# GENDER IMAGES in PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Second Edition

## Legitimacy and the Administrative State

Camilla Stivers
Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs
Cleveland State University, Ohio

SAGE
International Educational and Professional Publisher
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# Preface

Quite often, when I talk to classes of public administration students about gender, someone—woman or man—says, "Well, I'm sure it was like that in the bad old days, but things have changed." More than any other single factor, this comment (heard over and over) led me to produce a second edition of *Gender Images*. The first edition was written in 1991 and came out in print in late 1992, so it has been nearly a decade since I did the supporting research. Perhaps, I thought, things *had* changed; at least I owed it to the students, and to other readers of the book, to find out. The result is this new edition, which incorporates data, research studies, and theoretical literature from the past 10 years.

Unhappily, although there are signs of progress in such indicators as the proportions of women at upper levels of federal, state, and local governments, in my judgment the big picture as seen in the field's writings looks pretty much the way it did 10 years ago. Public administration scholarship continues to rely on images that conform to widely accepted (though varied) notions of masculinity, and women are still struggling to manage their gender images (not too feminine, not too masculine) and to balance competing demands of work and family. And even more unhappily, with a few exceptions, by and large the literature in the field still neglects the issue of gender. If for no other reason, since it is common for a majority of the students in an MPA class to be women, we still seem to need a book that considers gender as a factor in public administration—and of course, there are lots of other reasons, as this book tries to show.

A few readers of the first edition responded to it by calling *Gender Images* a "polemic." (A roughly equal number told me I was too timid.) My dictionary defines a polemic as "a controversy or argument, esp. one that is a refutation of or an attack upon a specified opinion or doctrine," so I suppose in the main these critics are right, since my intent is certainly to make an argument and to stimulate controversy. The purpose of my

project has never been to attack in an intemperate way, however, but rather to engage in a dialogue. I do accept what my experience tells me, that raising the issue of gender (let alone the topic of feminist theory) is liable to be viewed as an act of aggression in some quarters.

Some have characterized the work of a number of feminist critics of organizations, including mine, as arbitrary and biased—that is, that we "read in masculinities whenever [we] feel like it," ignore the factors that promote equality between the sexes, and in general "oversensitize" the issue of gender (Alvesson & Billing, 1997, pp. 7, 12, 86). Readers of this new edition must judge for themselves whether this is the case. It seems to me that broaching the subject of gender in a field where it has been virtually absent can only be seen as oversensitivity by those who would rather the topic not be discussed at all. I have tried to make my argument judiciously and in a spirit of self-criticism. Gender analysis is neither self-evident nor the most important framework within which to approach the study of public administration. I do insist that a feminist perspective on gender in organizations makes it possible to see certain aspects that other perspectives do not reveal. The significance of the feminist perspective in comparison with others, I leave for readers to decide for themselves.

Reaching the finish line of this edition, like the previous one, was made possible only with the help and support of many colleagues and friends. My husband, Ralph Hummel, not only makes my world but sometimes finds himself offering feminist perspectives. He is my best critic and best friend. Colleagues and students at Cleveland State University, the University of Akron, and the Evergreen State College took on the earlier edition in lively discussions, as did classes at a number of universities where I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to talk. Many scholars in the field have helped me sharpen and refine my arguments, whether they considered themselves fellow travelers or unbelievers. My thanks to (in no particular order) Mary Ellen Guy, David Farmer, Suzanne Mettler, Chuck Fox and Hugh Miller, Jay White, Celia Davies, David Carnevale, Mary Timney, Cynthia McSwain and Orion White, Ken Dolbeare, Cheryl Simrell King, Matthew Holden, Dolores Foley, David Rosenbloom, Jennifer Alexander, Guy Adams, Richard Box, April Hejka-Ekins, Larry Terry, Cindy Rosenthal, Dick Pratt, J. J. Hendricks, Joyce Outshoorn, Petra Schreurs, and an anonymous reviewer. Conversations at the 1994 conference on women and public policy, cosponsored by Erasmus University, Rotterdam, and the University of Leiden, were extraordinarily stimulating and helpful. A special thanks to Renee Nank, colleague and friend, whose help and support anchor and guide me in so many ways. Ruth-Ellen Joeres continues to be my home away from home. The book is better for the criticism and appreciation it has received; its deficiencies remain my responsibility.

# 1

# Gender and Public Administration

Skepticism about bureaucrats is an ongoing American phenomenon; the late 20th century, however, seemed to reach something of a nadir in the fortunes of public administration. Civil servants bore the brunt of widespread public suspicion and outright disapproval. Trading on the reported failure of the War on Poverty, budget deficits, and a series of scandals that sharpened American misgivings about government activism, politicians promised to lower taxes and reduce the size of the bureaucracy. Then-President Bill Clinton assured Americans that the era of big government was over. Seen by the public as paper shufflers and time servers, enmeshed in red tape and out of touch with reality, federal bureaucrats eagerly embraced the National Performance Review, and their counterparts at the state and local level took up their own efforts to "reinvent government" (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

Not surprisingly, the onslaught of criticism produced not just steps toward reform inside the bureaucracy but also a wave of efforts on the part of scholars to defend the work bureaucrats do, to justify the place that career administrators hold in the American system of government. In a representative system of government, legitimate power is seen as flowing from the people to their elected representatives and, indirectly to appointed officials. The power of those who govern is checked by the fact that citizens can vote them out of office or at least vote out those who appointed them. In such a system, the exercise of power by civil servants, neither elected nor easily removable, is problematic.

