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Gendered corrosion of occupational knowledge

Contracting-out Israeli social services

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Abstract

Purpose – When public agencies seek to privatize a service, a commissioning process begins wherein public sector budgeters must decide how generous the funding will be while taking occupational standards into account so that the quality of service is assured. One important area of occupational standards is the required personnel and job sizes of certified employees. Not enough attention has been directed to how occupational standards' related knowledge is treated in the process. The purpose of this paper is to: first, investigate how the commissioning process is experienced by Israeli, often female, occupational standards administrators. Second, proposing a gendered perspective on Sennett's corrosion of character thesis.

Design/methodology/approach – As part of an institutional ethnography project, 16 interviews were conducted with (14 female and two male) occupational standards administrators at the Israeli Welfare, Education and Health Ministries.

Findings – The routine of commissioning involves a stage of using occupational standards' knowledge and experience, and a stage of dismissing it. The "corrosion of character" embedded in the dismissal stage undermines historical achievements in the area of recognizing caring work and skills.

Research limitations/implications – The research is unable to distinguish between the specific caring occupations discussed.

Practical implications – Service delivery modes has to develop into more publicly visible forums where occupational standards' are protected.

Social implications – The continuous corrosion of occupational knowledge may result in the demise of professionalization in care service occupations causing increasingly more polarization and poverty among their employees.

Originality/value – While Sennett's thesis has already been found plausible for understanding public servants' experiences of the "new public management," until recently, not enough attention has been devoted to the commissioning processes' gendered implications for contract-based delivery of services. This paper examines these implications for the power struggle between the feminist achievements protecting skill recognition in caring occupations, and policy makers.

Keywords Gender, Social services, Caring services, Contracting out, Occupational standards, Sennett

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In his analysis of the ways in which the workplace has changed since the late 1980s, Richard Sennett (1998) directed attention to a dimension of flexibility that he named "discontinuous reinvention." This dimension refers to the dominance of the principle of "reinventing institutions decisively and irrevocably so that the present becomes discontinuous from the past" (p. 48). From a feminist political economy perspective, this principle can be understood in three different ways: the first suggests that discontinuous reinvention enables the disruption of the traditional gender hierarchies. With women's work in care service occupations continuing to be devalued and in very persistent ways (Duffy, 2011), discontinuous reinvention is not applicable in this case. The second suggests the disruption of the controlling character of many practices used

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by those in caring occupations, reinforcing the oppression of those in need (Abbott and Meerabeau, 1999). Given the still-weak influence of critical social work, nursing, and pedagogy in public systems (Gardner *et al.*, 2006), neither is discontinuous reinvention applicable in this case. The third suggests the disruption of the 1970s and 1980s feminist achievements that enabled unions and professional associations to protect the value of skill in care service occupations (Armstrong, 2013). In light of Hugman's (1999) analysis of the ways in which managerialism has consistently contributed to de-professionalization, it appears that discontinuous reinvention may be an important feature of a feminist political economy. In this paper, I use Sennett's notions of "discontinuous reinvention" and "the concentration of power without centralization" to elaborate on the understanding of the latter interpretation, focussing on the possibility raised by Sennett (1998) that "to the economics of inequality the new order thus adds new forms of unequal, arbitrary power within the organization" (p. 55).

Employees in the new economy are exposed to a "corrosion of character" process, argued Sennett (1998). A combination of lack of occupational pride, lack of a sense of belonging and trust, lack of stability, and a continuous sense of failure serve to individualize, isolate, and deprive employees of assets that in historically earlier working lives were accessible to them. Several studies have already shown that with public sector casualization reforms, Sennett's various aspects of flexibility have become particularly relevant to women (Conley *et al.*, 2011; Benjamin, 2011). As casualization of women's jobs has been mostly a part of a policy of government procurement and the introduction of contract-based delivery of services, it could be useful to apply discontinuous reinvention and the concentration of power without centralization thereto. That is, going beyond the level of casualized employees' experiences by applying Sennett's notions to the analysis of institutional-level procedures, i.e., exploring their contribution to the analysis of how women's jobs are institutionally shaped by procedures involved in contract-based forms of service delivery: contracting out, outsourcing, commissioning, acquisition, purchasing and public-private partnerships as forms of services delivery. In other words, how occupational standards-related knowledge informs the shaping of jobs defined as necessary for contract-based operation of services.

