

# “Power From Within” and Masculine Language: Does New Age Language Work at Work?

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## Abstract

This study investigates the use, by women, of New Age spirituality (NAS) language in the workplace. Quantitative and qualitative data collected in New Zealand and Israel show that women reported using NAS language more than men, and that NAS language are generally silenced. Results show that if not calculated correctly, women’s use of NAS can lead to the loss of social capital and cultural capital in the workplace. In addition, women use NAS language as a set of ideas that shape the way they behave, as a form of “power from within,” and as “spiritual capital.” The article draws out some implications for theory on language and power in the workplace, by showing that silenced languages may remain alive within people, directing responses and actions, and for feminist research, by suggesting that women’s spirituality should be considered as a factor in explaining the interpretation and negotiation of workplace challenges, by women.

## Keywords

Gender, empowerment, language, spiritual capital, New Age, spirituality, workplace

## Introduction

In this study, we empirically investigate the use, by women, of New Age spirituality (NAS) in the workplace. We define spirituality as that in which the sacred is taken to come into evidence, where the relationship with the sacred involves a profoundly experimental way of “knowing” (Heelas, 2012, p. 5). We discuss a specific, contemporary form of spirituality, one linked to and blended with New Age ideas and practices. Thus, we refer to NAS as those ideas and forms of practice that draw from various domains, including esotericism, psychology, Eastern philosophy, complementary and alternative medicine, religion, lifestyle, popular science, feminism, the human potential movement, the ecology movement, and neo-paganism (Hanegraaff, 1998). Such ideas and practices are pervasive in Western New Age communities, and have now extended beyond them into the realm of secular organizations. An indication of NAS growth is documented in studies showing that in Europe and North America, between 10% and 20% of the general population claim to be “spiritual not religious,” and the level of belief in “some sort of a spirit or life force” or in “God as something within each person rather than something out there” lies somewhere between 20% and 40% (Sointu & Woodhead, 2008, quoting others, p. 259).

Earlier research has demonstrated that women are more likely than men to be engaged in NAS (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Houtman & Aupers, 2007; Houtman & Mascini,

2002), in holistic spirituality practices (for the purpose of attaining wholeness and wellbeing of body, mind, and spirit), and in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) connected with holism, spirituality, vitalism and energy, and the acknowledgment of the unity of body, mind, and spirit (Eardley et al., 2012; Frass et al., 2012; Keshet & Simchai, 2014).

While existing research has documented women’s work within the fields of NAS and CAM, to our knowledge, scarce research attention has been devoted to exploring gender differences in the use of spirituality in mainstream work organizations such as education (e.g., schools), finance (e.g., banks), and high-tech companies, as discussed in this article. Furthermore, little research has documented how women specifically perceive and use NAS ideas and practices at work. This analysis is of significant importance, as it focuses on the ways that women express their belief in the context of such a primary domain of our economic and social lives.

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In this study, we empirically investigate women's use of NAS language at work. Based on earlier research that demonstrated that language expresses and embodies cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998), we use NAS language as a representation of the NAS culture and as a concrete anchor of data.

### Literature Review

Scholars have identified several core and interrelated dimensions that constitute NAS. First is *transcendence of the self*, that is, a belief that one is connected to other people, ideas, nature, or some kind of "higher power" (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003). In parallel with this is an emphasis on authentic selfhood and inner wisdom, and on connecting with these inner depths (Sointu & Woodhead, 2008). Second, those involved in spirituality are committed to a vision of authentic *selfhood-in-relation*. Such relationality is conceived as fundamentally small-scale and egalitarian. The emphasis is on life lived out in "healthy" connection with intimates, coworkers, family members, and others (Sointu & Woodhead, 2008).

The third dimension is *holism and harmony*, that is, the integration of different aspects of one's self into a coherent and symbiotic conception of the self (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003). This dimension includes a focus on the body, understood as the access point to unique selfhood and which serves as a means of achieving greater well-being (Sointu & Woodhead, 2008). The fourth dimension is a belief in *growth*, that is a clear sense of what one is seeking to become and what one needs to do to achieve self-actualization (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003).

These sets of ideas have been translated into texts and practices, creating a growing market of workshops and seminars claiming to enable spiritual self-development at work (Bell & Taylor, 2004; Taylor, 2010; Zaidman, Goldstein-Gidoni, & Nehemia, 2009).

The questions "why" and "how" women use NAS practices have been the focus of several studies. Previous researchers showed that spiritual New Age practices enable women to establish their identity, and that they empower women (Nissen, 2011). Sointu and Woodhead (2008) and Woodhead (2007) argued that NAS attracts women in far greater numbers than men, because it offers women living in contemporary Western societies ways of negotiating contemporary dilemmas of selfhood, which most men don't seem to require. Women use holistic and spiritual practices to develop a new and stronger sense of self, achieved by getting in touch with a "core self," which is understood as one's emotions and desires that lie beyond their conventional "feminine" roles. According to Woodhead (2007), holistic spiritualities have the capacity to offer a practical setting for the construction and performance of forms of selfhood traditionally demarcated by respectable femininity, such as self-fulfillment, bodily pleasure, inner authenticity, freedom, and self-expression. The

New Age's holistic milieu is perceived as an emancipating alternative for women, as enabling women's reconstruction of self-identity, and as an opportunity to challenge existing gender inequalities.