A hundred years or so ago, when government—especially the federal government—was small and weak, when there was no "administrative state" to speak of, and when government jobs could be won through party loyalty, there was little need to defend the legitimacy of administrative power. But with increased responsibility and authority came increased need to counter accusations that the bureaucracy oppresses rather than serves American citizens. The need produced an outpouring of books, special journal issues, and conference presentations aimed at validating public administration.

Many of these defenses have drawn attention to qualities of the public service that are thought to be essential to good government and have summoned up corresponding images of public administrators as professional experts, good managers, and creative leaders. The thrust of these justifications is that the scale and complexity of contemporary society demand a stable class of career officials who can be counted on to have the competence, the vision, and the public spirit to steer the ship of state (Mitchell & Scott, 1987).

During the same period that public administration labored to defend itself, an equal or greater volume of writing called into question the gender dimensions of several centuries of Western political philosophy. Feminist theorizing critiqued the classical liberal state for its marked individualism and for the dependence of its clear boundary between public and private spheres on the exclusion of women and women's concerns from political life. Feminist theory offered new ideas about power, about the nature of organizations, and about leadership and professionalism; it brought to light fundamental ways in which women have shaped society and politics. Yet few of these ideas have made their way into conversations in public administration, and defenses of the administrative state still show little apparent consciousness that the images of public administration on which they rely have gender dimensions or that feminist political theory might have a significant role to play in the legitimacy project.

One could argue that apologists for the administrative state seem insensitive to gender because an enterprise so roundly criticized by politicians and the public at large hardly needs another source of critique. What help to public administration could a feminist point of view possibly be? Probably little, it would appear, if (as many of the current defenses suggest) justifying public administration involves simply mobilizing support for administrative business as usual. My assumption is,



however, that public administration's legitimacy crisis (if crisis it is) has deeper roots than the failure of the War on Poverty, Watergate, Iran-Contra, Whitewater, or the Lewinsky scandal. If this is so, the need to defend public administration cannot be answered by an argument that restricts itself to currently accepted alternatives.

The thesis of this book is that images of professional expertise, management, leadership, and public virtue that mark justifications of administrative power contain dilemmas of gender. They not only have features commonly and unthinkingly associated with masculinity but they also help to keep in place or bestow political and economic privilege on the bearers of masculine qualities at the expense of those who display culturally feminine ones. Far from being superficial window-dressing or a side effect, the characteristic masculinity of public administration—though far from monolithic—is systemic: It contributes to and is sustained by power relations in society at large that distribute resources on the basis of gender (though not solely on this basis) and affect people's life chances and their sense of themselves and their place in the world.

Looking at public administration through the lens of gender, its public dimensions are revealed as gendered rather than neutral. Public administration involves the discretionary exercise of public power, and we expect public power to justify itself. Typically, this is accomplished by reference to redeeming features such as the public interest dimensions of administrative decision making, the expertise that is said to serve the public good, the deft management skills that make possible the accomplishment of public purposes, and the necessity for administrative leadership in an era of postindustrial complexity. But this publicness is problematic, because it is grounded in a historical understanding of the public sphere as a male preserve, distinct from the domestic realm that has been the primary life space and responsibility of women.

Classical liberalism has always seen boundaries around the public sphere as necessary to prevent tyranny by sheltering individual "private" concerns from the reach of the state. But paradoxically, the viability of the economic and political activities that go on in the liberal public sphere depends on the household: on the provision of shelter, food, clothing, and the bearing and nurturing of children. Both pervasively in theory and persistently in practice, the household has been viewed as the realm of women. Women's concerns, when they revolve around their domestic responsibilities, have been seen as private by definition—that is, as not political, not of public interest. Therefore, not only the justice of

household arrangements but also *the division of human concerns into public and private* in the first place are barred from public discussion. (During a conference roundtable discussion, I once heard a male colleague ask, in reference to domestic violence, "When did this get defined as a public issue?" A female colleague replied, "When did it get defined as *not* a public issue?") Throughout history, women have been expected to handle needs related to sustenance and nurturance in order that men could have the time and energy for public pursuits (Jaggar, 1983; O'Brien, 1989; Okin, 1989). This division of labor persists today despite equal opportunity and affirmative action policies, which have simply enabled women to shoulder both household and paid work rather than to share them equally with men, and despite recommendations for shared parenting, which are honored more in the breach than in the observance (Hochschild, 1989; Rhode, 1988). In recent years, several theorists have suggested that the nature of the boundary between the public and private spheres is itself debatable—that is, it is a political issue (e.g., Ackelsberg & Shanley, 1996; Honig, 1993). If so, the justice of household arrangements can become a matter of public deliberation.