As government procurement of services suggests that agencies and local governments know the detailed characteristics of the purchased service, occupational standards' administrators previously involved in the regulation and evaluation of services are needed. They are enlisted to contribute their knowledge concerning the occupations required for operation of the service, workloads, the required level of certification, the required training, and so forth. Thus they become the proponents of conventions established since Second World War in the care service occupations before the reforms. Moreover, being involved themselves in past forms of services in their fields that are now contracted-out, they are able to evaluate the significance of the caring relationship to the caring service together with additional invisible aspects of the caring work. Their knowledge, and more importantly the question of whether it is embraced by budgeting administrators or not, is crucial to shaping women's jobs in contracted-out care service occupations.

Occupational standard administrators' professional knowledge has to be seen in the context of the process described by Abbott and Meerabeau (1999), who showed how allegedly rigid public sector bureaucracies supported professionalization and protection for certified women employed in care service occupations. While they

remained critical of some of this process' consequences, like Duffy (2011), they cited the advantages of these professionalization achievements over fields of care service jobs that have not managed to establish the protection of skills, including those of women employed in child care (e.g. Findlay *et al.*, 2009) or in elder care (Lewis and West, 2014). Establishing training and certification procedures alongside workloads and remuneration scales in ways that were beneficial to quality of services and quality of jobs, was made possible by the power position of public sector unions.

In Israel these processes have consolidated through collective bargaining and agreements: in 1970, a collective agreement was signed with the teachers' union; in 1973, a collective agreement was signed with the social workers' union; and in 1979, with the nurses' union. Although the wage scales established by these contracts were relatively low, they secured job stability and a variety of benefits, including a generous civil servant pension. New public management reforms in Israel primarily took the form of applying the Local Government Procurement Act of 1992 by outsourcing many social services to the extent that by 1996, 90 percent of social workers were no longer employed by the government. Given this historical context, it is intriguing to examine Sennett's observation concerning discontinuous reinvention in the Israeli bureaucracies of the Welfare, Health, and Education Ministries, as well as their gendered facets. Before presenting my empirical analysis, below, I introduce my theoretical framework and methodology.

Theoretical framework

According to Sennett, character is the ethical value we find in our work, the pride we can take in working properly; it is grounded in an individual's connection to others, and it consists of a long-term aspect of workplace-related emotional experience. Corrosion of character is the process via which shame gradually replaces this pride – not merely the shame of not being able to work in ways one believes one should, but also the shame of being emotionally dependent on how the work is done and on the others doing it. As workplace culture becomes one of self-sufficiency and self-control, the realization of one's dependency on the work and on others leads to a sense of failure and distrust. Sennett views this process as destructive not only to the self: "Shame about dependence has a practical consequence. It erodes mutual trust and commitment, and the lack of these social bonds threatens the workings of any collective enterprise" (p. 141).

The collective enterprise at stake here is the social organization of care services delivery in various areas, each with its own historical struggles and trajectory, including child care services, long-term elder care services, emergency services, at-risk youth services, and so forth.

The emergence of the social services and their standards of operation and regulation meant that occupation-specific knowledge became the basis for their operation. However, as Abbott and Meerabeau (1999) explained, the status of this knowledge remained fragile, especially as it has embedded debates concerning how effective caring practices are. Debates over various aspects of service quality and specific political configurations resulted in country-specific understandings of professionalization and modes of regulation (Mor, 2014). Those in charge of occupational standards and professionalization, however, have been personnel with specific knowledge, experience, and skills that nurtured their ethical beliefs concerning how the service they are involved in should operate. These ethical beliefs and their role in the collective enterprise provide an opportunity to examine Sennett's suggestion that corrosion of character may threaten their contribution.