A review article focusing on the use of CAM and holistic spirituality practices yielded similar results. It was found that despite some constraints, these practices are constructed as empowering women, facilitating economic entrepreneurship, and challenging social perceptions that ground women and femininity in positions of inferiority (Keshet & Simchai, 2014, quoting others; Taylor, 2010). From most of the reviewed articles, it emerges that women perceive CAM and the holistic milieu as "feminine," in accordance with conservative gender perspectives; they focus on personal empowerment rather than on collective action or endeavors to change gender relations. Women's empowerment has been interpreted as stemming from "power from within"—from a sense of competence and confidence, and not from "power over," which is directed toward resistance (Keshet & Simchai, 2014; Wong, 2003). The term "power from within" refers to a personal psychological power in the minds of people, resulting from the development of self-value and a sense of ability to overcome internalized oppression (Wong, 2003). Rowlands (1997) defined "power from within" as "the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect, which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals" (p. 13).

While existing research has documented how NAS followers perceive and enact their NAS beliefs as independent entrepreneurs running their own businesses, little research has documented how NAS is experienced by followers who are employed in organizations.

The workplace spirituality literature tends to focus on recounting how different spiritual traditions can be or should be used at work (e.g., Barnett, 1985; Ray & Myers, 1986), generally considering the phenomenon as a positive development (Lips-Wiersma, Lund, & Fornaciari, 2009). A second direction in workplace spirituality research includes studies arguing that workplace spirituality may in fact be harmful rather than useful, particularly with regard to employees' well-being, because it may be used as a negative force with which to acquire hegemony (Bell & Taylor, 2003; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009). As before, this academic trend does not address the question of *how* NAS is embodied into secular Western organizations.

According to Taylor (2010), the holism of New Age capitalism emphasizes individual responsibility for coping with the demands of contemporary work and society. The discourses surrounding holism might then be seen as mediators for the contradictions experienced in the pursuit of meaningful work in large organizations, where instrumental values are dominant. However, empirical studies suggest otherwise. Grant, O'Neil, and Stephens (2004) found that nurses who

experienced the sacred in a variety of ways struggled to find opportunities to talk about or to practice their spiritual beliefs. Similarly, managers working in for-profit organizations attested that spirituality improved their awareness at work, enhanced communication, and reduced stress. Yet, when involved with spiritual practices in the organization's public domain, they suffered negative emotions, such as shame, or a deterioration of their image at work. As a result, they had to participate in spiritual practices privately while concealing their involvement from colleagues (Zaidman & Goldstein-Gidoni, 2011). In line with this research, Casey (2000) argued that de-alienation and the search for meaning in work may be best pursued by reducing or ceasing involvement in large organizations.

In summary, existing research rarely focuses on women's (or followers') actual enactment of NAS within work organizations. Several studies (e.g., Grant et al., 2004; Hedges & Beckford, 2000; Zaidman & Goldstein-Gidoni, 2011) describe such encounters, but they lack a systemic theoretical explanation of it. The theoretical framework suggested in the studies focusing on women's involvement at CAM, a context in which women are often self-employed, tend to overlook the complexity involved in the context of work in large organizations. In our view, the "power from within" perspective (Keshet & Simchai, 2014; Wong, 2003) and Taylor's (2010) argument for the New Age premise about individual responsibility for coping with the demands of contemporary work seem to be relevant to our case. Yet, they fall short of explaining the complexity involved in women's use of NAS in work organizations. For this reason, we suggest using two alternatives, which are in fact complementary theoretical perspectives.

*Theoretical perspectives.* Our analysis of women's enactment of NAS at work organizations is based on Bourdieu's work, and on research on language power and control in organizations.

Bourdieu (1986) proposed various conceptual tools to analyze social reality, which scholars—including feminist scholars—have found to be useful, such as social field and capital (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005). Bourdieu saw social fields as semiautonomous networks of social relations, and compared the field with a game that follows rules and regulations that are not directly explicit. Participants in a field apply different positions and opportunities, as well as different sets of strategies. They are in fact players who are engaged in a game, and hold particular types of "capital" which they use in competition with others. Participants may improve their position by using economic capital (e.g., material property), social capital (e.g., networks), and "and/or" cultural capital (e.g., prestige). These kinds of capitals determine the moves each player makes and the positions he or she takes (Ross-Smith & Huppertz, 2010; Verter, 2003). These capitals are considered symbolic capitals, if and when social agents know them, recognize them, and give them value. This

conceptualization of symbolic capital suggests that it is formed through a shared meaning of value and worth (Bourdieu, 1986; Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005).

Bourdieuian scholars have reworked Bourdieu's concept of capital to include gendered capital and feminine forms of capital (Hunter, 2002; Huppertz & Goodwin, 2013). Drawing on data focusing on senior managers in organizations, Ross-Smith and Huppertz (2010) demonstrated how in some instances femaleness or femininity may empower women and provide them with agency. However, gender capital—such as skills that are perceived as feminine, or feminine appearance and sexuality—might be double-edged and situational, and may grant women advantages as well as disadvantages. Others argue that women's gender capital is restricted (McCall, 1992) and that it "provides only limited access to potential forms of power" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 10).

