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Gender in Emergency Services: Foundations for Greater Equity in Professional Codes of Ethics

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Gender in Emergency Services: Foundations for Greater Equity in Professional Codes of Ethics

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The lack of gender equity in the public sector is a critical issue, especially for emergency services. We explore the gendered nature of firefighting and policing at both professional and organizational levels. We assess gender equity by asking the following questions: (1) How have understandings of gender in emergency services evolved over time? (2) What are the normative implications of emergency services' lack of gender equity? We draw from feminist literature to critique the lack of progress and examine firefighting and policing histories along with the professional ethics codes of the U.S. Fire Administration and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. This analysis demonstrates the potential to foster greater gender equity in emergency services and other public organizations by suggesting means of improving ethics codes that serve as foundations for organizational cultures, policies, and practices

Keywords: emergency services, gender, social equity

It is well documented that public services are gendered, or that they are socially constructed, designed by, and run for particularly the benefit of men, especially those identifying as cisgendered (a gender identity corresponding to one's birth sex) and heterosexual (Enarson & Chakrabarti, 2009; McCandless, 2018; Panter, 2018). One area in which male-centered gender construction is particularly evident is emergency services, specifically firefighting and policing (National Institute of Justice, 2019; U.S. Fire Administration [USFA], 2019). These professions' job design, norms, and organizational cultures are masculinized in that feminine individuals, especially women, are often seen as unfit for these roles (Ferguson, 1984; Martin, 2001). These professions are highly unrepresentative: Women represent roughly 13% of all police (National Institute of Justice, 2019) and roughly 4% of career firefighters (Evarts &

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Stein, 2020). Within these professions, women often report experiencing sexism regarding their place and roles, and many report feeling organizations are "boys' clubs" and not sufficiently diverse and inclusive for women (Prokos & Padavic, 2002; Veldman et al., 2017).

The gendered nature of firefighting and policing raises ethical concerns at the professional and organizational levels, the former concerning whether such professions make gender equity ethical priorities and the latter focusing on whether agencies are diverse and inclusive. Professional associations' codes of ethics and insights from feminist literature can help parse these dimensions. For instance, at the professional level, codes of ethics extol expected behavior (Svara, 2015), foster expectations that public organizations maintain high standards of stewardship and public service, and advance professional excellence by establishing ethical priorities concerning fairness (Svara, 2014). Yet feminist literature cautions that both professions and organizations are not gender neutral and privilege masculinity (Acker, 2000).

This article addresses two questions: (1) How have understandings of gender in emergency services evolved over time? (2) What are the normative implications of emergency services' lack of gender equity? We use feminist literature to critique the lack of gender equity progress made in firefighting and policing. This work first presents an overview of gender inequity in U.S. emergency services, specifically firefighting and policing. Then, we examine principles of two codes of ethics—that of the U.S. Fire Administration and the International Association of Chiefs of Police—regarding how they implicate gender equity. We argue that these professional codes and organizational dynamics have failed to promote gender equity as a professional norm, and have not allowed for significant advances toward gender equity. Finally, we demonstrate how ethical codes can help foster gender equity by serving as foundations for new organizational cultures, policies, and practices

HISTORY OF GENDER INEQUITY

Before the 1960s, U.S. social norms envisioned women's work largely occurring in the home (Goldberg, 2004). Wars interrupted these patterns in that women increasingly helped in nursing, convalescence, and even armaments production, all in addition to assuming the role as primary breadwinners (Deutsch, 2004; May, 2004). Yet despite legal enfranchisement through the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, gender equity remained far off (McCammon & Banaszak, 2018; Ware, 2019).

While women shaped public sector work before World War II (Gooden, 2017; Guy, 2000; Shields, 2018; Stivers, 2002), it was not until after the war that the public sector saw rapidly increasing numbers of women. The work was often secretarial with men tending to occupy leadership positions, but many women pushed against gender discrimination (May, 2004). Regardless, even today, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions across sectors (Pew Research Center, 2018), continue to be paid less than men (Barrett & Greene, 2019), and often face social role conflicts that demand making choices between career or family (Strober & Chan, 2001).