Furthermore, this collective enterprise has been a gendered one, namely, embodying the assumption that care is intuitive, that care is love rather than work, and that care

work can be elicited from women for free or for pin money (Folbre, 2006). As Duffy (2011) explained, these assumptions are still applied to those who are perceived as performing menial care work. Further, in specific political configurations that undermine occupational experts' power positions, these assumptions can extend to other caring occupations, even those that are far from menial. With "best value" being the dominant principle applied to the delivery of services (Grimshaw *et al.*, 2005), the collective enterprise of protecting the valuation and skill recognition of those in caring occupations becomes increasingly difficult. As this principle has been found to create significant international convergence in service delivery (Mahon *et al.*, 2012), the carriers of occupational knowledge – occupational standards administrators – take part in many contracting-out processes in English-speaking countries, albeit not in a uniform way. The possibility that they undergo corrosion of character has already been empirically substantiated by Balfour and Grubbs (2000).

These authors found that occupational knowledge is undergoing significant corrosion by analyzing three aspects of public sector procedures: they showed how discontinuous reinvention exposes public servants to their knowledge and experience being undermined within new procedures; how Sennett's notion of flexible specialization is reflected in the constant insinuation that public servants retain too much information and authority at the expense of allowing other parties to bring in their expertise; and finally how concentration without centralization is utilized to weaken public servants by imposing contradictory demands on operating in public-private partnerships on the basis of both trust and lack of trust; evaluating through non-evaluation, and regulating in ways that cannot be sanctioned. The question, however, is: what is the social process via which this corrosion of occupational knowledge disrupts the possibility of protecting the quality of jobs of those employed by contracted-out services? To answer this question, I propose that occupational standards administrators' experiences be analyzed on the basis of both the personal and political aspects of Sennett's theory. The personal aspect requires that experiences of shame, humiliation, and frustration be located in their understanding of how their knowledge is treated in the contracting-out procedure. The political aspect requires that their experiences of the power relations around them be mapped. Sennett's contention, according to which concentration of power in current workplaces occurs without centralization, suits the contracting-out procedure as a form of de-centralization that renders its procedures ideal for examining how power is concentrated in this institutional arena.

Methodological approach

When public agencies seek to privatize a service, a commissioning process begins wherein public sector budgeters must decide how generous the funding will be while taking occupational standards into account so that the quality of service is assured. The occupational standards administrators involved in the process have different titles in different countries: "commissioners" in the UK; "bureau-professionals" or "welfare professionals" in Europe, and "program staff" in the USA.

One aspect they are in charge of is the required personnel's position types (paid hours) of certified employees that shape staff workload. In order to understand how occupational knowledge is treated in the shaping of the quality of jobs in contracted-out services, I conducted an institutional ethnography between 2011 and 2013, focussing on the negotiation over budgeting of contracting-out procedures. Institutional ethnography is a feminist method (Smith, 2005) that focusses on administrative

procedures and discourses, based on the assumption that these embed gendered power relations. Herein I present the analysis of 16 interviews (of the 35 conducted) with occupational standards administrators involved in contract drafting (12) and contract management (four). These 16 interviewees were highly qualified employees who have served as the ministry's officers in charge of specific services. They were selected as other interviewees at their ministries pointed them out as significantly experienced with the contracting-out procedures. Typically, their jobs entailed routine supervision of the services and the drafting of the notices announcing the contracting-out of a service. According to the institutional ethnography method, their familiarity with the ministries' routines could shed light on the negotiation examined here. The duration of the interviews was about one hour. Because the interviewees felt that the topic to be very sensitive, and were generally reluctant to disclose the details of the procedure, the interviews were not taped, but instead the interviewer, a research assistant familiar with some bidding processes from his activism in the area of compulsory tendering of cleaning services, took notes during the interviews, which he transcribed immediately following each interview.