The literature about language, power, and control in the workplace provides an additional point of reference with which to discuss the enactment by women of NAS in work organizations. According to Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari, and Santti (2005, p. 597, quoting others), the traditional view on language and power in organizations emphasizes that any specific discourse empowers particular parties and disempowers others. For example, language has been shown to be a central element in the constitution of organizational relationships and their power implications, and has been explicitly linked with organizational rationalities, rules, and domination. Accordingly, feminist perspectives on power assert that power is generally exercised not coercively, but rather subtly and routinely. The most effective use of power occurs when those with power are able to coerce those with less power to interpret the world from the formers' point of view (Mumby & Clair, 1997). Collectively, this research substantiates examining language, such as NAS language, as related to structured relationships of dominance and subordination in organizations

According to Kissack (2010, quoting others), organizations tend to magnify the preference of masculine language, which is characterized by opinions, facts, and assertiveness; whereas feminine language (typically characterized by utilizing personal information and references to emotions) is marginalized. Within organizations, women can choose between alienation, when they forcefully internalize masculine language, or silence, when they do not express themselves within the confines of masculine-determined language. The author argues that not only has women's language been marginalized, but that in fact, it remains muted within organizations and, specifically, within email communications. Likewise, Houston and Kramarae (1991, quoting others) argued that women's silence is not only apparent in the absence of their voices from certain forums, on certain issues, and before certain audiences, but also in the form and focus of their speech and writing. The authors go on to describe methods of silencing women, such as ridicule and homophobia.

In this study, we empirically investigate women's use of New Age language in work organizations. In line with earlier research (Keshet & Simchai, 2014; Wong, 2003), we demonstrate that women perceive NAS spirituality as a power from within. Yet, this study takes this argument one step further by illuminating the specific ways that such power is constructed. The study shows that NAS adherents experience the hegemony of masculine language at work. If not calculated correctly, women's involvement with NAS might lead to the loss of social capital (e.g., their social relationships) and cultural capital (e.g., their professional reputation). This article draws out some implications for theory on language, power, and control in the workplace, by showing that silenced languages—such as NAS language—are not necessarily banished from the organizational domain. Rather, they may be alive within people, directing responses and actions, and are occasionally enacted out. The article also presents implications for feminist theory, by suggesting that women's spirituality (religion, or other systems of existential meaning) should be considered as an important factor explaining the interpretation and negotiation of workplace challenges, including gender relations, by women.

The first objective of this study is to assess whether women are more likely than men to transmit NAS ideas into mainstream work organizations. The second objective is to develop a contextual and in-depth understanding of the use of NAS, by its adherents, in work organizations.

To strengthen the validity of the research, we collected data in two different countries.

The article is structured as follows: Following the "Method" section, we present the quantitative and qualitative findings based on three research questions:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** Do women use NAS terms at their work organizations more than men?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2):** How did the participants in this study describe the responses to those who use spiritual New Age language at work?

**Research Question 3 (RQ3):** If women are prominent in carrying over their inclination to be involved in New Age activities to their workplaces, how do they perceive and use NAS language at work?

We then present and discuss these findings based on previous research.

## Method

### Research Design

To assess gender differences in the use of NAS in mainstream work organizations, we chose to survey employees, working in three different sectors, from two different countries. A representative scale of NAS which could be used to pursue this objective was hard to develop, for a number of reasons. First, as Liu and Robertson (2011) argued, the 65

existing scales published within the spirituality, religion, and work domain mainly focus on ethics, religion, faith, values, beliefs, and so on, rather than on "spirituality" itself. Second, we found that the more "spirituality"-oriented scales were built upon researchers' articulations of what spirituality (as a construct) meant. For example, Liu and Robertson (2011) considered three components: interconnection with a higher power, interconnection with human beings, and interconnection with nature and all living things. But these components differ from those described by Ashforth and Pratt (2003) and Sointu and Woodhead (2008) (as described above), and from the instrument developed by Ashmos and Duchon (2000). Third, such scales, in our view, may not fully reflect native participants' perceptions. Fourth, our intention was to apply a systemic methodology, one that could be used to document worker perceptions and behavior, as well as the perceptions and behavior of NAS adherents. These constraints led us to develop an alternative methodology, one which uses NAS language as spoken by NAS adherents, and that reflects NAS ideas. In other words and for the purpose of this study, we do not measure an external "ethic" set of NAS ideas, but rather measure (and ask about) the essential expressions of NAS as crystalized in the participants' language.

This allowed us to assess the differences between men and women in their use of NAS language. It also meant that we were able to conduct focus groups with workers, and to assess organization members' responses to people who used NAS language at work, and we could initiate in-depth interviews, where the initial questions to adherents were about their use of NAS language at work.

The study employed both quantitative (self-report questionnaire) and qualitative (focus groups and semistructured interviews) methodologies. The rationale for applying a mixed-methods research approach is justified by the benefits of obtaining complementary responses to different research questions. The quantitative data provided an indication of similarities and differences between populations (gender and nationalities) in the use of NAS language, while the qualitative data provided information regarding the participants' wider perceptions. More specifically, we used the quantitative research method to examine gender differences in the reported rates of (a) the participants' engagement in NAS practices and (b) the usage of New Age terms as applied by the participants outside and inside their work organizations. We used qualitative methodology to reveal participants' perspectives regarding the people who speak NAS language at work, and the way they are perceived by coworkers and managers. In addition, we used qualitative methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning that women attribute to NAS language and the way they use it at work.

To strengthen the validity of the research, we sampled employees working in mainstream organizations in two different countries rather than focusing on a sample of employees from one nationality. We chose to sample data from New

Zealand and Israel for several reasons. First, New Zealand and Israel are Western countries, both belonging to the range of countries in which NAS is active. Second, the population numbers of both countries are similar, a factor that might be important in terms of the establishment of the New Age movement in both countries. Third, the New Age movement has taken a similar form in both New Zealand and Israel. A research study about New Age shops—a primary institution within the New Age culture—in both countries showed mainly similarities (albeit with some differences) in the settings, functions, and perceptions of these shops across both countries. That said, the manifestation of NAS in each country incorporates local influences. In Israel, NAS adherents tend to incorporate ideas and practices from Judaism; in New Zealand, NAS adherents tend to incorporate ideas and practices from Maori culture (Zaidman, 2007).

