

TEASING APART TO BRING TOGETHER: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN VARIATIONIST RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT: Sociolinguistics has long recognized the crucial interconnection between gender and sexuality. This article situates sociolinguists' concern with this topic within a larger discussion of intersectionality as a framework for theorizing identity. It argues that variationist methods provide a mechanism for redressing certain shortcomings of intersectional analysis that have been highlighted by scholars in other disciplines. To illustrate these points, pitch variation is analyzed among a cohort of Israeli lesbians. The author demonstrates how, despite the fact that gender and sexuality are tightly imbricated in the Israeli context, some speakers linguistically attend to these constructs in identifiably distinct ways. It closes by suggesting implications of this argument for the intersectional project more broadly.

THAT GENDER AND SEXUALITY are related is undisputed. Sociolinguistic research has demonstrated time and again the tight imbrication of these two constructs, both in speakers' linguistic production (e.g., Cameron 1997; Boellstorff 2005; Hall 2005) and in listeners' ideological perceptions (e.g., Gaudio 1994; Levon 2006, 2007; though cf. Smyth, Jacobs, and Rogers 2003). The necessity of treating gender and sexuality together is succinctly summarized by Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 488):

That the discursive construction of heterosexuality is often bound up with the discursive construction of femininity and masculinity is by now a familiar finding . . . if researchers insist that sexuality be analyzed in isolation . . . they run the risk of reading it through a theoretical lens that may be only partially revealing, at best.

Bucholtz and Hall's assertion in this regard resonates more broadly with recent developments in cultural studies that seek to interrogate the explanatory adequacy of unitary categories like gender and sexuality and insist instead on an understanding of identity as a multidimensional phenomenon. Adopting a framework of INTERSECTIONALITY (Crenshaw 1989, 1991), research in this paradigm argues that no one category is sufficient to account for an

individual's experiences or practices. Rather, we must focus on the ways in which multiple systems of social stratification (including sexuality, gender, race, and class, among many others) exist simultaneously and in interaction (see also Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

The strength of intersectional analysis lies in its ability to theorize the complexity of identity formation by destabilizing simplistic categorical binaries, such as man versus women, gay versus straight. This has had a profound impact on research across a variety of related disciplines (including linguistics) such that intersectionality has become by many accounts the dominant framework for conceptualizing identity (Zack 2005). Yet, despite its success, intersectional analysis lacks a consistent and theoretically motivated methodology (McCall 2005; Nash 2008). What this means is that certain crucially important questions remain unanswered:

1. What is an intersection, and how is it defined? While the theory insists that "subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender class and sexuality" (Nash 2008, 1), it neglects to specify how those intersections are to be conceptualized. Are they vectors of influence, such that the experience and practice of being "black," for example, affects the experience and practice of being a "woman" in discrete and identifiable ways? Or are the two inextricable and interdependent, such that "black woman" represents an indivisible unit?
2. Related to this, what is the relationship between categorical intersectionality as conceptualized by a researcher and an individual's lived experience? As Nash (2008, 11) puts it, "If intersectionality theory purports to provide a general theory of identity, it must grapple with whether intersectionality actually captures the ways in which subjects experience subjectivity or strategically deploy identity."
3. Finally, and most importantly, how do we locate intersectionality empirically? Assuming we reject an essentialist view of identity as something a person is, how do we identify particular practices as being part of an individual's intersectional presentation of self (or not)?

Devising principled answers to these questions is central to the project of what has come to be called third-wave variationist studies (Eckert 2010). If, as Eckert argues, the goal of work in this paradigm is to understand how people use language to both construct and transmit social meaning, intersectionality—as a model of the meanings speakers work to present—is at the heart of what we do.

In this article, I outline an initial attempt to resolve these methodological issues. Building on sociolinguistics' recent engagements with critical (e.g., Bucholtz and Hall 2004) and psychoanalytic (e.g., Cameron and Kulick 2003) theory, I present an analysis of how two groups of Israeli lesbian activists

use the same phonetic feature (variation in mean pitch) to differing social ends. I argue that the key to understanding the different meanings that the use of this feature represents lies in the distinct ways in which the women of the two groups understand the intersection of gender and sexuality in their lives. In other words, I aim to demonstrate how an analysis of the social meaning of language is inseparable from an analysis of our informants' lived experiences, and, in so doing, propose that the methodological architecture of sociophonetic inquiry provides a fruitful empirical way of bringing these two analytical projects together.