In an institutional ethnography, we learn from the interviewees about their routine procedures and the moral justifications that they hold as well as their stated contributions to the described routines. Thus, the analysis rarely focusses on subjective meanings in interviewees' worlds, as it does in grounded theory, for example. Instead, analysis of institutional ethnography materials is closer to critical discourse analysis, which focusses on exposing power positions, power relations, and power legitimization mechanisms. These aspects are all embedded in Smith's (2005) understanding of what she calls the ruling relations, the revealing of which entail focussing on fewer and longer quotes from which the procedure can be elicited. At the same time, the quotes may not address specific positions because such disclosure would immediately expose those who participated in the study.

Findings

Gender emerges from the analysis as implicated in three instances where administrators' weak negotiating positions prevent care-related knowledge from shaping budgeting decisions: first, when they are serving as members of the budgeting committee; second, when they are trying to convince service deliverers to recognize their occupational insight; and third, when realizing that existing services' quality and the job quality provided therein are low. I analyze these three instances, focussing on how a gender hierarchy that undermines caring knowledge is reproduced.

Lack of support for occupational knowledge

Legitimacy, worth, and a sense of rational operation are all derived from the meticulous attention and respect shown to the occupational standards administrators at the preliminary stages of the contracting-out process. Because often the occupational standards administrators are women who have amassed experience in various social services, and who struggle to protect that skill recognition, their emotions become relevant to the analysis of the processes that shape the resulting contract.

Particularly relevant to the studied negotiation is the experts' pride as professional women: their expertise is recognized to the extent that their voice is heard and invited to shape the contract. Their pride is that of those who have gained discretion and autonomy and are able to manifest these in the context of their high-quality jobs.

Davina G. is a retired occupational standards administrator who was involved all her occupational life in developing child care services. In her interview, she positions herself as deeply frustrated by the relationship between the ministries and local governments on the one hand, and the private NGOs that fund and operate projects in the area of education. She is critical of the process via which occupational standards administrators cannot be regulated by the current operators of the service. She is particularly angry at her being denied lists of those employed and their relevant training. Here's how she describes her participation in the process as a gendered position of losing voice:

> I participated in the contracting-out process of the after-school services. I attended meetings[1] with all the occupational standards administrators and the budgeting personnel. You have to remember that I used to be a figure with significant influence on others in the field. To begin with, it felt as if they were listening to us and that we, the occupational standards people, managed to have a say. We were able to explicitly state how many children can enroll in each class, how many child minders and teachers are required, the type of equipment needed, and so on and so forth. All this was clearly stated and accepted. Then, I got to know the reality part of it all: The budgeting personnel, representing budgeting considerations […] set forth to dismantle everything we so carefully built. What became clear is that they were not going to support any idea to do with maintaining the training courses we had for child minders and preschool assistants over the years. While we thought of it in advance that you need to train caring employees […] this aspect came up as too costly.

Davina G. describes two stages of the contracting-out process: the first aimed at improving the service and raising its occupational standards. The organizing principle of the first stage is occupational rationality, and, therefore, participants experience professional pride, e.g., "I used to be a figure with significant influence on others in the field." In addition, the first stage is characterized by a dialogue oriented toward consensus. The second stage disrupts the consensus and the dialogue. The budgeting administrators' degraded power in the process (to "dismantle everything we so carefully built") triggers feelings of disappointment and humiliation. The pride is replaced by a sense of powerlessness facing the inability to shape crucial aspects of the contract, such as occupational training for care workers, as costs are staunchly defined as too high. The sense of engagement and ethical commitment to the quality of the service is frustrated, and later in the interview, Davina G. admits that following her serving on the committee, she developed an indifference to the commissioning process. The historical pendulum becomes apparent in her narrative: the huge efforts that women made introducing training in caregiving and early childhood education are rendered worthless. While this effort contrasts with a history of no recognition of the need for such training, it runs up against a cost-based justification structure, i.e., it is framed by the commissioning process as unimportant and as expendable. A "ceremony of degradation" that is gendered in the sense of ignoring caring knowledge, facilitates the corrosion of character in the committee, where the occupational standards administrators' sense of professional pride is not validated.

