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Women in Public Administration Symposium, The Future of Women in Public Administration

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The Future of Women in Public Administration

Administration & Society
2017, Vol. 49(1) 4–8
© The Author(s) 2017
DOI: 10.1177/0095399716685794
journals.sagepub.com/home/aas



The first symposium on women in public administration was published in 1976 and focused on three central topics: discrimination against, underrepresentation of, and underutilization of women in public service. Analyses of why conditions of discrimination and underutilization existed, as well as remedies to these challenges, were the crux of the 1976 symposium. Over four decades later, these issues are still pressing and continue to dominate the conversation surrounding women in public administration in the United States. The renewed and continued focus on equal pay, paid family leave, the absence of women in key leadership positions, women's health care options, and reproductive rights remain center stage in the national policy arena, including the presidential debates. Internationally, gender parity was a priority agenda item during the 2016 Economic Forum, where only 18% of the participants present for a discussion about the "state of the world" were women. As a discipline, public administration continues to explore the ongoing challenges and progress of women with a degree of consensus on the common obstacles and work to be done for continued progress. However, what the key challenges and opportunities are for women in the 21st century, and how we can rethink long-standing issues from diverse perspectives are now pressing questions demanding scholarly attention. This symposium highlights what is missing from the conversation and how, in the field of public administration, we can be leaders on these topics.

The common thread connecting the papers is to identify emerging issues and diverse research approaches to help us further develop the conversation on women and public administration. Leading and emerging scholars in the field were invited to submit articles. In keeping with the purpose of the symposium, rather than setting the themes at the onset, we asked authors to develop the future direction of research on women and public administration. The authors have gone beyond the common distinctions of identifying barriers and obstacles, counting the number of women in leadership positions, or rehashing arguments for greater equality. These manuscripts carve out ways of considering women, gender, and diversity issues in a broader public administration research agenda. Seven manuscripts were selected for this symposium, each contributing to the substantive and methodological study of women and gender in public administration in unique and innovative ways.

Maria D'Agostino recognizes that the dominant narrative about women's progress in public administration focuses on identifying the obstacles to that progress and how to overcome them. She explains that to make meaningful progress toward gender equality and social justice, we must rethink our entire approach to research. Understanding the difference women make through narrative inquiry is a necessary change to the prevailing dialectic. Her manuscript begins by exploring the link between social justice and public administration. An analysis of the literature on the difference women make in public administration is followed by an explanation of why the difference women make is relevant to social justice. She concludes with a discussion of the relevance of narrative inquiry to social justice in public administration, a methodology that is largely missing from mainstream scholarship.

Nicole Elias addresses the increasingly complex topics of sex and gender representation that prompt new policy and administrative responses within public agencies. This research contributes to a developing area of policy targeting transgender employees, particularly policy that guides the employer response throughout the transitioning process. Elias explores how U.S. federal agencies are developing and implementing the transitioning process, and what the implications are for transgender employees in federal agencies. This work presents a successful case of the transitioning process by interviewing the key policy decision maker and one of the first federal employees to complete a transition while in a federal field office. From this case, Elias suggests avenues for designing and enacting future transition plans in this emergent policy area.

Grappling with the theoretical dimensions and contributing factors of the pay gap, Mary Ellen Guy argues that gender roles manifest themselves in the workplace and affect everything from careers to job assignments to salary. She demonstrates how jobs are segregated by gender and attributes at least a portion of the cause to the emotive demands of the work. To explore this, Guy juxtaposes the case of women in kindergarten through 12th grade education against women in law enforcement. She then critiques how we arrive at the pay gap—as long as women and men perform different jobs, the legal requirement that women be paid the same as men when performing the same job is largely moot. By categorizing jobs by industry, Guy demonstrates that the pay gap between what women earn versus what men earn is connected to larger labor force dynamics. She closes with a discussion of the perdurability of gendered jobs and its implications for perpetuating the “normal.”

Mohammad Alkadry and Sebawit Bishu undertake a fresh approach to the well-studied subject of the gender pay gap. Few previous works use meta-analysis to estimate the gender pay gap in the workforce, and no past study has attempted to conduct a systematic review of existing research to explain

underlying causes of the gender pay gap as Alkadry and Bishu do. Moreover, although individual studies have attempted to compare the gender pay gap by sector, this research adds a needed discussion on sector comparisons. To do this, Alkadry and Bishu perform a systematic review of 95 peer reviewed journal articles that investigate the presence of a gender pay gap along with factors that reinforce it in organizations. This work is essential to identify how the public sector fairs in closing the gender pay gap compared with other sectors. Adding greater perspective on pay gap causes to the extant literature, this work presents offers reflections on public sector progress and areas where further improvement is needed.