Similarly, to strengthen the validity of the research, we sampled employees working in various mainstream organizations from both the public and private sectors, as well as from different industries.

We accessed the participants in this study via our networks, and via the networks of several research assistants.

### Quantitative Methodology

We used the quantitative methodology of a survey. The first stage in the development of NAS language survey was a web search conducted by a research assistant. The assistant surveyed the most popular Israeli and New Zealand New Age forums, “Desertashram,” “Alternativli,” “Ima-adama,” and “Chakrapedia” in Israel, and “Emergingparadigms,” “Almora,” “Omegacommunications,” “Nzpsychics,” “Soulpower,” and “Alletermy” in New Zealand. We also used books, magazines, and scholarly research to create a list of core New Age terms (e.g., key words, metaphors, idioms) used in each country. Examples are, “life is a journey,” “everything starts from within,” “to be connected to,” “to flow,” “spirituality,” “meditation,” “energy,” “chakra,” “intuition,” and “channeling” (see the appendix). The first and second authors reviewed the list, and narrowed it down to avoid repetitions and to include key terms. In the second stage, we created a list based on the sources from New Zealand. The second author, from New Zealand, reviewed the list of terms used in New Zealand and narrowed it down. The first and the second authors carefully compared the two lists in an attempt to construct a Hebrew (Israeli) questionnaire and an English (New Zealand) questionnaire, similar to each other but at the same time reflecting the local endemic terms that emerged from the various sources. We found that the list of core New Age terms that we extracted from these New Age forums and texts reflected main NAS ideas such as a “focus on the divine” and “nature of one’s inner self” (see Ashforth & Pratt, 2003; Sointu & Woodhead, 2008), demonstrating that the choice of language indeed expresses and embodies the New Age cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998).

The English questionnaire was pretested in New Zealand with a sample of 10 people from various organizations (e.g., school teachers and bank employees), with the aim of checking the clarity of each word in the questionnaire. The preliminary Hebrew questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 Israeli participants.

The final version of the English questionnaire included 35 NAS terms; 11 of the items represented local Maori spirituality language embedded within the New Age context in New Zealand. The Hebrew questionnaire contained 28 items, with four of them reflecting local Jewish spirituality language embedded within the Israeli New Age context.

Responders were asked to rate the amount of self-usage of each item in their workplace on a scale from 1 to 6: *never*, *seldom*, *sometimes*, *often*, *frequently*, and *very frequently*. The questionnaire included questions about the extent to which the participants use the words or expressions listed in the survey outside of their work environment. The responders were also asked to grade their participation in three types of New Age activities: meditation, workshops, and consulting with alternative medicine practitioners, as well as about their reading health/well-being or New Age literature), on a scale from 1 to 6: *never*, *seldom*, *sometimes*, *often*, *frequently*, and *very frequently*. A New Age practice score was calculated by adding the responses to these items. The questionnaire also included some demographic details.

**Population and sample.** We used a convenience sample of 310 workers in organizations in two countries, New Zealand and Israel. The sample distribution was 169 women (54.5%), which included 82 from New Zealand (26.4%) and 87 from Israel (28.0%), and 141 men (45.5%), which included 68 from New Zealand (21.9%) and 73 from Israel (23.5%).

Data were collected from education, finance, and high-tech organization employees during the year 2013. The sample included employees from more than 103 diverse organizations. We sampled no more than three employees from the same organization. Employees who agreed to participate in the study were given the questionnaire and were requested to complete it. Overall, in Israel we sampled 62 organizations from the education sector (i.e., elementary and high schools, but not colleges or universities), 59 finance organizations (e.g., banks, insurance companies), and 39 high-tech firms. In New Zealand, we sampled 60 organizations from the education sector, 60 finance organizations, and 30 high-tech firms (Table 1 and 2).

**Quantitative data analysis.** We analyzed means, standard deviations, *t* test, and one-way ANOVA. Means and standard deviations were used to determine the level of self-reported usage of NAS terms in the workplace and outside the workplace, as well as the level of participation in New Age activities. The *t* test and one-way ANOVA were used to determine whether, at a selected probability level, there

**Table 1.** Number of Participants.

	Women	Men	Total
New Zealand	82	68	150
Israel	87	73	160
Total	169	141	310

**Table 2.** Age and Gender Distributions.

Country	Group	Group <i>n</i>	No. of males	No. of females	Average group age
Israel	Education	62	11	51	45
	Finance	59	31	28	39
	High-tech	39	21	8	35
New Zealand	Education	60	24	36	45
	Finance	60	26	34	40
	High-tech	30	24	6	35

were significant differences in the means of the terms' usage inside and outside the workplace based on differences in gender. They were also used to determine whether women reported participating in New Age activities more than men.

### Qualitative Methodology

**Focus groups.** We conducted three focus groups with the Israeli employees during the years 2013-2016. The purpose of these focus groups was to explore (a) if, how, and by whom New Age language is used in various organizations and the common perceptions of organization members about this language, and (b) what the consequences were of using New Age language on the organization floor. The main questions for the focus group were as follows: Please tell us what characterizes the language spoken by employees at your workplace? How do your colleagues and the senior members of your organization respond to a person who uses the following terms: "flow," "positive energy," "listen to yourself," and so on? Are these terms part of your organizational language? Based on your experience, does using such language positively contribute to, or hurt the speaker? How does such language enter your organization, if at all?

