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The Difference That Women Make: Government Performance and Women-Led Agencies

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ABSTRACT

Empirical research on the difference that gender makes is sparse. This study is the first step toward providing evidence that agencies led by women perform better than those led by men. Using the Federal Employment Viewpoint (FEVS) data, this study examines the research question: Are women improving federal government agency performance? Preliminary results indicate that they do. The broader goal of social justice frames the discussion of findings.

INTRODUCTION

Public administration has long been concerned with the necessity of equity for a democratic system of governance. Social equity, rooted in John Rawl's theory of justice, "implies a calculation of fairness, right, and justice" (Nalbandian 1989). Social equity is a philosophical concern and an administrative one (Guy and McCandless 2012) with public administration as the vehicle for implementing its competing values (Frederickson 2010). In the twenty-first century, gender equality remains an essential—and unfulfilled—component of the pursuit of social justice.

Women have historically emphasized an alternative view of public administration rooted in social justice (Stivers 1995, 1993; Schacter 2011; Guy 1992; McGuire 2011). As highlighted at the 2012 Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, "The inclusion of women in decision-making and leadership positions is necessary for gender equality [and] the broader goals of justice. Understanding the contribution of women to public administration is vital to achieving [this] goal" (Leuenberger 2011,52). Examining how women's contributions make a difference moves the dialogue beyond women's empowerment to the broader implications of women's involvement, thereby paving the way toward justice (Guy and McCandless 2012).

Despite women's ongoing empowerment, their presence in the highest leadership and decision-making positions continues to lag. As of 2012, only fifty-two women have held Cabinet-level positions in U.S. history[1] (CAWP 2012). In 2013, a petition by the Women's Media Center urged President Barack Obama to appoint the first female chair to the Federal

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[1] These numbers differ from CAWP's because they include "acting" positions.

Communications Commission (FCC); a blogger at the Women's Media Center argued that the "identity and personal experience of a regulatory chief matters" (Bruns 2013).

There is mounting interest in the empirical connection between diversity and organizational performance (Pitts and Wise 2010) and specifically in the impact of gender on public administration (Guy 2011). The difference that women make is real and valuable despite performance results. However, an empirical approach is important because of the conflicting messages about the progress of women in the zeitgeist: women are portrayed as having already achieved equality; told to work harder to overcome barriers; and asked to accept that they just cannot "have it all." To achieve gender equality and the broader goals of justice, improvements proceeding from women's involvement must be connected to empirical evidence of organizational performance.

Emerging research reveals that companies led by women perform better (Carter and Harvey 2011; Barsh and Yee 2011). Public administration research examines the differences that women make, but empirical research on performance is sparse. This study is a first step toward providing evidence that woman-led agencies are higher performing than those led by men.

This paper examines if women are improving federal government agency performance. A review of the literature examines how social justice has been a vital component of public administration and how gender roles and organizational segregation provide a context for understanding women's progress. After an overview of woman-led federal agencies this study explores the performance rates of federal agencies led by women. This empirical research will provide policymakers with "usable knowledge" (Pitts 2011). As emphasized by Pitts (2011), "The more information that policymakers have at their disposal,

the better they will be at proactively addressing obstacles that could prevent effective implementation" (78).

Social Justice and Public Administration

Social justice has always been a vital component of public administration (Schacter 2011; McGuire 2011; Burnier 2008; Stivers 1995). Prior to the professionalization of public administration, men and women worked together on issues of social justice (Schacter 2011). During the Progressive Era, male and female reformers—concerned with both social justice and the rationalization of political and administrative authority—collaborated on social betterment and the commitment to efficiency. Indeed, there was no division between the two approaches, or "twin concerns"; they were considered and pursued concurrently (Stivers 1995). Men and women attended the same conferences, published in the same journals, and spoke out on the same issues. Indeed, pre-World War I books on municipal administration and urban reform clearly reflect women's involvement in the scientific management movement (Schacter 2011).

As public administration was professionalized, reforms driven by the New York Bureau of Municipal Research to the emergence of two distinct fields: social work developed from a social justice (i.e., "female") perspective; and the orthodoxy of efficiency, effectiveness, and expertise, (i.e., the "male" perspective), came to dominate the field of public administration. The contributions of women to that field were subsequently squelched (Stivers 1995; Schacter 2011; McGuire 2011; Shields 2011).