Like other public sector activities, public administration is structurally masculine despite its apparent neutrality and despite the presence of increasing numbers of women in federal, state, and local governments. It can only go on as it does with "business as usual" because women bear a lopsided share of the burden of domestic functions without which life would simply not be possible. Thus, justifications of public administration take place in a space that (a) depends for its coherence on the subordination of women through their assignment to a set of duties that, no matter how necessary, are generally regarded as less significant and (b) limits both women's opportunities to participate in public life and the time and energy they have to devote to it. (See Chapter 2 for extensive recent data on the division of household responsibilities, indicating that despite progress in the past decade, the structural problem I describe is still with us.)

The gender dimensions of this arrangement are paradoxical. The state depends on the household but acknowledges only grudgingly the political relevance of domestic issues; throughout liberal theory women are treated as "citizens," but in reality their participation in public life has been restricted, either formally (in law) or practically, by the demands of their household duties. It is this sort of gender paradox, which I argue constitutes a dilemma for women in the administrative state, that the book considers.



Examining gender dilemmas involves taking into account everyday life practices, such as what goes on in families, organizations, and politics, as well as what theorists say. It entails an effort to undo the taken-for-grantedness of administrative practices and what is written and thought about them: to bring to light ambiguities, gaps, contradictions, and unspoken assumptions that are connected to our varied notions of what constitutes appropriate masculine and feminine behavior—that is, gender. The intent is to articulate the harm these administrative ideas and patterns of behavior work on women and to lay the groundwork for the transformation of the thoughts and practices in question. I want to show that these widely accepted understandings (a) devalue a range of contributions and concerns that are thought to be associated with femininity and (b) limit women's political and social freedom. Gender dynamics do, of course, restrict men's options as well, because the scope of pursuits and behavioral styles they feel free to adopt is narrower than it would be if men did not have to worry about being thought "feminine." But in most cases, being a man remains an advantage in the acquisition of economic, political, and organizational power. If this were not the case, there would be relatively little need to call gender dynamics into question. Uncomfortable as it may be for many men and not a few women to encounter the idea that, despite progress, gender stereotypes still harm women more than men, that is the position taken in this book and supported by empirical evidence both here and in a plethora of other studies.

Examining gender dilemmas in public administration does not imply the view that other factors such as race and class are less important. Gender is tied to race and class; gender's importance is not as the sole source of domination but as a lens that enables one to see things that other lenses miss. In what follows, I try to be consistent about pointing to the interrelationships among the three factors—to show, for example, where the harmful effect of gender stereotypes is exacerbated by influences of race and class. I also try not to generalize about gender in ways that obscure the visibility of these influences (for example, I try not to take it for granted that problems faced by women of color or women who hold clerical positions are the same as those of professional white women).

My approach to gender dilemmas in public administration is to focus on images of professional expertise, leadership and management, and virtue that have characterized defenses of administrative power. I do not pretend to take on public administration as a whole (whatever the

reader's own definition of that enterprise may be), although I think it needs taking on. In the main, the book is a consideration of what role certain ideas play in an important arena of public administration theorizing. It is an exercise in the political philosophy of public administration, in the sense that Dwight Waldo's (1948) *The Administrative State* described: a consideration of the nature of power and the public good in administrative contexts. Questions such as these can be discussed and debated, and arguments for and against particular positions can be supported by empirical evidence, but they cannot be answered once and for all. They are what William Connolly (1993) has called essentially contested questions—and, in fact, that is what makes them "political." Thus I am not out to *prove* but rather to *argue* that there are gender dilemmas in public administration. I hope to persuade rather than to convince.

Because of the connection I see between what we think and material realities in the world, I begin by considering through the lens of gender some things that are actually going on in the world of contemporary public administrative practice. Chapter 2 looks at the extent of women's historical progress as public employees, their current status in federal, state, and local governments, the peculiar nature of the organizational reality they experience, and the extent to which women's place in society at large is shaped by the administrative state. I examine the implications of these factors for our understanding of the nature of public organizational dynamics and of the special role in governance that public servants play. I suggest that facts such as that women are still paid less than men, generally do most of the lower-level work, are still not represented proportionately in the top levels of the bureaucracy, have trouble fitting into accepted managerial roles, experience sexual harassment in organizations, and work a double shift of home and job responsibilities are as tangible as many other factors in the real world of public administration to which observers have given considerably more attention. I argue that our commonsense notions of the administrative state are deeply dependent on traditions that privilege men and the pursuits considered typical of them over women and their work. Documenting these factors is necessary in order that my subsequent arguments have weight: If stereotypes about gender that inhabit ideas of leadership and expertise had no effect on the actual dynamics of administrative life and action, they would be considerably less troubling than they are.