There were 10 participants in each of the focus groups—nine women and one man in the first focus group, eight women and two men in the second focus group, and five women and five men in the third focus group. The participants were employed in high-tech firms, financial firms, banks, public schools, and other organizations such as medical services, a chemical production company, and the Israel Electricity Company.

The discussions that were held in the three meetings with the focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. We

read the transcribed texts of the focus groups several times. We then collected all the responses to each specific question that we asked, in an attempt to make sense of the data—that is, to determine if there was an emergent trend, and if so, what it was. We also examined the content of the text and its form, that is, the particular ways that the participants responded. We then analyzed the dynamics of the participants' responses during the focus group meetings. We conducted this analysis independently for each focus group.

**Interviews.** We conducted 23 interviews with women from both Israel (13 women) and New Zealand (10 women) who worked in various organizations such as in public schools and higher education (nine women), in the finance and the high-tech industry (seven women), in government and health (five women), and small-medium enterprises (two women). All these respondents were highly involved with NAS practices. Data were collected between 2013 and 2016. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight regarding the meaning that these women attribute to NAS, and the ways they use NAS language and NAS practices at work. The main questions of the interview were as follows: (a) When you read the following words or phrases (e.g., I connect to myself, I connect to others, listening to myself, everything starts from within, self-actualization, consciousness/awareness), what does it do to you? What do you feel when you hear them? (b) When do you use this language? (c) Do you use it at work? (If yes, please explain and give examples; if not, please explain why not). We then conducted an open discussion about the participant's use of NAS at work.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. We read the transcribed texts of the interviews several times. We first grouped together all the quotes dealing with the ways that the participants perceived NAS in general, and then grouped the quotes specifically dealing with the use of NAS language in the context of the participants' workplace. We identified dominant themes in the participants' responses, which were further classified to get a better understanding of the data.

### Results

Engagement in NAS practices was measured through reported levels of participation in New Age workshops, practicing alternative medicine, and reading New Age literature. Women reported participating in New Age activities significantly more than men (5.28 vs. 4.42,  $p < .01$ ) when analyzing the answers of participants from both countries together. While the same trend was evident for each country separately, however, New Zealand women's engagement in New Age practices (5.9) was significantly ( $p < .01$ ) higher than all other groups: New Zealand men (4.51), Israeli women (4.68), and Israeli men (4.32).

**Table 3.** Mean Reported Use of Spiritual Language: Women Versus Men ( $N = 310$ ).

		Women	Men	Significance (ANOVA)
The two countries	At work	2.24	1.83	**
	Outside of work	3.04	2.77	<i>ns</i>
New Zealand	At work	2.08	1.77	<i>ns</i>
	Outside of work	2.74	2.77	<i>ns</i>
Israel	At work	2.4	1.88	<i>ns</i>
	Outside of work	3.1	2.65	<i>ns</i>

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

The answer to RQ1, “Do women use NAS terms in their work organizations more than men?” (and therefore, do they carry over their inclination to be involved in New Age activities from one social field to their workplace), is yes. Preliminary analyses of gender differences in the reporting of use of New Age language between men and women, within and outside the workplace, revealed highly significant differences (ANOVA,  $F = 44.01$ ,  $dfs = 3$ ;  $p < .0001$ ). On average, women reported greater use than men of NAS terms in their work organizations (2.24 vs. 1.83,  $p < .01$ ). This finding was significant when we analyzed the answers of the participants from the two countries together. We also found the same trend for each country separately (New Zealand: 2.08 vs. 1.72, *ns*; Israel: 2.40 vs. 1.88, *ns*), but, probably because of smaller sample sizes, these differences were not significant (Table 3).

The simple answer to RQ2, “How do the participants in this study describe the responses to those who speak spiritual New Age language at work?” is that they describe these users mostly in negative terms. When asked if this language was spoken in the participants’ organizations, the initial response of most of the participants in the focus groups was negative. The following quotes are examples of the responses that participants gave to these questions: “In my work, they would have killed a person who speaks in such a way” (accountant); “Such a person would not be accepted to the job, or would not be able to hold the job” (economist); “There is no chance that such a person would be socially accepted to my team, people would look at him as a weird person” (bank worker); “I would avoid communicating with him” (a worker in a production company). A high-tech employee said in one of the focus groups that when two of her female colleagues used NAS language at work, their CEO mocked them. The participants explained that such language was considered unprofessional and frivolous. A school principal provided a slightly different picture: “There are those who accept this [language] as an essential aspect of education, while others would consider it unprofessional.”

Participants expressed a slightly different opinion further on in the focus group conversations, when asked if such a language was spoken in their organizations. At first, they

said that NAS language was not spoken at all in their work organizations, but later they indicated several exceptions. Such exceptions took place in “organizational ex-territoriality” situations, in which NAS language was spoken by a person who is an external organizational consultant, or by organization members during organizational fun days. Second, work colleagues would be more open to accept such a language if spoken by people holding a certain position in the organization. For example, participants working in public schools said that such a language would be accepted when spoken by a school consultant, but certainly not by a school-teacher. A bank worker said that she could think of a manager “who is located at the top of the pyramid” who would speak such a language. This account was discussed vividly in the third focus group. An IT person said, “Managers can use several of these sentences but not all of them. Anyway, I do not see workers talking like this at all.” Other participants said that such a language could be introduced by managers, but definitely not by “small workers.” Finally, a high-tech worker explained that if a person who speaks NAS language “brings results,” he or she would be accepted; another mentioned that such language would be accepted if spoken by a very charismatic person.