Madinah Hamidullah and Norma Riccucci address an area of public administration scholarship that has received very little attention—intersectionality. To contribute to the understanding of intersectionality in public administration, Hamidullah and Riccucci examine women federal employees' satisfaction with work–life balance issues. Using intersectionality as a theoretical framework, they examine how gender, race, and class interact in the formation of federal employees' views in the 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. This work adds to our understanding of issues affecting women in public service by distilling the differences among different groups of women in the federal government and by examining how women of color, compared with all women, perceive the fairness of programs and policies aimed at the promotion of work–life balance. One of the most pressing issues today is that women continue to struggle to meet the demands of work as well as child or elderly care. This timely work speaks to the primacy of these challenges as reflected in the convening of a Working Families Summit on June 23, 2014, which brought together the president, members of Congress, the media, business groups, and labor leaders to address the issues facing today's working families.

Kenneth Meier and Kendall Funk highlight a perennial question for the study of women in public administration surrounding active representation. They ask, do bureaucracies that have more women employees generate policies or processes that differ from those produced by less representative bureaucracies? Using the concept of gender identity, Meier and Funk seek to illuminate when and under what conditions more representative bureaucracies will produce outcomes that might benefit women. Outlining a theory of gender representation in bureaucracy in a cross-national context is an important first step that brings cutting-edge thinking on identity and intersectionality to the discussion of representative bureaucracy. This analysis utilizes an extensive data base from Brazilian local governments to examine the impact that women chief executives have in recruiting female executives and in shaping the outcomes of local governments to benefit women. From this

study, Meier and Funk suggest how a general, comparative theory of gender and bureaucratic representation might be validated.

Hindy Lauer Schachter analyzes the topic of gender in public administration curricula that educate practitioners for leadership. While the 21st century has seen unprecedented advances for women in public administration, women still remain under-represented at executive levels. As educational programs transmit a field's focus, examining the place of gender in public administration, education is an important component of revisiting women's role in public administration. While educational change proceeds from change in the field, it is also a change agent in its own right. Schachter emphasizes that a turn in professional education is a prerequisite to a shift in the way practitioners view their roles. She argues that gender has a place in the MPA program, and this is a result of societal changes over the last 30 or so years. Augmenting the place of gender in MPA programs is a likely precursor of additional changes to equalize women's roles as administrative leaders. Schachter does not contend that such augmentation will change student values, which would be a difficult enterprise. MPA students tend to have public values when they start their careers, including a desire to advance equity and responsiveness. Rather, she believes that attention to gender in MPA curricula alerts students that these values are foundational to PA, which will help students develop their ability to advance the goals of responsiveness and equity in various concrete situations.

The rich contributions of this symposium capture emerging issues surrounding women in public administration and utilize diverse research approaches to explore new and persistent problems; however, this symposium does not cover the full breadth and depth of the issues that should be addressed. What is distinctive about the symposium is that each contributor re-establishes the importance of the practitioner–researcher relationship in shaping our understanding of issues that are absent from the national agenda, such as the most basic definitions of the term “woman,” sex/gender representation, and intersectionality. Future research on women in public administration should consider the practitioner–researcher relationship when addressing issues and problems. Furthermore, contributors have identified innovative approaches and methods to long-standing problems such as representative bureaucracy, the gender pay gap, and a gender perspective in public administration education. The articles in this symposium also provoke new questions that need to be addressed, including what critical issues affecting women in public service does scholarship continue to overlook; how can we be leaders on topics to further the conversation on women, gender, and social justice; how can we better connect scholarship and practice by addressing these issues within the broader policy realm; and, finally, what avenues for

collaboration and resource-sharing would contribute to bringing greater attention to these topics in the mainstream public administration scholarship? This symposium provides new momentum for continued collaboration, new research, and innovative methods to advance our understanding of women in public administration.

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Maria J. D'Agostino is Chair and associate professor in the Department of Public Management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Dr. D'Agostino's recent research has focused on women in public service including a co-edited book, *Women and Public Administration: Theory and Practice*. Maria D'Agostino is a recipient of the Section for Women in Public Administration *Rita Mae Kelly Distinguished Research Award*. She is also a member of the UNDP roster of experts in *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Public Administration* and co-founder of *Women in the Public Sector* at John Jay College.

Nicole M. Elias is an assistant professor in the Department of Public Management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY and co-founder of *Women in the Public Sector* at John Jay College. Her research explores public representation and participation, and technology and governance with a particular focus on sex, gender, and race. Dr. Elias regularly works with practitioners at the federal level. She was a Research Fellow at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Office and served as the Lead Faculty Advisor to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management on the 2016 Government-wide Inclusive Diversity Strategic Plan.