The book then turns to three images in defense of public administration that I argue present women with dilemmas of gender; that is, these images set up expectations and impose implicit performance standards that are culturally masculine and that therefore women have greater difficulty meeting than do men. By asserting that prevalent normative images in public administration are "masculine," I do not mean to imply that masculinity is a monolithic construct; clearly it is not, as will become evident in the following pages. There is not one image of masculinity in public administration, there are several. Chapter 3 deals with the image of expertise found in the argument that public administration is a legitimate part of government because public administrators are expert professionals. The need for expertise is a central tenet of modern public administration and has been so at least since Woodrow Wilson (1887) put forward the idea that the duty of administrators was to carry out legislative mandates by means of scientific expertise, not to take sides on political questions. Administration was legitimate because it was neutral and objective. As the practice of expertise became increasingly professionalized over the past century, the idea that career administrators are in some sense "professionals" became widespread. Yet the question remains, as Federick C. Mosher's (1968) classic study put it, "How can a [professional] public service . . . be made to operate in a manner compatible with democracy?" (p. 3). In the course of trying to answer this question, writers in the field have tried to show that administration requires professional expertise; they have painted a portrait of the legitimate administrator as a professional expert. This image is marked by four dimensions my argument attempts to deconstruct: objectivity, autonomy, hierarchy, and brotherhood. I suggest that the image of expertise is fundamentally inconsistent with widely held notions of womanhood and the actual conditions of most women's lives, and I attempt to show the gender contradictions that lurk inside any attempt to join professional expertise with ideas of the public interest.

Chapter 4 considers the leadership of the public administrator and the argument that, in a system of government marked by separation of powers and interest group politics, someone has to steer the ship of state, to be the balance wheel or fulcrum in a fractionated system, to hold things together, to move them forward—to have a vision. I argue that this way of thinking about leadership works to keep in place dynamics of discrimination against women. Four images of public sector leadership are examined: the visionary, the decision maker, the

symbol, and the definer of reality. As constituted, these ideals conflict with widely held expectations about women's behavior, requiring women to struggle with the tension between being feminine and being a leader, a tension that requires a continuing balancing act. I suggest that current images of leadership are at best an equivocal basis on which to defend administrative power.

Chapter 4 also examines the idea of the public administrator as a "manager," an increasingly popular idea connected with efforts to make public administration more businesslike and systematic. Woodrow Wilson (1887) said that "the field of administration is a field of business" (p. 209), a proposition that shaped the early days of the field but has taken on new resonance as "reinventing government," performance measurement, customer service, and the devolution of public responsibilities to the private sector have proliferated. The management perspective has taken a somewhat different tack from other legitimating strategies, for it has essentially adopted the position of the critics of bureaucracy instead of attempting to deflect it. In the management view, the critics are right, and the answer is to "break through bureaucracy," turn bureaucrats into innovators and entrepreneurs, and get rid of "bureau-pathology"—in sum, to make government agencies run like well-run businesses. Here, too, there are gender dilemmas, since the idea of "management" is rooted in historically and culturally masculine images.

In Chapter 5, I deal with arguments grounded in the public administrator's virtue or public spirit, such as those that suggest that public administrators are guardians or trustees of the public interest, or "heroes," or "exemplars of virtue," or "citizens for the rest of us." I suggest that images of virtue in American political history are fundamentally gendered and linked to a sex-based division of social life into public and domestic spheres that disadvantages women and hinders public administration from promoting a politically compelling version of virtue.

In Chapter 6, I examine the reform era out of which public administration as a field of study developed and in which so many of its ideas and arguments have their origins. The discussion aims to show how women's work and thought were at the center of the movement to reform city governments and how gender dynamics at the time resulted in a bifurcation between what could have been complementary impulses of systematization and caring. The extent to which the contemporary administrative state has roots in women's reform work has been obscured



because male reformers, painted by party politicians as effeminate, felt the need to make public administration masculine by making it "muscular"—that is, scientific and businesslike.

In the final chapter, I reflect on some of the implications of the book's arguments—what gender dilemmas inherent in current defenses of public administration tell us about the direction in which it must head if the administrative state is to be a realm equally hospitable to women and men and fully equipped to operate effectively in the future without reliance on discriminatory ideas. My argument here is based on the notion that change depends not on introducing a missing element but on bringing to light factors that already inhabit our most taken-for-granted ideas and processes. In other words, gender is already present in public administration. How can we turn recognition of this fact and an analysis on this basis into transformative energy? I present several examples of how feminist thinking might work toward transformation.

Readers will have already noticed that this book is a "feminist" discussion. Feminism has apparently acquired something of a bad name over the past couple of decades. In countless conversations with women in public administration both before and after the first edition of this book was published, I encountered over and over the following paradox: Although most women in public service firmly support equal pay for equal work, equal access to jobs (including those at the top), the sharing of housework, and better child-care facilities, and many are interested in promoting what they see to be "feminine" qualities in the workplace, they are very likely to distance themselves from the term "feminism," which they equate either with academic abstraction or with shrill narrow-mindedness and even man hating. When I once asked during a conference panel discussion whether the ideas of Mary Parker Follett (public administration's one "grand old woman"; see Follett, 1918, 1924) might today be considered feminist, several women made it clear that they saw feminist as a derogatory term, one Follett "didn't deserve"—although one of the women I spoke to afterward admitted that as far as she knew she had never read a feminist book.

I have concluded from these many conversations that at the very least there is a risk associated in the minds of many professional women (and men) with counting themselves as feminists, one they would just as soon avoid. If so, I take a different risk by using the term—that is, of alienating women and men for whom it calls up a negative image. Since I hope to reach beyond the walls of academia to connect with women

and men in public service, then, it seems especially important to be clear about what I mean when I use the term.