When asked to describe the archetypal user of New Age language, the participants’ first reaction in the focus groups was to describe a woman. Examples were, “organizational consultant or human resource manager, who is over 35”; “female yoga instructor”; and so on. But later on during the discussion, participants said that there were also men who used New Age language, and indicated specific terms that they would use, such as “let’s go with the flow,” and on the other hand, terms that they will not use, such as “my intuition” or “the energy is.”

The answer to RQ3 is that women perceive and use NAS language at work in three interrelated ways: First, women experience NAS language as carrying positive psychological effects; second, women perceive this language as a source that brings meaning to their actions and efforts; and third, women use NAS as a set of ideas and premises that give directions as to the way they behave at work.

A dominant theme that appeared in the women’s accounts (from both countries) was that NAS language is perceived as a directive power embedded in various domains of their lives, including the domain of work. A woman working in high-tech explained, “This language is a state of mind; it is a state of being.” A teacher told us, “For me, these expressions are a path that shows how to behave in this world. They give power to cope in this world, and they make your life easier.” Other women talked about NAS as “a default of my day-to-day living,” as a “directive light,” as something that carries “critical meaning,” and as something that gives “hope and a reason for all the efforts that are involved in my work and in my social life.” A high school teacher explained, “I am at peace with myself and happy with all my imperfections,

probably for the first time in my life . . . It's self-acceptance reflecting that everything starts from within." Another teacher was very explicit about NAS language and its inclination to generate self-confidence. She said, "The words are truth. Using them creates a feeling of being down to earth, a feeling of confidence." She further explained, "This language is always with me, but I use it especially when something does not go well. It directs me to act in certain ways." The interviewee provided several examples demonstrating the embodiment of NAS language in her daily work as a teacher, such as in her efforts to establish teamwork which reflected her firm belief in connectedness. Another woman, a project manager in a high-tech corporation, constructed NAS language as self-talk. She noted, as did other interviewees, that she used NAS language when she has trouble at work. This practice assists her in rekindling "the power from within" and to "put the difficulties in proportion." She explained, "I am a control freak, and in stressful situations, I have learned to take a deep breath and to reestablish proportions." In this case, the NAS language conveys a directive and empowering role, and it sets a basis for self-reflection. Another woman described how she practices this directive language:

In high-tech sometimes you have good days, and sometimes you have bad days when nothing works well. At these times you have to listen to your body, and leave some parts of the work aside, especially when you are stumbling across a problem and can't progress.

A slightly different perspective was expressed by the female manager of a large team of information system experts in a financial organization. Like several other interviewees, she recognized the essential role of NAS in forming directions to act. Yet, she perceived NAS as a means to succeed at work, and indirectly she referred to the advantages she gains from adapting NAS language and practices compared with men. She said,

NAS is a resource, similar to other resources, such as knowledge and experience. The use of this resource gives me an advantage compared to others because it directs my activities in the right way, and it enhances the chances for success. For example, with awareness I see the individual person, I can see her strong and weak qualifications, and I will direct her accordingly. Men do not consider these aspects.

While most of the accounts were positive about the use of NAS language at work, one woman expressed a different opinion. She discussed a situation in which NAS language did not direct or empower her, but rather it raised her frustration level:

I don't use this language at work . . . because I sometimes feel that I am not situated at the right designation, and this creates a

kind of an inner war; it brings about frustration . . . this language, "everything starts from within," "self-awareness," etc. It creates despair because the reality is much stronger than me . . .

Consistent with the data presented in the focus groups, the interviewees from both countries said that they did not explicitly use NAS language at work, explaining that "The people at work do not understand it" (high-tech employee), and that "There is no 'social permission' for me to talk like that at work" (psychologist). In their encounters with colleagues and managers at work, women often used NAS language as self-talk, or they translated it to a more familiar language. In response to our question "Do you use this language at work?" we were often given the answer: "I don't use these words; I use alternative expressions." Examples included a woman who substituted the term *self-actualization* with the words *personal choice*, and a university lecturer who used terms and concepts from psychology, although she estimated that their scope was narrow compared with spiritual or religious concepts and ideas. A high-tech worker provided an elaborated explanation:

In my earlier workplace I used this language during lunch or coffee breaks; it was not an acceptable language. In each place you adapt the text and the subtext, without changing yourself really; this is the wisdom of self-awareness, in my view.

Gender differences regarding the use of NAS language at work were vividly expressed in the following account:

Men won't openly talk about these things in public . . . When some women talk the emotional talk, there is uneasiness in the air!! The other day a woman manager talked this emotional talk about how we need to be aware of specific dimensions and why self-actualization is important, but the audience was uneasy. I could tell that. (High-tech employee)

Several women from New Zealand spoke specifically about the use of NAS with superiors. A teacher in a dysfunctional school explained, "I cannot talk about awareness to top management for fear of the consequences this may have on my job." A university instructor holding the position of a department manager explained that she worked out relationships with colleagues in line with NAS ideas, but "the senior people above me, they have their own solutions and I am not an assertive person." She further explained,

In commercial situations I will not use this language. The people would not understand it and it reduces your legitimacy . . . they are interested in profit and the bottom line, and if you talk like that they would think that you are crazy.

A medical doctor explained, "I use this expression when I want to make a stronger point to my peer colleagues and patients. I don't think I'd feel comfortable using this

expression with male superiors—with female superiors, maybe . . .” Finally, a high school teacher told us,

My experience is that it is women who mostly use this language . . . Some people don't get it [spiritual language]—maybe because it is too personal. You have to be more careful when it comes to the hierarchy—they are your bosses—you have to be more careful about what you say—you could antagonize someone . . . .