Feminist scholarly research has uncovered female progenitors in the field of public administration whose contributions emphasized a social justice perspective (Stivers 1995, 2000; Schacter 2011). As revealed by Stivers (2000), "[As] the bureau men…were tackling municipal reform, the settlement movement (mostly composed of women) also became a force for reform" (p. 34). The settlement women worked to improve living conditions, develop new social programs for the poor, and to care for people and for whole neighborhoods. But Stivers (2000) argues that the development of an administrative state was not the result of the bureau men's science but of social welfare programs based on the results of practical experiments—pilot projects conducted by settlement house residents and clubmen. These programs offered modern public administration a substantive, rather than procedural, model of thinking and acting.

Women's contributions during the progressive era underscore the relevance of social justice to the field of public administration and have had wide-ranging implications for the field and for society. Providing evidence of the difference women make is fundamental to social justice. Without it, we risk relegating the inclusion of the role of women to mere empowerment and a battle between the sexes, when it is in fact a meaningful and critical component of equity and justice.

Performance, Gender and Organizational Segregation

Performance, for the purpose of this study, is defined as perceptions of conditions within agencies that contribute to the organization's success (FEVS, 2012). Government agencies, despite competing values, perspectives and resources, are committed to equity and social justice keeping the field of public administration grounded in the application of democratic principles (Guy & Candless 2012). Performance has the potential of providing

evidence of the difference women make, however, we must recognize that performance does not occur in a vacuum. Evidence should be contextualized within the broader social and political context in order to accurately determine whether women are improving agency performance and as a result, contributing toward towards social justice.   In other words, for performance to be a valid measure of the difference women make in agencies, we cannot rule out perceptions of gender roles and images. These perceptions are not separate from organizational, political and societal rules (Guy 1992; Alkadry & Tower 2014). On the contrary, gender roles greatly affect how society and work are organized and must be viewed as such (Alkadry & Tower 2014; Guy 1992; Hale & Kelly 1989; Schachter 2008). For example, difficulty in separating societal expectations from organizational expecations is seen in work-life issues. Societal norms and expectations still place the larger burden of family responsibility on women, who are perceived as caring and nurturing (Alkadry & Tower 2014; Newman 2003; Noonan 2001) while men are perceived as the breadwinners (Alkadry & Tower 2014). This implicit bias contributes to negatively attributing the same behavior differently depending on whether a man or woman engages in it (Alkadry & Tower 2014). For instance, if a woman takes on a leadership role there is a greater likelihood that she will be perceived more negatively and less effective than a man taking on the same role (Alkadry & Tower 2014) simply because women's gender roles are incongruent with leadership roles (Stivers 1993). Overtime such perceptions contribute to the underrating of women's performance and the overrating of men's performance (Alkadry & Tower 2014; Valian 1998).

The undervaluing of this alternative view of public administration, as emphasized by women, is further highlighted in performance measurement given its dominant apolitical

approach (Schachter 2008). In scientific management, for example, performance measurement has focused on effectiveness, expertise and those aspects that are easy to measure quantitatively and traditionally attributable to men (Schachter 2008). As a result, attributes emphasized by a 'women centered reality' including caring, relationships and context (Schachter 2008) or those related to 'emotional labor' such as the ability to gain the cooperation of clients or coworkers, integrate diverse perspectives, the ability to see the other side of the issue, are excluded because they are difficult to measure (Guy and Newman 2004; Fletcher 1999). Schachter (2008) argues the necessity of acknowledging a political framework by examining performance measurement via a women centered reality. This however is a challenging order given that the perception of a women centered reality already contributes to workplace segregation.

The socialization, politics and gender typing of women contribute to segregation of women in certain agencies, occupations and positions (Stivers 1993). Given the masculinity of bureaucratic institutions (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995; Newman 1995; King 1995; Stivers 1993) any differences that women produce as managers and leaders are too often undervalued and contribute to job segregation. Women are more likely to be employed in redistributive agencies (i.e. provision of services including health, welfare, education) and not regulatory or distributive agencies (i.e. implementing control and regulatory policies including environmental and law enforcement agencies) (Newman 1994; Miller Kerr, Reid 1999); Orazem and Mattila 1998).Women also encounter the glass wall in occupations resulting in overrepresentation in occupations in the area of social services and healthcare and underrepresentation in male dominated occupations such as engineering and financing (Alkadry & Tower 2014, Lewis and Emmert 1986; Pfeffer and Davis-Blake 1987; Guy and

Duerst-Lahti 1992;Cornwell and Kellough 1994; Guy 1994; Lewis and Nice 1994; Naff 1994; Newman 1994; Riccucci and Saidel 1997). In addition, women also experience the glass ceiling as employment opportunities tend to to be concentrated in the lower echelon positions in organizations, such as administrative and clerical positions (Alkadry, Nolf & Condo 2002; Meier & Wilkins 2002).