Everything the occupational standards administrators see as important is declared, in front of all the important people around the table, expendable.

A foreign language defines what's important

The occupational standards administrators' pride is built in particularly powerful ways when a new public sector function is being contracted-out. At these preliminary stages,

their opinions are given heightened attention. According to Tatiana F., the dialogical approach soon disappears, replaced by the indignity of powerlessness where their voices are almost completely ignored:

> Occupational standards committees set the occupational aspect of the service: They examine the service cluster, what each of the service recipients get, and who is going to provide that, the ages, the clarity of guidelines for the service deliverer, etc. We set a contract that defines the service cluster, the occupational materials.
>
> To begin with, it operated on the basis of an agreement, but then we had to define […] there was a dimension of trust there where we looked each other in the eye and clarified all the details. We defined the professionals, the nature of work we aimed at, the documentation, saving the files and the archival aspect, the reports of the ministries, control of the centre, standards of training for new employees – there wasn't an item that wasn't included.
>
> What happened then was that the service deliverer asked many questions and refined the resolutions of the procedures down to their details, which obligated us to go over each point with a fine-tooth comb.
>
> Concurrently, a tango began with the budgeting people, who said, "We only have this budget! You cannot ignore it!" and the occupational standards people would say, "You must follow this. That's a sacred requirement!" and suddenly the finance people began speaking in a language that we'd never spoken before. They began calculating the cost of each activity […] and then what generally happened was that everything had to be recalculated down to pennies.
>
> But then, the very long list of requirements, each one with its accurate cost, took on an intimidating effect, and the service deliverer said, "Look, I'm obligated to give the training, to provide the service, but nothing more than that." Although we saw many more aspects […] we couldn't […] it became difficult to go back to our list of requirements. Nothing, beyond somebody coming in and putting checkmarks beside the activities, nothing could be achieved.

Tatiana F.'s account echoes the disruption and transition between the two stages described by Davina G.: "[…] and suddenly the finance people began speaking in a language that we'd never spoken before." The silencing of the occupational standards administrators by the translation of their requirements into their dollar-and-cents costs excluded their knowledge, their experience, and their deep belief that occupational standards are sacred.

In Tatiana F.'s narrative, an additional pressure was introduced, and the gendering nature of contracting-out shattered her hopes for a quality service: the firm's profitability disrupted the dialogue, dismissing the caring expert's knowledge.

The silencing enforced by the power of the budgeting administrators combined with the service deliverer's power to reject the possibility that its expected profit would shrink, erased the occupational terminology. The terminology developed over years of providing caring services on the basis of occupational standards based on trained personnel and clear procedures, was cast out of the negotiation process. Decades of women's work, their accumulated knowledge and experience, were ignored.

Occupational standards administrators' resistance

Professional knowledge is further ignored when regulating services is needed. In some cases, during the contract management stage, the occupational standards administrators find themselves just accepting the low quality of the services, unable to express resistance. In already operating services, they are already aware of the

outcomes that ignoring their knowledge will have on the service. Here's how a male occupational standards administrator describes his feminized position in which his caring expert knowledge is ignored:

> The counsellors are often young students. Because they interact with youth with diverse difficulties and issues, they experience burnout and their jobs are essentially temporary. They tend to remain in their positions for about a year and a half, which is basically too short a period. Our experience is that it is better if employees stay at their jobs for over three years. That's because the relationships they build with the youth are crucial to their becoming significant sources of support for them, thereby contributing to their rehabilitation. If the counsellors can stay for three years or more, they become role models for the youth, they become more professional with the experience that they gain, and this in turn empowers the youth. However, it's very hard work and it's difficult to locate counsellors that would be willing to work for that long for low income. So, the employment model that we have now solved the problem of the burnout, but it means that we have services with too high a turnover.