BACKGROUND

The data used to illustrate my proposals are drawn from a larger examination of language and sexuality in Israel (Levon 2010). In that work, I explored how members of different Israeli lesbian and gay activist groups use language to help construct and portray identities that are at once both lesbian/gay and Israeli. The issue is an interesting one because Israel has always maintained a very strong, normative conceptualization of what it means to "be (and act like an) Israeli" (Kimmerling 2001; Shafir and Peled 2002). Grounded in the tenets of early Zionist thinking, a large part of this conceptualization is a particular understanding of gender and sexuality (what is often glossed as the "men as soldiers/women as mothers" model) that serves to link traditional ideas about femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality to standard definitions of Israeli national identity. What this means in concrete terms is that Israeli men and women are subject to a set of rigorous (and, historically, very ideologically laden) gendered behavioral expectations. For men, these expectations revolve around notions of strength, independence, and virility (Biale 1997; Almog 2000). Women, on the other hand, are normatively defined almost exclusively in relation to motherhood: women (whether they have children or not) are expected to be caring, supportive, and nurturing (Berkovitch 1997; Sered 2000). Stereotypically, lesbians and gays are seen as existing outside of, and even in opposition to, this dominant discourse. There is, therefore, a palpable ideological tension between identifying as lesbian/gay and identifying as Israeli, and the goal of my work has been to understand how lesbian and gay Israelis negotiate this tension linguistically.

To do so, I spent twelve months in 2005 and 2006 observing and recording the members of numerous Israeli lesbian and gay activist associations. For our present purposes, however, I restrict my attention here to a discussion of the women in two clusters of these associations, what I call the MAINSTREAM and the RADICAL groups (see Levon 2010 for a detailed discus-

sion of all of the groups). As my names for them suggest, these two groups position themselves quite differently across the Israeli political spectrum and espouse very different beliefs about sexuality and its place in the Israeli public sphere. In the most general terms, the mainstream group adopts what I call an “accommodationist” stance with respect to sexuality in Israel. Members of this group argue that lesbian/gay sexuality is fully compatible with standard Israeli models of gender and the nation, and their activism is geared toward the integration of lesbian/gay sexuality within existing Israeli social structures (for a discussion of similar movements in other countries, see Vaid 1995; Seidman 2002). In contrast, the radical group rejects this integrative tendency (Ziv 2005). Arguing that the current structures are inherently discriminatory, members of the radical group advocate a total reconfiguration of the Israeli gendered and sexual order.

Linguistically, my analyses are based on an examination of stylistic variation (e.g., Bell 1984, 2001) in the speech of group members. In terms of language style, I am interested in two things. The first is whether a significant differentiation in language use is evident as a function of the topic of speech (what for our purposes I simply gloss as “gay” versus “nongay” topics). My interest in topic-conditioned shift is premised on the notion that Israeli ideologies of sexuality, to the extent that they may allow lesbian or gay identities to be expressed, require that these identities be confined to specific gay-identified spaces. As a methodological approximation, I take talk on gay topics to represent a gay conversational space distinct from talk on nongay topics (see Levon 2009 for a fuller justification; see also Schilling-Estes 2004). I am also interested in the quality of any systematic alterations observed across topics, and, especially initially, how these alternations compare to Israeli sociolinguistic gender norms—norms that are themselves grounded in the standard conceptualizations of gender in Israel described above. Of the various norms that exist (see, e.g., Katriel 1986), I focus in the discussion below on those that equate higher mean pitch levels with normative femininity and lower mean pitch levels with normative masculinity.¹ I recognize that mean pitch is a somewhat coarse-grained analytical instrument. I nevertheless choose to focus on this feature here because of its social salience in the Israeli context and the fact that previous research in the field has shown it to be a widely used resource for conveying social meaning (e.g., Besnier 1990; Biemans 2000; Podesva, Roberts, and Campbell-Kibler 2002; Gussenhoven 2004; see also Levon 2010 for a discussion of other pitch and voice quality features).