The first thing to say is that most feminist theorists today no longer believe that it is possible or even desirable to settle on one definition of feminism. Many writers now speak of "feminisms" as a way of acknowledging and even celebrating the diversity of viewpoints among women and men who want to take the impact of gender dynamics into account in developing a systematic understanding of how society works. Women of color have been a major force in moving feminist theory toward this position, but the tendency has been reinforced by the widespread realization that to universalize one version as "the" feminist worldview would be to replicate the fallacy of overgeneralization historically prevalent among male thinkers, in which observation and reasoning based in elite white men's experiences and concerns are applied equally to women, people of color, working class and poor people, and so on.

What, then, does the term feminism mean today? To what does it commit the person who speaks as a "feminist?" Three things, in my view: to the proposition that gender is a crucially useful category of analysis, to a critical perspective on women's current status and prospects, and, to use Gerda Lerner's words, to "a system of ideas and practices which assumes that men and women must share equally in the work, in the privileges, in the defining and the dreaming of the world" (quoted in Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 19).

With those propositions in mind, the most fundamental way to characterize a feminist approach is to say that the gender lens encourages one to see underlying assumptions (experiential and otherwise) that shape the concepts and conclusions that people display in their practices—such as in the day-to-day life of the administrative agency. Looking at the world through this lens, one is likely to be able to see patterns of behavior, of interpersonal dynamics, of the allocation of resources, of power that one would not otherwise see. Although people of both sexes can look through the gender lens, women are particularly likely to discover that anomalies in their own lives, things that just didn't make sense before, taken together form patterns that can be accounted for when considered from a gender perspective. They often find that experiences that seemed idiosyncratic, even "crazy," and which had led them to distrust their own senses and judgment, now make sense (Frye, 1996, p. 34). Finally able to explain experiences they had formerly



chalked up to their own "hang-ups," women have often gone on to question traditional assumptions about what is "natural, . . . inevitable, appropriate, or even good" (Haslinger, 1996, p. 84) and to find that seeing certain things that go on in the world as contingent rather than inevitable leads toward the idea of changing them.

Feminists tend to see theory not as instrumental but as constitutive (Ferguson, 1984). That is, theory is not so much a tool to apply to reality "out there," the way one applies a wrench to a bolt; rather, theory brings the world into focus: It organizes, frames, and makes the world meaningful. In this sense, theory almost brings the world into being. Theory—in this case, the gender lens—organizes the world, bounding the flow of lived life into shapes and arenas and interpreting relations among human beings, their activities, and their ideas so that we can make sense of our experience and begin to question what does not fit.

The conceptual boundaries established by theory—the road map they create of the world—bring power along with them, in the sense of enablement as well as the sense of "power over." "The limits of what people can think set the limits of what they can do" (Cocks, 1989, p. 30). Thus, when we come to agreements about which considerations appropriately lie within or outside a particular area of thought (such as public administration), we also set limits on the lived experience of people who inhabit this form of life. The way we frame a theoretical conversation not only makes a certain kind of coherence possible but, if it becomes pervasive enough, establishes an orthodoxy that literally keeps us from being able to hear certain voices that have been defined as not parties to the dialogue because they raise issues that do not fit or belong. Once during a meeting of public administration theorists I heard a well-known and respected figure say that he wanted a "structured public argument" that would make certain questions off-limits—an unusually explicit declaration of a strategy by which intellectuals in disciplines (not to mention members of organizations) achieve, beyond specific conceptual wrangles, a definitional level of like-mindedness that keeps the boundaries of their consensus from being breached. But the insistence on maintaining these established boundaries is at the same time a strategy of legitimation and a strategy of suppression—a flexing of cognitive muscle that has not only conceptual but practical consequences. For example, when questions of gender or race are seen as irrelevant to public administration, many of the greatest needs and interests of people in public service—people whose lives have been shaped by their gender

and/or racial identities—are eliminated from consideration. Their voices are silenced unless they are willing to speak a language in which there is no room for some of their most urgent concerns. In addition, there is the possibility that taken-for-granted ideas and theories about administrative practice may shape people's understandings about their work so that they discount their identities as women and/or people of color because there doesn't seem to be any legitimate way of taking them into account.

A feminist approach to public administration theory—at least, *this* feminist's approach—entails calling these conceptual boundaries into question and exploring their implications, which include the practical differences in access to resources and power they sustain and the perceptions of self and world they generate. I hope my analysis will stimulate people to reflect on a few of public administration's unexamined assumptions and boundaries. My aim is not to make a conclusive statement, even in the limited areas of thought with which this book deals, but to raise issues and spark discussion. Many of the topics I explore need and deserve treatment in greater depth (unhappily, this is still true nearly a decade after the first edition's publication in 1993), and some of the observations are speculative. In my view, where looking through the lens of gender will take public administration is an open question, one that is best addressed in the most inclusive dialogue possible. I only insist that it is (way past) time to have this dialogue.

The implications of my argument for public administrative practice are twofold. First, the structural nature of public administration's masculine bias means that equal opportunity strategies for advancing women's careers in public service, important though they are as a matter of sheer justice, cannot be counted on in and of themselves to change public administrative affairs. As long as we go on viewing the enterprise of administration as genderless, women will continue to face their present Hobson's choice: either to adopt a masculine administrative identity or to accept marginalization in the bureaucratic hierarchy. In either case, the intellectual assumptions, definitions of knowledge, and values that shape administrative thinking—and in turn the conditions of people's lives—are likely to remain as masculine and as disadvantageous to women as they now are.