Basically, the speaker knows that the service is not operating on the basis of his occupational knowledge, according to which three years are needed to achieve the caring relationship. Elsewhere in the interview, he explains that the low wages reduce the quality of employees in additional roles in the service. Thus he finds himself in charge of a service that is perpetually under-functioning.

The interviewed occupational standards administrators understand perfectly the disempowerment inflicted upon them that cripples their ability to apply their professional knowledge. The only action they can take in response is to threaten not to cooperate with the commissioning process, but they know they cannot halt it.

Consequently, under very limited ability to shape levels of remuneration during the contracting-out process, the occupational standards administrators search for indirect ways to effect professionalization. For example, upon encountering employees' exploitation, they try to promote some systematic change that will enhance protection of employees' rights:

> Employees complain to me on an interpersonal level. A social worker came to me and told me that her workload is impossible to bear. I couldn't help them other than by forwarding the information to the ministry headquarters so that they would realize there that they have to change the budgeting of the service. While I'm not involved in that on a daily basis, when I hear from several employees, I realize that there is a problem and then I present it to people higher up the ladder and I talk about it in the monthly supervisors' meetings. I understand the source of the problem and I try to urge others to deal with it.

> I can also act in an indirect way. For instance, [let's say] I see a place where the turnover of social workers is very high. I'll talk with the employees to see what's going on and try to understand the situation, and I can learn whether it is an interpersonal issue or something to do with the employment conditions […] I recently found a place where they didn't employ a social worker at all despite their clear obligation in the contract to employ one in each branch. So now we introduced a clause into the contract that they cannot open a branch if they don't show that they have employed a social worker.

Past occupational guidelines for service operation demanded certified employees and protected their employment conditions. The occupational standards administrators learn in their daily encounter with the operating services that some of these guidelines, even when codified in the contract, are circumvented. In other words, the occupational knowledge that was not erased by funding considerations, and could

not be defined as too costly, is erased by the daily routines of the long-term management of the contract. The occupational standards administrators who encounter the gendered, summary dismissal of caring knowledge, are compelled to search for "ways" to influence future practices so that less occupational knowledge is ignored. In this way, they sometimes manage to shape future contracts. Or, more commonly, when her reports are heard in future meetings, a power struggle will determine action.

Despite the awareness of the various forms that dismissal of occupational knowledge take in the operation of the contracted-out services, no practical measures are taken to protect the this knowledge's value. Even when a specific service deliverer fails to adhere to the clear provisions of the contract, the occupational standards administrators can hardly help.

Discussion

Managerialization, de-professionalization, and user empowerment are generally recognized as key developments in the administration of social services since the late 1990s in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and Israel, among other countries. While several authors have already addressed the influence these trends have on administrators in the field (Carey, 2014; Clarke, 1999), little scholarly investigation has targeted the impact that they have on occupational standards administrators whose knowledge could shape the quality of jobs for employees in contracted-out services. Moreover, their knowledge embeds the historical accumulation of critical insights proposed by research in these areas. Thus, their deep understanding of workloads has always been recognized as salient for both quality of caring jobs as well as quality of services. By targeting this impact, a power struggle is exposed, one that engenders daily violations of occupational standards' administrators' occupational identities and pride.