While these accounts demonstrate the organizational constraints women encounter in various positions in their respective workplaces, the manager of a cosmetic shop in Israel provided insight into acts of agency. She explained that she used this language in her interactions with her workers in the shop, but not with her managers, suppliers, or with people from the headquarters. She had created an isolated territory—the shop, in which the workers (all women) accepted this language and some NAS practices. She explained that this language helped to solve conflicts between workers, to build up the individual worker, and to improve the atmosphere in the shop in a way that clients are also attracted to it.

## Discussion

The results of this study support previous research indicating that women are more likely than men to be engaged in NAS (e.g., Eardley et al., 2012; Frass et al., 2012; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Houtman & Aupers, 2007; Houtman & Mascini, 2002). The cross-national sample of participants from New Zealand and Israel reported gender differences in relation to their involvement with New Age activities, with women participating in New Age workshops, practicing alternative medicine, and reading New Age literature more than men. Yet the novelty of this research lies in its attempt to examine whether women carry over this inclination from one social field to another, that is, from the field of spiritual New Age to their workplace. Our finding regarding gender differences in the use of New Age language at work is quite clear: Women reported using NAS language inside work organizations more than men.

The current article's findings also demonstrate that NAS language, and hence NAS ideas, are generally rejected in Israeli and New Zealand work organizations. This finding supports earlier research conducted in Israeli organizations indicating a negative response to those who express their New Age inclinations at work (Zaidman & Goldstein-Gidoni, 2011).

The results of this study also support previous research regarding the preference for masculine language in organizations (Kissack, 2010). Like feminine language, NAS language is marginalized and predominantly silenced (Houston & Kramarae, 1991; Kissack, 2010). The methods of silencing NAS language, like those employed to silence feminine language, include ridicule, among others (Houston & Kramarae, 1991).

These results are quite intriguing, leading to the question, “If the responses are often negative, why and how would a woman carry on using NAS language at work?”

We believe that the answer to this question lies in the data provided by the women we interviewed. Previous research has shown that spiritual New Age practices are constructed as a means to empower women. These practices are used to develop women's new and stronger sense of self (Nissen, 2011; Sointu & Woodhead, 2008; Woodhead, 2007). In line with this argument, our study's findings also suggest that women use NAS language and ideas for self-empowerment *within their work organizations*. The use of spiritual New Age language and ideas allows women to self-generate “power from within,” a necessary component of the empowerment process (Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1995). According to existing research, “power from within” leads people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to participate in decision-making processes, and to develop a sense of personal self as well as individual confidence and capacity. “Power from within” is manifested as self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect, and helps women develop the ability to overcome internalized oppression (Wong, 2003).

The results of this study show that NAS bestows women with an empowering alternative which they can apply at their workplace. One should note, however, that this form of empowerment is also available to men, but in practice they don't find it as attractive or useful. Consistent with this explanation, men do not use spiritual ideas and language in their workplace because they are in fact “owners” of a prominent form of power, “power over,” where their controlling power and dominance over marginalized groups is obvious. Hence, they don't need alternative forms of power to establish their position (Rowlands, 1997). In this case, masculine language, which is characterized by opinions, facts, and assertiveness, is a form of “power over,” dictating a framework to interpret the world from the male participants' point of view (Mumby & Clair, 1997).

An in-depth examination of the voices of the women who use NAS language at work takes us one step further in understanding the concept of “power from within,” as applied to women's empowerment at work. Rather than constructing women's psychological state of “power from within,” for example, their sense of ability and self-value in terms of an a-contextual, perhaps universal dimension of power, we argue that *this aspect of power is constructed as emerging from a specific spiritual/cultural source*. In the context of this study, women's “power from within” is derived from a sense of meaning and direction that they draw from NAS ideas. Our data show that women perceive and use NAS language to convey peace, confidence, and meaning, and as a set of ideas and premises that give direction to the way women behave at work, including a way to manage task-related difficulties. These various aspects, and especially the latter, justify considering NAS as “spiritual

capital,” that is, capital that assists women to succeed in a competitive environment.

Yet, while NAS was perceived as valuable to individuals within the field of NAS, the value of “spiritual capital” is considered low by managers and employees of various work organizations (Verter, 2003). In other words, women in fact carry the capital from a field where there is a cultural consensus regarding the value of the capital to a different field, the field of workplace organizations, where there is inconsistency regarding the meaning attributed to the “spiritual capital” (Bourdieu, 1986; Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005). While some social agents (i.e., women) perceive spirituality as capital, others do not recognize it as such and do not attribute value and worth to it.

When analyzing the interplay of different forms of capital that agents use in their attempts to advance their position within the field of workplace organizations, we see that while women might gain from using “spiritual capital,” they most likely may lose in terms of their “social capital.” More specifically, when using the unpopular NAS language, they pay the price of being considered as “outsiders” and so on, which most likely hinders their ability to establish social networks within their workplace. A similar relationship has in fact been reported in previous research that documented women gender capital. Like gender capital (see McCall, 1992; Ross-Smith & Huppatz, 2010; Skeggs, 1997), the use of NAS language at work might be double-edged and situational, and may grant women advantages as well as disadvantages.

In the case of NAS capital, it seems that women’s success in using it is dependent on the way they practice it, that is, their use of various tactics. Women apply tactics such as translating NAS language into more familiar lexicon, gauging the appropriate circumstances in which NAS language can be used, and calculating with whom it should be used. It seems that in general, women tend to adapt to a local context. Such adaptation, it seems, is necessary in workplace organizations. It is, however, inherently embedded in NAS language and discourse: This is expressed, for example, in the expression “to flow,” which means the ability to move on with the changes, constraints, and so on of an external situation.