The second implication of this exploration of public administration theory is that changes in thinking *can* effect changes in real-life circumstances: that developing an understanding of the connections between



habits of thought and societal arrangements can lead human beings to take concrete actions that will change things for the better. Actually, taking concrete actions that have this sort of liberatory purpose *are* changes for the better. So are conversations that raise issues and voice previously excluded perspectives. Thus my position is that altering the composition of the public administration "choir" will do little unless its members become conscious of the need to sing different tunes from the ones currently in the repertoire, but that given the latter, much is possible.

# 2

# "On Tap But Not on Top"

## Women in the Administrative State

Ever since Woodrow Wilson wrote the first scholarly paper on public administration, practical circumstances have influenced images of administrative governance. Wilson's (1887) statement that it was "getting harder to run a constitution than to frame one" (p. 200) was made in light of new economic and political complexities facing those charged with carrying on the affairs of the nation. Today's defenses of public administration continue to be attuned to the implications of such factors as a federal system of government, a market economy, interest group politics, bureaucratic organizational form, the characteristics of fiscal and human resources, computerization, and other concrete aspects of the American administrative state in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. To do otherwise would be to risk irrelevance, a charge that theorists in an applied field are more than usually anxious to avoid.

Yet public administration theory has been curiously insensitive to the gender dimensions of political, economic, and social factors that affect public bureaucratic practices. Judging from the attention they devote to other structural and practical factors, it seems that those who write about public administrators as experts, leaders, and businesslike managers believe it is important to take the real world into account in their reflections. Against this backdrop, their failure to pay heed to gender appears to indicate that they see it as relatively insignificant in their





field of observation. On the basis simply of reading arguments in defense of the administrative state, one might conclude either that there are no women in public agencies or that, although they are there, the nature of their participation, their experience of public organizational life, their career opportunities and patterns, and their problems are so little different from those of men as to have no effect—or at least none worth taking into account—on the substance of public administration from which these images are drawn.

The purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for a critique of the literature by suggesting that such is not the case. Women have been government employees now for nearly a century and a half, and from the first days of their entry into public employment they had work experiences, career opportunities, and problems unique to them. I want to raise questions about the fact of women's presence in public bureaucracies instead of taking it for granted and to argue that their experiences are both different from men's and significant in their own right. In my view, our understanding of the real world of public administration—hence any theory about it—is incomplete without taking into account the terms of women's relationships to the administrative state. I suggest that women are quintessentially "on tap" but still rarely "on top" and that this tangible circumstance is as important as any in painting a picture of public administration complete enough to serve as an adequate basis for theory. The discussion begins with a brief review of the history and current status of women in the career civil service. Then I deal with organizational realities that women face (including women in public service), which I argue are substantially different from men's. Next is a consideration of the gender dimensions of the administrative state, that is, the mutual shaping that occurs between women's lives and the dynamics of public administration. Finally, I reflect on the implication of these realities for defenses of administrative governance. My discussion aims not to speak the definitive word on its subject but to raise issues and stimulate reflection and dialogue.

### *Women in Public Service*

Prior to the Civil War, the only federal agency that employed women was the U.S. Patent Office, according to Stephen B. Oates (1994), biographer of Clara Barton. (Oates notes that at this time there were several hundred postmistresses scattered across the country.) In 1854, Barton,

who went on to fame as founder and first president of the American Red Cross, began working as a copyist in the Patent Office along with three other women. Patent Office Commissioner Charles Mason believed that women made competent and efficient copyists. Barton always maintained that she was the only one of the four who was "regularly" employed, the others simply filling in for sick husbands or fathers. Evidently Barton was so good at her job that Mason soon promoted her to "regular 'temporary' clerk" with a salary equal to that of men of similar rank, an innovation that appalled her male co-workers. Oates (1994) recounts that Barton became subject to what we would today call sexual harassment:

> When she came to her desk in the morning, they glared and whistled at her and stooped to taunts and catcalls. They also impugned her character, spreading rumors that she was a "slut" with illegitimate "negroid" children. Such behavior got her "Yankee blood" up, she said, but she refused to quit; "there was a principle involved" and she was "determined not to yield it." . . . When one malcontent complained to [Commissioner Mason] about Clara's "moral character" and insisted she be fired, the commissioner demanded proof by five o'clock that afternoon. "But understand," Mason said, "If you prove this charge, Miss Barton goes; if you fail to prove it, you go." When the deadline passed without the proof, the man went. And that put a stop to the harassment of Clara. (pp. 11–12)

With the start of the Civil War, the U.S. Department of the Treasury began to hire women in significant numbers to clip and count paper currency, replacing men who were needed as soldiers. Congress enacted legislation authorizing the hiring of women at $600 per year, or half the salary of the lowest paid male clerk. Women thus enabled the federal government to meet a critical need for more workers without straining its budget. Once inside the door, women stayed in the federal government; counting currency remained an exclusively female function for the rest of the century (Aron, 1987).