Such conflicts highlight how deeply rooted gender-based inequities are in U.S. society, and such inequities stem from numerous societal processes related to how people perceive and react to someone else's sex, gender, gender identity, and gendered behaviors (Munson,

2007). *Sex* refers to biological distinctions between male and female; *gender* encompasses social construction, norms, and roles of what it means to be a man versus a woman; *gender identity* refers to internalized senses of what it means to identify with a particular gender. Additionally, gender identities are more diverse than "man-woman" binaries and include transgender identity (i.e., internal gender identity different from biological sex), nonbinary identities (i.e., not identifying as man or woman), and more (Newman, 2018). In terms of behavior, men may exhibit characteristics traditionally deemed "feminine," and women may exhibit so-called masculine characteristics. More simply, each of these dimensions presents concomitantly with socially constructed expectations of behavior, roles, norms, and more (Colvin, 2012).

These dimensions manifest in workplaces in that perceptions of someone's gender (i.e., whether someone is perceived to identify as a man, woman, or outside of binaries) shape interactions and assumptions of roles, responsibilities, and occupational competency (Elias, 2017). Work itself is frequently gendered in that language describing jobs often explicitly (and implicitly) refers to gender (Bigler & Leaper, 2015). While "fireman" is explicitly gendered, professions like nursing that do not have "man" in the name have historically been associated with women (Witter et al., 2017). Such gendering affects who applies, who is hired, and who is promoted in particular jobs (England, 2010; Rudman & Glick, 2008).

Many workplaces tend to privilege masculinized perspectives. It is well documented that men are sex stereotyped as more competent (Koenig & Eagly, 2014) and assumed to be leaders and in possession of dominant personality traits seemingly undesirable in women (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Ridegway & Correll, 2004). Workplaces, even in the public sector, become hegemonies of male privilege and, in turn, are often socially constructed as rational and neutral (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Yet across sectors, women have made progress in representation in traditionally male-dominated professions (Hendrees, 2019). For instance, women now constitute roughly 48% of lawyers, veterinarians, and commercial and industrial designers, 42% of chemists, and 40% of financial analysts (Hendrees, 2019).

Numerous public administration scholars have examined public organizations' gendered performances and use critical lenses to assess such organizations' gendered performances (Bearfield, 2009; Guy & Newman, 2004; Stivers, 2000, 2002). For instance, Stivers (2002) noted how public institutions construct gendered images that showcase men as more legitimate, which promotes gender divides in public service organizations. As a specific example, police agencies are male dominated, and women tend to be concentrated in "feminine" units like domestic violence and juvenile divisions. Representative bureaucracy literature similarly demonstrates that despite the many benefits of representativeness—especially fostering greater community trust with historically marginalized communities and more responsive service delivery—women are underrepresented in leadership at all levels of government (Guy & Meier, 1992; Park, 2013; Riccucci & Meyers, 2004; Riccucci, Van Ryzin, & Lavena, 2014).

On the whole, emergency professions are not representative. Women account for 41% of private detectives and investigators, 40% of emergency medical technicians, and 32% of paramedics (Hendrees, 2019). In 2018, women accounted for 60.3% of full-time civilian law enforcement employees (i.e., those who work in law enforcement but are not sworn officers, such as someone who works in personnel, data management, and so forth), 12.6% of sworn

law enforcement officers (Duffin, 2019), 9.5% of first-line supervisors, and 2.7% of chiefs (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016), although agencies serving racially diverse areas tend to be more representative (Schuck, 2014). Further, women remain underrepresented in fire-fighting. As of the early 1980s, women accounted for less than 1% of all firefighters (U.S. Fire Administration, 2019), yet presently, women account for roughly 4% of career firefighters and slightly more than 11% when accounting for both career and volunteer roles (Evarts & Stein, 2020; Haynes & Stein, 2017).

Taken holistically, despite historical advancements, many public agencies remain hostile to women. More specifically, such agencies are constructed in ways in which men dispropor-tionately benefit from social arrangements, economic opportunities, and political engagement (Acker, 1990). Similarly, masculine advantages become rooted and manifest through work-place discrimination like gender pay gaps and differential access to work and work-related opportunities (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017). Human resource management practices create and sustain inequalities between men and women (Acker, 2000; Mastracci & Arreola, 2016) through valuing their behaviors and work over those of women (Ely & Meyerson, 2000) and casting men as "the ideal worker" (Acker, 1990).

GENDER IN EMERGENCY SERVICES: THE PROFESSIONAL LEVEL

Feminist literature suggests that dynamics like those detailed above occur because gender is actually *performative,* meaning gender is not something static but, rather, a socially fashioned process and outcome patterned along male-female binaries (Acker, 2007). Gendered perform-ances manifest throughout social structures, in familial labor divisions, and organizational structures, operations, and resource allocations (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000; Kanter, 1977). Gendered organizations often promote themselves as gender neutral, yet doing so privileges entrenched power structures, thus normalizing masculinized perspectives (Britton, 2000) and perpetuating subordination, dominance, and harassment (Mundbjerg Eriksen et al., 2016; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007).

