought. Many studies deal with the reasons for why women lose their voice at a young age, and examine the manner in which socialization processes link public voice and action to men and silence and domesticity to women. However, the question of what are the conditions of a public sphere that enables women activists to voice themselves publicly and becoming more influential have not yet been examined in full. Thus, the conditions for spaces that encourage women's voices remained under-theorized in regard to women who operate in the public sphere in Israel.

This study is based on a qualitative analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 31 Israeli activities. It addresses the ways in which the public sphere can work to enhance the voices of women on one hand, and the ways in which it can work to diminish and extinct those voices, on the other hand.

The findings expose five conditions for a public space that enables and enhances women's voices. These conditions are formed by an environment which allows the emergence of voice, the availability of a platform for the voice, the credit given to the voice, a sense of belonging and an ability to influence others. The more these conditions were present, the more active the participants of the research group were in the areas of activity. Diminishing Spaces include five opposite conditions: a space that does not allow the birth of the voice, no given stage for the voice to be heard, transparency in the field, a sense of alienation and limited or incomplete influence. Disempowering spaces enhanced various feelings of failure, and often lead to temporary withdrawal from activity among women in the research group.