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND PITCH

My goal in this article is not to go through a full analysis of the data I collected in Israel. Instead, I would like to hone in on the question of the intersection of gender and sexuality in our interpretations of variation in practice. To do that, I consider the example of one pitch pattern in my data: the ways in which the women of the mainstream and radical groups vary pitch levels in their spoken Hebrew across topics when recounting narratives.²

My decision to compare the mainstream and the radical women is by no means arbitrary. I have argued elsewhere (Levon 2010, forthcoming) that the women of these two groups maintain diametrically opposed beliefs about gender, sexuality, and the ideological structuring of Israeli society. These beliefs are themselves articulated through a variety of practices (both symbolic and otherwise) that serve to distinguish the two groups of women from one another. The mainstream women, for example, all served in the Israeli military (as required by law) while the radical women did not. While perhaps a seemingly unrelated fact, military service is symbolically immensely meaningful in Israel, and the radical women's choice to not serve (and the considerable administrative hassle they went through to do so) can be taken as an explicit statement of orientation AWAY from prevailing social norms—an orientation that the mainstream women do not share.³ Linguistically, clear differences between the groups also exist. These include the mainstream women's use of breathy voice as part of a "hyperfeminine" speech style (a pattern not found among the radical women; Levon 2010) and the radical women's increased use of gender-specific morphology as compared to the mainstream women's more habitual use of generic masculine forms (Levon 2011). In short, the mainstream and the radical women conceive of their identities differently, and these conceptualizations are evident in distinct sets of social practice.

MAINSTREAM WOMEN

An analysis of the mainstream women's use of mean pitch when recounting narratives finds that the women of this group significantly differentiate their mean pitch levels across gay and nongay topics.⁴ When talking about gay-themed experiences (things like their first lesbian experiences, telling their friends and family about being a lesbian, etc.), the women have an average mean pitch level of 12.34 semitones. In contrast, when talking about past events from their lives that are not directly linked to their sexuality, the women's average mean pitch level is 11.64 st.

This finding is meaningful for two reasons. The first is the significant differentiation between gay and nongay topics itself. In earlier discussions of these findings (e.g., Levon 2010), I have argued that this differentiation across topics suggests that the mainstream women are using mean pitch to help construct distinct gay and nongay voices and, in so doing, conform to Israeli normative conceptualizations regarding the necessary compartmentalization of lesbian identity.⁵ As an illustration of what I mean by compartmentalization, consider how Miriam, a member of the mainstream group from Tel Aviv, describes the place of lesbianism in her life:⁶

1. 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, and 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, for example. My work isn't connected at all to my lesbianism.

In her reply, Miriam takes pains to describe how her lesbianism is only one part of the many things that make up her life. While her initial description of lesbianism is cast in terms of sexual object choice (“I have sex with people of my own sex”), she immediately clarifies that lesbianism is not only about sex. Rather, Miriam describes lesbianism as a “lifestyle.” This lifestyle, however, is not prominent in everything that she does, and Miriam is quick to point out that her lesbianism has nothing to do with her work, for example. Miriam's comments, then, provide evidence of a particular epistemic stance with respect to sexuality among the mainstream women, one which views lesbianism as an isolated and distinct part of a woman's social subjectivity unrelated to the rest of who she is or what she does. My proposal is that the significant differentiation we observe across gay and nongay topics is part of the linguistic materialization of this subjective understanding.

The second reason why the mainstream women's pitch practice in narratives is meaningful pertains to the direction of the variation between gay and nongay topics. In shifting to higher mean pitch levels on gay topics, I suggest that the mainstream women accommodate Israeli norms of femininity and strategically adopt a more stereotypically “feminine” pitch style. This interpretation, moreover, is supported by the women's own descriptions of what lesbianism means to them. Consider how Shira, a mainstream member from Haifa, responded when I asked her about the place of lesbians in Israeli society:

2. In terms of acceptance, you have to take it. Nobody is going to come 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.