Given that position in employment within bureauacratic institutions affects ones access to power (Lowi 1964) and that women are more likely to be employed in redistributed agencies where there is less involvement in the policy making process (Ripley and Franklin 1991), women in higher-level positions frequently find themselves in stereotypically female areas and agencies (Guy and Duerst-Lahti 1992), leaving them with fewer opportunities to shape government decisions (Dolan, 2004).

Illustrating the difference women make via performance has its limitations and must be considered within the broader societal, political and organizational barriers. Although the inclusion of women should not simply be relegated to how and if they make a difference such evidence can be a valuable contribution to the discourse on gender equality and justice.

The Difference Women Have Made

Nonetheless, women have come a long way since Mary Katherine Goddard was appointed the first woman postmaster in 1775 and Frances Perkins became the first female U.S. Cabinet member in 1933. Currently 43.5 percent of the federal workforce, and 45.8

percent of state and local governments [2] is female. However, only eight percent federal agency heads have been women (see Table 1).

>>Insert Table 1 Here<<

As evidenced by a plethora of research, women's increased involvement in decision-making and leadership positions is appreciable. Several studies have examined how women impact legislation differently from men (Carroll 1985, 1994; Hale and Kelly 1989; Saint-Germain 1989; Dodson and Carroll 1991; Tolleson-Rinehart 1991; Duerst-Lahti and Johnson 1992; Stivers 1993; Tamerius 1995; Saidel and Loscocco, 2005; Volden, Wiseman, and Witter 2013); others have investigated women's representation in government positions and the impact women make at the top levels of state (Bowling and Wright 1998; Bullard and Wright 1993; Cornwell and Kellough 1994; Fox and Schuhmann 1999; Guy 1992; Kelly et al. 1991; Miller, Kerr, and Reid 1999; Naff and Thomas 1994; Newman 1994a, 1994b; Riccucci and Saidel 1997; Szymborski 1996; Tolleson-Rinchatt 1991). Several studies have examined the difference women—and even specific women—make to the field of public administration. (Schacter 2008; Shields 2008). Other studies have looked into the contributions themselves (Guy 1992; Condit and Hutchinson 1997; Stivers 1995, 2000).

Although the link between performance and gender in the public sector has been studied (Meier et. al 2006; Meier, Mastracci, and Wilson 2006; Pitts 2006; Wise and Tschirhart 2000), empirical studies of organizational performance in female-led agencies have never been conducted. In contrast, a number of studies in the private sector demonstrate

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[2] The number for the federal workforce includes women in all General Service positions not including Senior Executive Service. The number for the state and local government workforces includes all General Service positions.

that the presence of a critical mass of women in senior jobs correlates positively with performance (Carter and Harvey 2011; Desvaux, Devillard, and Sancier-Sultan 2010). A recent report by Carter and Wagner (2011) indicates that sustained gender diversity in the boardroom correlates with better corporate performance. Furthermore, companies with three or more women board directors outperformed those with none. Similarly a 2011 Catalyst report found a 26 percent difference in return on invested capital (ROIC) between top-quartile companies, which had between 19 and 44 percent female board representation, and bottom-quartile companies, none of which had woman directors (Yee 2011).

PROJECT DESIGN

This paper is part of a broader effort to provide empirical evidence on the difference women make in public administration. Data from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Surveys (FEVS) for 2010, 2011, and 2012 are used to determine if federal agencies led by women perform better than those led by men. The FEVS measures employees' perceptions of those conditions within their agencies that contribute to their organization's success. Agency managers use these indicators to develop policy and plan implement changes in order to improve agency performance and evaluate individual agencies' progress toward long-term goals.