Finally, an intriguing question, not as of yet fully considered in the existing research, concerns the coexistence between women’s intrinsic experience on one hand, and the means by which this is communicated and enacted in the workplace, on the other. Houston and Kramarae (1991), for instance, discussed women’s silences, identifying several positive silences—such as the silence of female self-discovery—as examples of silence that women choose and control. Our data show that there are women who perceive NAS as a “state of mind,” as a “state of being,” and as a “source of peace.” These quotes signify the perception of NAS as an ontological intrinsic experience. However, women also provided examples when they intentionally enacted NAS at

work, such as when applying awareness to assess work situations.

## Conclusion

This study makes several key contributions to NAS and workplace spirituality research, as well as to broader research on gender, language, and power in organizations.

First, the study supports previous research findings regarding NAS and gender; specifically, it extends the claim that women are more likely than men to be engaged with NAS in the platform of mainstream work organizations. The study’s overall findings provide an indication of the growth and spread of NAS within Western mainstream society and its institutions.

Second, the study supports previous research regarding the supremacy of masculine language in work organizations, showing that NAS language—like feminine language—is marginalized and silenced via similar methods. Women perceive and use NAS language to convey peace, confidence, and meaning, and as a set of ideas and premises that give direction to the way women behave at work, including a way to manage task-related challenges, stressors, and relationships of domination. These various aspects, justify considering NAS as a form of “power from within” and as “spiritual capital.” The study supports previous research showing that spiritual capital, like gender capital, might be double-edged and situational, and may grant women advantages as well as disadvantages (Ross-Smith & Huppatz, 2010).

Third, this study seeks to move the discussion about women’s empowerment, as expressed by the concept of the “power from within,” one step further. It identifies the specific ways in which such power is constructed by demonstrating, for instance, how spirituality directs women’s actions in the workplace. The article draws out some implications for theory on language, power, and control in the workplace, by showing that silenced languages are not necessarily banished from the organizational domain. Rather, they may very well remain alive within people, directing their responses and actions, and are occasionally enacted out. The study presents implications for feminist research inclined toward focusing on macro-materialistic systems (Mumby, 1996), by suggesting that women’s spirituality (religion or other systems of existential meaning) should be considered as an important factor in explaining the interpretation and negotiation of workplace challenges, including gender relations.

This study leaves open a number of questions for future research. First, the results of this study provide preliminary indications about differences regarding the extent to, and the ways in which NAS is accepted in various types of organizations. For instance, while NAS is largely rejected in the public domain of high-tech organizations, it may be partially

acceptable in public schools. The study also identifies particular conditions that enable the creation of NAS-language enclaves, for example, when championed by a senior manager. Second, we do not know enough about the perspectives and experiences of male adherents to NAS regarding their experiences at work. Third, future research could address the

differential use of NAS terms by men and women, by investigating the extent to which the distribution of participants within the types of workplaces may reverse the insignificant statistical yields reported when individual country results were examined separately. These topics call for further qualitative and quantitative investigation.

## Appendix

### Survey on Communication in the Workplace

This survey compares communication in organizations across countries. Thank you in advance for your participation in our survey!

*Section 1.* The following survey includes words and phrases that people occasionally use in their workplace. For each word or phrase, give a score from 1 to 6 that best describes columns a, b, and c.

- a. To what extent do **you** use this word/phrase in your workplace?
- b. To what extent do **other people** use this word/phrase in your workplace?
- c. To what extent is this word/sentence part of your **workplace's language**?

Please use the response rating below for each of these:

1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Very frequently</i>

1. Let's go with the **flow** ( . . . *with the moment, with the world, with people*)
  - a. My use [.....]
  - b. Others' use [.....]
  - c. Part of the workplace language [.....]
2. We are/are not on the same wavelength
3. I connect/do not connect ( . . . *to myself, to others, to the essence of an idea*)
4. The energy is ( . . . *positive, negative, blocked . . .*)
5. Mana
6. Everything starts from within
7. Listening to oneself/tune into your body
8. Hui
9. Acupuncture, homeopathy
10. Whānau
11. Kaupapa
12. Each person learns his or her own lesson; What is the universe teaching us? . . .
13. Life as a school
14. Self-actualization
15. Journey
16. Shanti
17. Consciousness/awareness
18. Aroha
19. Koru
20. Karma
21. Peace of mind
22. Kaumatua
23. Wairua
24. Marae
25. Mind–body connection
26. Guided visualization/guided imagination
27. Powhiri
28. Whakapapa

- 29. Intuition
- 30. Spiritual
- 31. Holistic
- 32. Yin/yang
- 33. The body’s healing power/self-healing
- 34. Tikanga
- 35. Interconnected (or interconnectedness)

**Section 2**

36. To what extent do you use the words or expressions listed in the above survey outside of your work environment?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Frequently	Very frequently

**Section 3.** In summary, please provide some demographic details:

- 38. Country of birth: .....
- 39. If applicable, year of immigration: .....
- 40. Gender: (1) Male; (2) Female
- 41. Age: ....
- 42. Years of study after secondary school: .....
- 43. Into what category does your workplace belong: Education/finance/other
- 44. Your position in your workplace: .....
- 45. Language spoken in your workplace: English/Maori/Other (specify)

Your native language: English/Maori/Other (specify)

To what extent are the following sentences representative of yourself (circle)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Frequently	Very frequently

- 46. I have participated in meditation or New Age workshops: 1 2 3 4 5 6
- 47. I have consulted with alternative medicine practitioners about my health/well-being:  
1 2 3 4 5 6
- 48. I read New Age literature: 1 2 3 4 5 6

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