Shira highlights the fact she lives in the “consensus.” By this, she means that she is in a committed monogamous relationship, has children, and to a large extent accepts Israeli ideologies of gender and believes that her lesbian identity is perfectly compatible with them. It would seem possible, then, to take Shira's comments as evidence in support of the idea that linguistically as well the mainstream women are accommodating to Israeli gender norms.

In fact, I would go one step further and argue that they not only accommodate gender norms, but embrace them. Consider how Miriam, the mainstream member introduced above, defines lesbianism:

3. In my eyes, a lesbian is a woman who loves women, with everything that that includes— in a very comprehensive way. That in their social lives they prefer women; that at work, they prefer to work with women, if possible— as much as possible. She supports women wherever she can. And also in her love life, she is with women and she prefers women.

Miriam's definition of lesbianism highlights a theme common to all of the mainstream women, namely that being a lesbian is first and foremost about being a woman and feeling a connection among women—as Miriam puts it, “loving women in a very comprehensive way.” In other words, it would seem that the mainstream women understand their lesbianism as a sort of more “authentic” version of normative Israeli femininity. In light of this, I argue that the women's use of mean pitch reflects this understanding and allows them to enact a “hypernormative” feminine speech style on gay narratives as a way of portraying their version of lesbian identity.

Because providing a full and complete analysis of the mainstream women's practice is not my primary focus in this article, I have allowed myself to stipulate much of my preceding argument. I do, however, hope to have demonstrated how for the mainstream women sexuality is in many ways dependent upon gender. By their own account, the mainstream women define their lesbianism strictly in relation to their womanhood, such that being a lesbian essentially means being a special kind of woman (cf., for example, Bunch 1972). Linguistically too, I suggest that the language the mainstream women use to “do” sexuality (i.e., the language they use to help materialize lesbian subjectivity) is derived (and even gains its meaning) from the

language used to “do” gender. Though I do not describe it here (see Levon 2010), this proposal is supported by comparing the mainstream women’s practice with that of the mainstream men. The men, who espouse similar beliefs to the women, also differentiate mean pitch levels across gay and nongay topics. In the men’s case, however, gay narratives show significantly lower mean pitch levels than nongay narratives. These lower levels of mean pitch among the men correspond to dominant beliefs regarding normatively masculine ways of speaking in Israel, and, together with the women’s practice, mean that across the mainstream group talk on gay narratives accords with Israeli gender norms (be it through higher mean pitch levels for the women or lower mean pitch levels for the men). In other words, the mainstream women and the mainstream men appear to be doing essentially the same thing: they both conceptualize sexuality as dependent on gender, and they both make use of normatively gendered mean pitch levels to help express lesbian/gay subjectivities. I would argue then that the behavior observed within the mainstream group provides us with an empirical snapshot of at least one of the ways in which the intersection between gender and sexuality is experienced and constructed linguistically.

But is this the only way? Can the insights gained from an examination of the mainstream women be extended to form the basis of a general theory of the intersection between gender and sexuality? In order to address this question, I turn in the next section to an examination of the radical women’s pitch patterns.

RADICAL WOMEN

An analysis of the radical women’s use of mean pitch in narratives shows that the radical women’s practice parallels what was found for the mainstream women: the radical women also vary average mean pitch levels across gay and nongay topics by employing significantly higher pitch levels on gay topics (12.77 st) than on nongay topics (11.97 st).⁷ The most straightforward interpretation of this finding would suggest that the radical women’s practice is grounded in a similar understanding of the intersection of gender and sexuality as the mainstream women—that the radical women also conceptualize lesbianism in terms of normative Israeli womanhood and thus make use of essentially gendered linguistic features to construct and portray sexual identity.

I, however, do not think this interpretation is accurate. In keeping with the differences between the groups outlined above, the radical women explicitly reject dominant Israeli discourses of gender and what they view as

the mainstream women's overly accommodationist stance to them. Consider, for example, how Tova, a radical member from Tel Aviv, describes her initial contact with lesbian activism:

4. And I really quickly understood that I don't have any connection to [the mainstream group]. It is, you know, this 1970s feminism, it's Dworkin feminism. There never was the battle for the lesbian sex here [in Israel]; there never was Pat Califia. [The mainstream group] is a very conservative feminism. . . . As a group, [they] have never tried to challenge the straight world. They've always been involved in the whole issue of children and families. But I think instead of saying that we want to take part in their oppressive institutions, we should struggle against established beliefs 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 also help ourselves.