As Aron points out, the mixing of the sexes in offices was a bold experiment. Women had worked in factories since the 1820s, particularly in textile mills, where they were the majority of the workforce by 1831 (Clinton, 1984). But the women hired to work for the Treasury Department were not working-class "girls" but "ladies" who, in taking



white-collar jobs, violated the notion of separated spheres—men in the public sphere, women restricted to the private—that structured middle-class social life. "Government offices were clearly men's turf. One had only to look at the spittoons that adorned every office" (Aron, 1987, p. 163). Yet for many women the concept of separated spheres had always been more political ideology than economic reality. The economic public sphere, the world of factories, mills, and stores, had included both men and women virtually from the day "work" began to move outside the household. But the liberalist idea of a political public sphere distinct from the private, when linked to widespread ideas about women's proper role, barred women from full citizenship at the same time that a burgeoning capitalist economy made use of them. The notion of separate spheres, then, served to exclude women from political benefits such as voting but not to protect them from economic exigencies. Permitting women to take a part in government, even at so lowly a level, was a significant breach in the gender-based wall between public and domestic rather than in any real barrier between government and business activity.

Women's entrance into public employment occurred on a different basis from the charity work that, although men shared it, had been considered uniquely feminine from its inception (see Chapter 6). Women invaded the male world of government employment "not because [it] required women's benign, compassionate, and caring influence, but because federal offices needed cheap labor and middle-class women needed good jobs" (Aron, 1987, p. 182). The need was such that by 1870 there were nearly 1,000 female federal employees, about 16% of the total in Washington, D.C.

Aron (1987) suggests that some of the problems that plague women workers today were evident even in the early decades of their involvement in public employment, including (as Clara Barton discovered) sexual harassment and discriminatory treatment. For example, in 1864 (only three years after women were hired in significant numbers), a special congressional committee had to look into "certain charges against the Treasury Department" that seem to have entailed male supervisors attempting to win sexual favors from their female employees. In 1869, John Ellis's *The Sights and Sounds of the Nation's Capital* commented that "the acceptance of a Government clerkship by a woman is her first step on the road to ruin" (quoted in Aron, 1987, pp. 166–167). The first annual report of the Civil Service Commission observed that the new merit system would

benefit female job seekers because it would remove the necessity for them to exert political influence or resort to "importunate solicitations, especially disagreeable to women" (quoted in Aron, 1987, p. 100). As early as the decade from 1884–1894, we find evidence of discrimination in hiring: During this period, women constituted between 28% and 43% of those passing civil service examinations but only 7% to 25% of those actually hired—a disparity that reflects the exercise of discretion on the part of the appointing officer in the particular agency (quoted in Aron, 1987, pp. 109–110).

According to Harley (1990), black women were among those who applied for and received federal jobs during the 19th century; but black males held most of such higher-level positions as were "reserved for blacks in Washington, D.C. throughout the 1880–1930 period" (p. 163). Brooks-Higginbotham (1989) argues that "black women in the District [of Columbia] did not benefit from the feminization of clerical work in the late nineteenth century as did white women. . . .Racism confined the great majority to domestic service and thus presented them with fewer options than black men for upgrading their class position or working conditions" (pp. 131–132).

In the early 20th century, educated women who had become active in the settlement and municipal reform movements began to be appointed to positions in state and local governments. Hull House founder Jane Addams was appointed garbage inspector for her neighborhood after she complained repeatedly about the quality of the service. She and an assistant followed the garbage trucks to the dump, made charts of collection patterns, pushed to have landlords arrested, and argued with the contractor (Davis, 1984). Frances Kellor of College Settlement in New York investigated corrupt employment agencies for their treatment of immigrants; in 1910, the governor of New York tapped her to head the newly created Bureau of Industries and Immigration within the state Department of Labor (Fitzpatrick, 1990). In 1914, Katherine B. Davis of Philadelphia's College Settlement became the first woman to head a New York City agency when she was appointed commissioner of corrections. She promised that she would run her agency "exactly as a man would" ("Trained Social Workers Take Charge," 1914, p. 431).

In 1912, Julia Lathrop, a Hull House resident who had been active in social welfare work, was named to head the new U.S. Children's Bureau, becoming the first woman to run a federal agency. The creation



of the bureau was the result of lobbying by settlement residents. Interestingly, in light of discrimination against women at the time, Lathrop used civil service regulations to fill the ranks of her bureau with women. As Robyn Muncy (1991) notes,

> The Civil Service rules—ostensibly written to assure that merit alone qualified an applicant for government jobs—explicitly allowed the heads of agencies to specify the sex of candidates for all positions. . . . Lathrop obtained permission from the Civil Service Commission to accept only female eligibles from existing civil service lists for most of her hiring. . . .Lathrop thus ensured that women dominated the Children's Bureau. . . .By March 1919, the Bureau listed only 14 men among its 169 staff members, and women outnumbered men in every occupational category except that of messenger.[1] (pp. 50–51)

World War I marked a significant change in the public sector participation of women, not only furthering the cause of suffrage but bringing increasing numbers of women into both paid and volunteer work for the war effort. The Women's Committee of the U.S. Council of National Defense coordinated a wide variety of activities on the part of women, stimulating housewives' food conservation, working with the Children's Bureau to save the lives of thousands of infants, and investigating conditions of women workers in war industries. Lemons (1973/1990) writes that "college girls worked on farms, women lawyers on exemption boards, women draftsmen [*sic*] in the Navy Department, and women physicians in hospitals in France" (pp. 16–17). Women demonstrated that they could do the work as well as the men they collaborated with or replaced, and new demands for equal opportunity and equal pay were heard.