Variables

The FEVS survey is one source of information used to examine the perspective of employees in three Human Capital Accountability and Assessment Framework[3] (HCAAF) implementation systems: leadership and knowledge management, results-oriented performance culture, and talent management (see appendix 1). The survey includes an employee-perspective job satisfaction index, an additional metric used by HCAAF to monitor implementation. Three different five-point Likert-type scales were used. The response scales were collapsed to determine the proportion of positive, negative, and neutral responses.[4]

DATA AND METHOD

The FEVS is a self-administered, web-based survey. In 2012, it was distributed to over 1.2 million full-time, part-time, permanent, and non-seasonal employees, as well as those in supervisory and non-supervisory positions, including positions in the senior executive service. In 2010 and 2011, the survey was administered only to full-time and permanent employees. Only the large [5]departments and agencies are included in the HCAAF index ranking. The response rates were as follows:

2010   2011   2012

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[3] The Human Capital Accountability and Assessment Framework (HCAAF) is composed of human capital systems that are interrelated to produce a world-class workforce, defined as an organization that achieves agency mission, delivers the highest-quality products and services, and adapts quickly to changing environments.

[4] **Percent positive:** the combined percentages of respondents who answered "strongly agree," "agree," "very satisfied," or "very good." **Percent neutral**: the percentage of respondents choosing the middle response option in the five-point scale ("neither agree nor disagree," "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied," "fair"). **Percent negative:** the combined percentages of respondents answering "strongly disagree" or "disagree"; "very dissatisfied" or "dissatisfied"; or "very poor" or "poor."
[5] HCAFF categorizes the agencies as large, small, and independent. The FEVS survey only examines the large agencies.

Government-wide (%)	52	49	46
Large department and agency (%)	57	57	56

In order to code the agencies for gender, [6] their websites were reviewed to determine the gender of the agency head in each year.[7] If the information could not be found on its website, the agency was telephoned and the required information requested. The data were then entered into SPSS. Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine if the HCAFF performance rates differed by gender.

FINDINGS

The proportion of agencies led by women increased from 22 percent in 2008 to 30 percent in 2012; nonetheless, 70 percent are still led by men (see Table 2).

>>Insert Table 2: Agencies by Gender<<

However, the HCAFF variables suggest that women are outperforming men. In 2012, women had higher percentage of positive scores than men in each of the four variables: for women, the composite positive score was 62 percent; for men, 58 percent (see Table 3).

>>Insert Table 3: HCAFF Variable by Gender<<

Only one agency, the woman-led National Credit Union, steadily increased its percent-positive score from 2010 to 2012 for each of the performance areas .

>>Insert Table 4: HCAFF Agencies by Gender and Percent Positive Performance Rates<<

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[6] Agency heads were coded 1 (one) if the agency was led by a women and 0 (zero) if the agency was led by a man.

[7] "Agency head" was defined as either the agency board's secretary, director, or chairman

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Because women remain underrepresented in key leadership positions, determining the difference they make on organizational performance is a challenge—one that must be overcome to understand the implications and importance of women's involvement on society and social justice. This research begins to confront that challenge.

Employee perception indicates that women are improving the performance of federal agencies, and woman-led agencies are outperforming those run by men. Women tend to bring to their work a social justice agenda as well as overlooked and undervalued "emotional labor" (Meir et al. 2006), skills such as "caring" (Stivers 1993; Guy 1992), and a focus on "subjective measures" (Schacter 2008); how, specifically, this management style relates to organizational performance is not yet well understood. Further research and interviews with agency heads and employees would identify the specifics of that difference and contextualize women's contributions to it.

Though findings indicate that employee perception of woman-led agencies are higher performing than those led by men, women are at the head of only 12 of the 37 agencies examined; the majority of those are redistributive agencies. Indeed, women are more likely to be employed by a redistributive agency than a non-distributive one (Newman 1994b 1995; Kelly and Newman 2001; Miller, Kerr, and Reid 1999). This is especially relevant to the work of Lowi (1964, 1985), who writes that place of employment directly affects access to power; The difference made by female leadership must therefore account for the type of agency they are leading.

Women have not "made it." To achieve gender equity and social justice, women cannot be relegated exclusively to redistributive agencies. Women's involvement must be encouraged and obstacles to it dealt with. Further research should analyze how the performance of distributive agencies led by women differs from that of those led my men. Such research could potentially improve overall agency performance.

Given the findings of this study although women are employed in key decision-making and leadership positions far less often than men, we can argue that women's presence make a measurable difference in organizational performance. Since women are likelier to emphasize social justice in their management style, their involvement is likely to move us closer to a just society. However, given the limitations and complexities of the concept of performance definining it beyond efficieny and encompassing the alternative view,is a necessary next step to achieving this reality.

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