Given public agencies' need to serve the public fairly, reflection on progress toward equity is critical (Plant, 2015; Svara, 2015). Codes of ethics, critical elements of any profes-sion's identity (Guy & Rubin, 2015), offer one way to reflect. Public sector codes establish professional normative standards, aspirationally state desired behavior, and reinforce man-dates to equitably promote public trust, including through enshrining the benefits of diverse, inclusive representation (McCandless & Ronquillo, 2020).

Both firefighting and policing have historically been viewed as highly masculinized jobs in which women are underrepresented in both paid and volunteer positions (Ainsworth, Batty, & Burchielli, 2014; Hollerbach et al., 2017; Hullett et al., 2008), and these profes-sions' codes of ethics show room for improvement to foster gender equity. Firefighters work under the 2012 National Firefighter Code of Ethics, developed by the Executive Fire Officers section of the International Fire Chiefs Association (IFCA, 2019). IFCA noted that the code is meant to support already largely ethical behavior but also to respond to occasional lapses in ethical judgment. While police agencies often have individual ethical codes, the most over-arching is one developed in 1957 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP]

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(2019). Some departments slightly modified this code in their own ethical statements (City of Mobile Police Department, 2019; University of California Berkeley Police Department, 2019).

IACP and IFCA cast their ethical priorities broadly by focusing on accountability, public trust and perception, integrity, and more, all of which could implicitly reference gender (See Table 1). These codes promote fairness as rooted in societal expectations, and both require members not to act on the basis of personal prejudices. Still, only IFCA's code explicitly addresses gender, namely related to discrimination and contains principles to never harass, intimidate, or threaten fellow firefighters. IACP's code mandates protecting constitutional rights and not acting "officiously or [permitting] personal feelings [and] prejudices . . ." to influence decisions.

Thus, professionally, women are left in a problematic space. On the one hand, in firefighting, women are expected to fit into a "man's world" yet simultaneously be free from prejudice and harassment (Rosell et al., 1995). In policing, gender equity is never mentioned. The danger is that, from a feminist analysis, such dynamics privilege masculinized perspectives. Despite actions taken in individual departments, at the professional level, gender equity remains an afterthought.

GENDER IN EMERGENCY SERVICES: THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

These inequities at the professional level have profound implications for the organizational level. Feminist literature charts how gender inequities are traceable to how organizations'

TABLE 1
IACP and IFCA Code of Ethics.

Firefighter code of ethics (IFCA, 2019)	International Association of Chiefs of Police code of ethics (IACP, 2019)
• Always conduct myself, on and off duty, in a manner that reflects positively on myself, my department, and the fire service in general. • Support the concept of fairness and the value of diverse thoughts and opinions. • Exercise professionalism, competence, respect, and loyalty in the performance of my duties and use information, confidential or otherwise, gained by virtue of my position, only to benefit those I am entrusted to serve. • Never discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, age, marital status, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual preference, medical condition or handicap. • Never harass, intimidate or threaten fellow members of the service or the public and stop or report the actions of other firefighters who engage in such behaviors.	• As a Law Enforcement Officer, I do solemnly swear that my fundamental duty is to serve the community; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence or disorder; and to respect the constitutional rights of all people to liberty, equality, and justice. • I will never act officiously or permit personal feelings, prejudices, political beliefs, aspirations, animosities or friendships to influence my decisions. • I recognize the badge of my office as a symbol of public faith, and I accept it as a public trust to be held so long as I am true to the ethics of police service. • I know that I alone am responsible for my own standard of professional performance and will take every reasonable opportunity to enhance and improve my level of knowledge and competence.

processes, structures, and performances (even in traditionally masculinized professions) are viewed as gender neutral. Gender neutrality ultimately privileges entrenched masculine perspectives, thus creating disadvantages that predict economic inequality and unequal access to career and social opportunities (Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020).