In her comments, Tova argues against what she sees as the outdated conservatism of mainstream activism. She takes issue with the mainstream women's focus on securing rights for adoption and marriage, essentially equating these struggles with a capitulation to what she describes as the "oppressive institutions" of Israeli society. Instead, Tova advocates for a new way of conceptualizing gender and the place of women in Israel. Given comments like these, I would argue that interpreting the radical women's practice in terms of a portrayal of normative "hyperfemininity" (as I do for the mainstream women above) is ethnographically unjustified.

In addition to this, and on a deeper level, the notion of a necessary dependency of sexuality on gender that I argue underpins the mainstream women's practice does not seem to apply to the radical women. Recall Miriam's definition of a gender-derived lesbianism above. Compare this with Tova's description of how she defines her sexuality:

5. 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.

We find in Tova's definition a dramatically different perspective than in Miriam's. Rather than seeing lesbianism as a radical statement of gender (i.e., loving women "in a very comprehensive way"), Tova works to destabilize the very notion of gender upon which Miriam's formulation is based. In effect, Tova seems to be decoupling her understanding of gender from sexuality, seeing the two as distinct and only partially overlapping constructs. Taking

Tova's comments as representative, it would therefore seem inappropriate to interpret the radical women's practice in relation to Israeli sociolinguistic gender norms. Not only do the radical women reject those norms as outdated and oppressive, they do not understand sexuality as inherently dependent on gender. In order to accurately model the radical women's use of language, we must adopt an analytical approach that parallels the women's own beliefs and experiences and allows for the possibility that the language used to "do" sexuality may have nothing at all to do with gender.

The difference I am describing between the radical and the mainstream women's practice is perhaps most visible when we situate the women's uses of mean pitch in their discourse contexts. The extracts in (6) and (7) represent portions of "coming out" narratives that were related to me by Nivi (a mainstream member) and Tova (a radical member), respectively. In these extracts, note how while both women make use of elevated mean pitch levels on various gay topics, the stances that this variation can be taken to index are different (*italics* represents elevated pitch).

6. I used to go out with guys. It's funny, me and my girlfriends, though, we used to sit for hours and say things like "*If I was attracted to girls, which ones would I like?*" It's funny thinking about that now. In 12th grade I had a boyfriend. And we had been going out for like a month. But so after a month *I couldn't figure out what was wrong*. He is attractive and I like him, so what's the problem? So then it's New Year's of 12th grade, and there was this thing of who's going to kiss who at midnight and *there was this girl that I was really attracted to* and she was like "kiss me, kiss me." So we kissed, *and then I realized that I was kissing her for a long time, and I was just like "wow."* And I figured out the problem— *my boyfriend wasn't a woman*.
7. [I started thinking about sexuality] at a very young age— like around 13. I thought just generally, *in this really logical way, I'm just not attracted to men*. I mean like the first time that I heard about lesbians, like in a book or something like that. *I thought maybe that might be for me...* And that lasted for a couple of years, this sort of half and half life. And by that I mean *I defined myself as a lesbian* but I didn't really circulate in any lesbian community. I mean *I would go out from time to time*, but then I would also go to clubs and take drugs and have sex with whatever guy was available. I think that around 18 I really started to define myself as a lesbian *in a serious way*. And that's also the time that I started to get interested in SM, *and so the whole thing was really about which roles to play, gender roles and power roles*.