The analysis revealed the personal and the political significance of Sennett's theoretical insights to be mixed. In the interviewees' experiences, discontinuous reinvention and the concentration of power without centralization were not separated: these two dimensions have completely converged in face of the basic institutional certainty that keeping costs down is more important than occupational training or remuneration that would reduce turnover. The shift between a first stage of maximum honoring/of occupational knowledge and the second stage of its dismissal exposes the interviewees to an emotional state of shame, humiliation, and frustration. Their experiences can be termed "ceremonies of degradation" where nothing they do or believe in is validated as important in the contracting-out procedure.

This corrosion of character that takes place on the individual level constitutes a genuine threat to the feminist collective enterprise of defending the quality of jobs of those employed in care service occupations. Sennett's contribution here becomes crucial as the defeat of the historical achievement takes place on an individual level, in an institutional space that allegedly remains gender blind: each of the interviewees raised her frustration with a colleague or two, but basically was left completely isolated with the realization of the corrosion of their occupational knowledge.

On the basis of my findings, I argue that a feminist political economy could significantly benefit from incorporating Sennett's theory applied within an institutional ethnography. The power of policy application procedure to undermine feminist achievements can be exposed within this framework in such a way as to significantly explain how women's poverty and dependencies are perpetuated on an institutional level.

The ruling relations exposed by the institutional ethnography reported here show how feminist achievements are used to legitimize current policies without practically improving women's opportunity structures. This manipulation was particularly illustrated by the first of the two stages of the de-skilling process described above: the stage that emphasizes skill and encourages occupational standards administrators to raise their standards of quality of the service being provided. As the budgeting decision making almost completely ignores the reports of the first stage, it can be said to be cynically used to extract legitimacy for the process by maintaining the veneer of quality improvement.

On top of augmenting Sennett's analytical observations, my findings show how a gender perspective and a focus on caring occupations extend Sennett's theory. Because care service occupations are still rich in intrinsic forms of rewards, particularly when relationships with those cared for are enabled, corrosion of character does not occur in the way it does in service occupations of the type described by Sennett. Instead, it occurs through the fragmentation and isolation that are engendered in contracts with service deliverers, and the forceful sidelining of occupational knowledge that is institutionalized therein.

Of particular interest here is the aspect of regulation of commissioned social services wherein occupational standards administrators act to implement their knowledge in regulation, as they have the experience necessary to shape its appropriate form and the personnel required. De-skilling them by silencing their arguments with budget-related justifications suggests that defeating feminist struggle is a key to understanding many of the irregularities exposed by the media in recent years in a range of social services. The practical implication of my findings for policy is that an alternative mode of delivery of services should be adopted by public sector agencies such as the government ministries described here: delivery based on caring knowledge rather than dismissing it and its potential for ensuring quality caring services.

Thus, a gender perspective on corrosion of character is one that maps the loci wherein corrosion of character takes specific forms, and continuously evaluates each such form in light of the power position that the commitment to recognize women's knowledge, experience, and skills, assumes. Mapping the implicit dynamics of these power positions would indicate the reproduction of gender inequality when stated equality is taken for granted (Acker, 2006).

While this study has its limitations, particularly in the form of insufficient systematic analysis of the distinctions between the contracted-out services, the emerging resemblance between the procedures exposes the silencing of women located higher up in occupational hierarchies and employed in quality, unionized jobs. While they are able to transmit information or write an adamant letter, their voices remain largely unheard and the requirements that they put forward remain unfunded. In silencing its occupational standards administrators, Israel has become an extreme case of the refusal to reconsider contracting out of social services. At the same time, its extreme form of commissioning social services has provided the opportunity to elicit the social process through which feminist achievements in the professionalization of nursing, social work, and teaching, are undermined. To assess the international scope of this phenomenon, future research should undertake to conduct systematic comparisons of occupational standards administrators in other countries to examine the extent to which their occupational authority is still respected and what local mechanisms protect it.

Note

1. The speaker refers to the meetings of the budgeting committee wherein finance ministry representatives meet with representatives of the service. While this committee can consist of men and women alike, the finance ministry representatives are often male economists. For more information about the budgeting administrators, see Benjamin (2015).

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