The interest of feminists of the time in furthering the cause of equal opportunity employment led to the creation of the Women's Bureau in 1920, the first policy development entity in the federal government that focused specifically on the needs of women: "Women did not want an agency just to collect statistics about industrial women; they wanted a special counsel in government and continuous attention to the needs of wage-earning women. They wanted an open channel to present the problems of women, to give the women's point of view," according to Lemons (p. 27). While the creation of the bureau was cause for feminist celebration, their joy was tempered by provisions in the authorizing legislation that excluded bureau employees from a postwar bonus of $240

given to other federal workers and set the salaries of bureau statisticians at $1,800 to $2,000 per annum when statisticians in the Bureau of Labor Statistics were receiving $2,280 to $3,000 (p. 30).

During the 1920s, women were employed in government in increasing numbers, but virtually all of them were in clerical positions (Lemons, 1973/1990). Harley (1990) notes that between 1920 and 1930 "racism in the federal government began to push black women and men out of white collar job opportunities. . . .Black federal employees who maintained their positions were increasingly victimized by racially-inspired policies and practices, such as segregated offices, cafeterias, and restrooms" (p. 164). Discrimination against African Americans, public administrationists should note, was set in motion decades earlier during Woodrow Wilson's presidency and with his approval.[2]

The onset of the Depression extended overtly exclusionary practices to white women as well. Soaring unemployment rates made working women, especially those who were married, the target of efforts to restrict available jobs to men, on the theory that women worked for pin money. State and local governments passed laws barring women from public employment; they were joined by the federal government in 1932. Section 213 of the Economy Act required personnel cuts to be made by releasing "persons" whose "spouses" were also employed by the government (the original wording, deleted in committee, was *married woman* rather than *person*). Many women were forced to search desperately for alternative work, which almost always paid less; protests led to the bill's repeal in 1937 (Lemons, 1973/1990, pp. 230–231).

During World War II, women flooded into a multitude of jobs from which they had previously been excluded, and despite the postwar emphasis on domesticity and "togetherness," women's labor force participation continued to rise after the war as it had throughout the 20th century. Women constituted 26.5% of all employed workers in 1940, but their share had risen to 35% by 1960. During the same period, the percentage of female federal government workers lagged behind private sector levels but did increase from 22.7% to 25% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1940, 1960).

A revived women's movement beginning in the mid-1960s set in motion a new expansion in the proportion of employed women, one that apparently has yet to crest. The percentage of women who worked outside the home rose from 43.3% in 1970 to 59.8% in 1998, by which time they made up 46% of all those employed. In 1995, women



comprised 43% of private sector managerial and related employees and 53% of professionals. Yet one in five of all working women held a secretarial or clerical job, a proportion that had not changed since 1950. Occupational de facto segregation by sex is still pervasive: Women still account for more than 98% of secretaries and more than 90% of professional nurses, bookkeepers, bank tellers, and housekeepers but fewer than one in 50 carpenters or auto mechanics (Roberts, 1995). Women still hold less than 5% of top management jobs (DeWitt, 1995).

By 1970, just over 33% of full-time federal government workers were women, although as yet they were heavily concentrated in lower grade levels: Only 3% of workers in Grades 13 to 15 were female and only about 1% in Grades 16 to 18 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). By 1999, women made up 44.8% of federal executive branch employees and nearly half (49.9%) of all federal white-collar workers, 39.7% of professional employees, and 43.3% of administrators. This is comparable to rates in the private sector, where in 1995, 43% of managerial and related employees and 53% of professionals were female (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). In state and local governments, women made up 34.7% of full-time workers in 1973, 41% in 1980, and 44.3% in 1997 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). The proportion of women who head state agencies rose from 2% in 1964 to 22% in 1994, although women executives in state government are still clustered in arts, aging, human services, and other traditionally female areas. Women still constitute only 7% of city managers (Bowling & Wright, 1998).

The proportion of women at middle and upper levels of the federal civil service has continued to increase, while at lower levels it has declined for white women and risen sharply for nonwhites. In 1998, 18.9% of federal employees at GS Grades 14 and 15 were white women, up from 8.9% in 1986. The percentage of minority women at this level rose from 1.9% in 1986 to 5.6% by 1998. In 1986, white women made up 47.2% of employees at Grades 1 through 4, with minority women constituting 29.4%; by 1998, the proportion of white women had declined to 36.8%, but strikingly, the percentage of minority women had risen to 62.8%. The absolute number of employees at the lower grades fell from 282,794 in 1986 to 111,700 in 1998; in the process, it appears that more women of color than white women remained stuck at lower grade levels. At the top ranks of the federal government, white women made up 18.3% of the Senior Executive Service by 1998, while 3.9% were minority women and 8.5% minority men (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1998,