In (6), Nivi's comments serve to portray an understanding of lesbianism as a desire for gender "sameness," as women desiring other women. Nivi's use of mean pitch is strategically aligned in such a way that higher mean pitch levels (i.e., an element of a normatively more "feminine" speech style) correlate

with a description of “women” as the true object of her inner desires, an object that she places in categorical opposition to “men.” While Tova begins describing things in similar terms in (7), she soon shifts her focus and by the end of her comments uses elevated levels of mean pitch when offering a “serious” definition of lesbians as people who question dominant societal gender roles and the power relations that sustain them. For both women then, there is evidence to suggest that higher mean pitch levels are being used to index lesbian subjectivity. That indexation, however, is *INDIRECT*, and I would argue that the difference between the two women lies in the specific stances each woman is using elevated mean pitch to express.

All of the above leaves me in the admittedly unorthodox position of arguing that, while the mainstream and the radical women exhibit identical linguistic practices (i.e., higher mean pitch levels on gay narratives), the practice means two different things for the two groups. For the mainstream women, I propose that it essentially means “gender.” My argument in this regard is based on the mainstream women’s own understanding of lesbianism as a special kind of feminine gendered status such that the use of higher mean pitch levels on gay topics can be understood as a strategic deployment of a normatively feminine voice as a way of portraying a lesbian identity. For the radical women, on the other hand, the ethnographic preconditions of this analysis do not hold. The women’s own descriptions of their experiences of gender and sexuality give me no reason to believe that they would be engaging in a presentation of normative femininity when using higher mean pitch levels or, for that matter, that their linguistic construction of sexuality on gay topics is in any way related to gender (normative or otherwise). Thus, while their linguistic practices may be superficially similar, I argue that the differences in the mainstream and radical women’s conceptualizations of sexuality force us to adopt distinct interpretations of what the use of that language means for the two groups.⁸ (Note, too, that the linguistic parallelism I describe above across women and men in the mainstream group is absent in the radical group, where the women and men are engaging in entirely different sets of linguistic behavior; see Levon 2010).

It is important to note that in arguing for distinct interpretations of the mainstream and radical women’s practice, I am rejecting a potentially simpler unified account—namely, that elevated mean pitch levels index heightened emotion or affect and that both the mainstream and radical women are more emotionally and/or affectively invested in gay topics, no matter how they subjectively conceive of sexuality (see note 5). Although I do not discuss it here, my reason for rejecting this interpretation pertains to the domain-restrictedness of the relevant finding. When the women are not recounting narratives, we do not find higher mean pitch levels on gay

topics. In other speech domains (such as when expressing opinions), the mainstream women have significantly lower mean pitch levels on gay topics than on nongay topics, and the radical women do not significantly differentiate between the two. It is because of this interaction between topic and type of speech that I reject an analysis purely in terms of affect or emotion, on the assumption that a uniquely affect-based analysis should apply across the board (i.e., if higher mean pitch levels index emotional investment and if the women are more emotionally invested in gay topics, then we would expect to see higher mean pitch levels on gay topics in multiple discourse types; see Levon 2009 for a detailed discussion of this point). In other words, that we do not find a consistent pattern across gay topics is what leads me to argue instead that the variation observed in gay narratives is grounded in the expression of the women's lesbian subjectivities, subjectivities that are themselves conceptualized differently across the two groups.

CONCLUSION: LANGUAGE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

I began this article by arguing that intersectionality has a central role to play in our understanding of the social meaning of linguistic variation. In the discussion above, I use the example of mean pitch variation among two cohorts of Israeli lesbians to illustrate the ways in which differing conceptualizations of how gender and sexuality intersect lead us to distinct interpretations of what variation is being used for and what particular indexical meanings speakers are drawing on when engaging in variable linguistic practice. This kind of ethnographic sensitivity is important because the meaning of sociolinguistic variables is inherently underspecified. As Eckert (2010) argues, variables only gain their full indexical potential when they are meaningfully deployed in interaction as part of the construction and presentation of a social self. Intersectionality provides us with a window into what "self" speakers are aiming for and thus with a better insight as to what meaning a variable has in context.

And yet more than just highlighting the importance of intersectionality to variationist research, I would also like to argue for the importance of variationist studies of language to the continuing development of intersectionality theory. I list above three methodological shortcomings of intersectionality that have been described in the literature: (1) the lack of a precise conceptualization of intersections themselves; (2) the lack of a critical engagement with the relationship between theory and individuals' lived experiences; and (3) the lack of a clear empirical method for locating intersectionality and its social manifestations. Beginning with the last point, I hope to have

demonstrated the way in which an examination of variation that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods allows us to locate intersectionality in practice. The quantitative identification of a variable linguistic pattern is the first step since it provides us with information regarding the symbolic resources speakers are using to construct and portray identities. Subsequent qualitative analyses then allow us to better understand what speakers take those resources to mean, and hence what the contours are of the identities they are working to construct. Finally, though not discussed above, perception testing can offer a method of verifying our interpretations of production-based findings and a way of indirectly teasing out the fine-grained connections between language and different (combinations of) social categories that nonexperimental approaches can easily miss. In short then, I suggest that third-wave variationist analysis represents a robust method for the empirical examination of intersectionality.

Applying this method, moreover, also helps to address the other two methodological critiques. In my discussion above, I argue that the mainstream and the radical women conceive of the intersection between gender and sexuality differently and that this difference results in the two groups of women attaching distinct meanings to the same sociolinguistic variable. I believe this finding suggests that, like sociolinguistic variables, INTERSECTIONS as theoretical constructs are themselves underspecified. In other words, we cannot know a priori how individuals will experience the intersection of two social categories in their lives or how that experience will inform their social practice. Rather, it is only in the context of empirical investigation that intersectionality gains its explanatory potential—a potential that is itself necessarily grounded in the facts of observed social practice.

NOTES

The research upon which this article is based would not have been possible without the guidance of Renée Blake, Rudi Gaudio, Greg Guy, Don Kulick, and John Singler or the support of the Social Science Research Council (with funds provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation) and the Torch Fellowship Program at New York University. Thanks also to Debbie Cameron, Penny Eckert, Kira Hall, Robin Queen, Rob Podesva, and Devyani Sharma for helpful discussions and comments on the ideas presented here. All errors and shortcomings are, of course, my own.

1. In the interest of space, I am glossing over a huge amount of both social and linguistic detail here. For a more complete treatment of the different linguistic features that are involved in the implication of gender and sexuality in Israel, including a discussion of those features' social histories, see Levon (2010, chaps. 2 and 3).

2. Briefly, I define narratives as those portions of the interviews in which informants recounted prior events from their lives. Structurally, narrative talk was all temporally past tense, proceeded sequentially, and contained nonimmediate deictic reference. See Levon (2009) for more details.
3. In saying this, I do not mean to claim that because the mainstream women served in the Israeli military that necessarily implies an orientation to prevailing social norms on their part (although for many of them it does). My point is rather that they do not share the radical women's orientation away from them.
4. Data for quantitative analyses are drawn from individual sociolinguistic interviews conducted with informants. For details of interviews and quantitative methods, see Levon (2009, 2010). Following Henton (1989), mean pitch measurements are taken in semitones (st) across an entire intonational phrase, corresponding to a level 4 break in the ToBI system. For the mainstream women, $n = 492$; $F(1, 486) = 8.731$; $p = .003$. Note, too, that while the difference in average mean pitch level across topics may appear small in absolute terms (0.7 st), this difference represents a change of 7% in the women's observed pitch range, a level of change that previous research has clearly identified as being perceptually salient (see Biemans 2000).
5. I concede that other possible interpretations of the women's practice exist. The differentiation between gay and nongay topics could be grounded, for example, in a difference of affect or emotional investment associated with the topic categories, such that gay topics elicit higher mean pitch levels. While in the interest of space I am unable to address the question of alternative interpretations here, the reader is referred to Levon (2009, 2010), where I deal with these issues in detail.
6. All names are pseudonyms. Extracts reproduced here are my English translations of informants' spoken Hebrew.
7. Note that the radical women's data is not regularly distributed. Analyses were therefore conducted using Mann-Whitney tests ($n = 500$; $U = 27815.0$; $Z = -2.122$; $p = .034$). The difference of 0.8 st across topics represents a change of 7% in the radical women's total observed pitch range (cf. note 4).
8. My point here is that the radical women's use of higher mean pitch levels does not mean "femininity" (or "gender"). For preliminary suggestions of what it could mean, see Levon (2010).

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