In firefighting, such dynamics result in what many scholars have historically called an image of firefighting as "immaculate manhood" comparable to soldiering through emphasizing physical dominance, control, and competition, all overtones excluding women (Cooper, 1995; Eriksen, Waitt, & Wilkinson, 2016). Additionally, female firefighters often are more likely to experience sexism, lower job association, and more coworker conflict (Sinden et al., 2013), thus leading to hostile organizational cultures that make it difficult to recruit and retain women (McDonald, 2016) and to create organizational cultures of normalized gendering (Khan, Davis, & Taylor, 2017). Further, job isolation, demands, and difficulties with balancing work and home disproportionately affect female firefighters (McIntosh et al., 2016). In policing, organizational culture or requirements gendering women's bodies may dissuade many women from joining (Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Kringen & Novich, 2018). Women officers have reported that policing is akin to working in a "boys' club" and a daily fight for equality with sexual harassment and discrimination being common (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016; Rabe-Hemp, 2018). They also face pay gaps in that for every dollar that policemen earn, policewomen earn 84 cents (Luo, Schleifer, & Hill, 2019).

Additionally, work design, resource allocation, and job structuring reinforce gendered performances (Acker, 1990, 2000; Britton, 2000), especially when caregiving disqualifies them from engaging in important organizational operations (Sabharwal, 2015). Gendered organizational performances are apparent in firefighting and policing as women are often: (a) absent from key decision-making roles; (b) concentrated in lower-echelon positions, in traditionally feminine roles, in specialized units, or even the only woman in a unit; (c) not sufficiently represented; d) unable to access professional opportunities for advancement; and e) encounter gendered dominance in professional development opportunities, thus experiencing occupational closure (i.e., closed off to women) (see Larson, 1977; Parkin, 1974; Witz, 1990). More directly, firefighting and policing organizations allow multiple strategies to perpetuate male dominance. The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice (DOJ) (2019) and U.S. Fire Administration (2019) highlight how occupational closure manifests when boundaries separate work and private lives. These professions often treat caretaking responsibilities as feminized and incompatible with the work. Given that women bear primary social role responsibilities, overcoming occupational closure is difficult (Sabharwal, 2015).

Masculine advantages are performed when professional norms necessitate use of force, physical ability, and/or power. Alternatively, feminine advantages are performed when professional norms necessitate empathy, nurturing, and facilitation (Heilman, 2001). Occupational closure is maintained when access to opportunities is determined based on perceptions of "fitness" for professional/occupational norms. Consequently, recruitment and training strategies stressing masculine traits as necessary for professional/occupational performance act as closure for women and for those perceived as "feminine," since such police trainings overemphasize physical requirements to the detriment of other skills like interpersonal and negotiating skills (National Institute of Justice, 2019).

Within organizations, social-role conflicts and organizational designs function as gate-keepers that exclude women from opportunities for advancement. In additional to occupational closure, the existing literature also identifies human resources and leadership styles as ways to preserve masculinized preferences and organizational cultures. Scholars connecting masculine professional culture to leadership behavior recognize that professional cultures emboldening dominance and masculinity affect employee attitude, morale, and relationships (Holmes, 2006). Masculine leadership performances often become rooted in symbolic, textual, procedural as well as formal and informal organizational arrangements (Knights & Willmott, 1999). Management superior-subordinate arrangements also have historical roots in the assumption that men are "natural," "ideal" leaders (Collinson & Hearn, 2001). Thus, traits perceived important for leadership roles are maintained in ways that privilege so-called rational systems, which privilege men as sources of authority and control, and that privilege aggression, hierarchy, paternalism, ruthlessness, and violence (Whitehead, 2014). Further, male perspectives are often preferred and rewarded through the design of job and even metrics evaluating performance, thus leading to agencies embodying stringent, distant, and hierarchal powerful structures (Ball, 2003; Whitehead, 2014).

These dynamics are particularly evident in policing. First, while representativeness of women has improved, many police departments are not diverse and inclusive, and officers at the intersections of multiple identities (e.g., race and sexual orientation) are disproportionately negatively affected by these barriers when compared with other officers (National Institute of Justice, 2019). Second, department cultures, while difficult to change, are often toxic for women through normalizing harassment. Third, women often report occupational segregation and feeling isolated if they are the only women in a unit or if women are placed together without having representation throughout a department. Additionally, women officers are differentially portrayed less positively in media, and objectified based upon physical characteristics (e.g., height or smile). Fourth, recruitment and retention make policing hostile for women in that hiring criteria are frequently gendered; may not accurately reflect officer ability; insufficiently address female-specific health and family issues; and offer insufficient career and mentorship support. Finally, regarding promotion, disparities in representation in command level positions are more pronounced when considering policing on the whole. Officers report strict gendered stereotypes of how women should behave versus men, and that promotions are often biased against women, but mentoring could help change organizational cultures (National Institute of Justice, 2019).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The lack of gender equity in firefighting and policing demonstrates much potential for improvement. The critique above draws from feminist literature, highlighting normative implications of persistent gender inequity and key areas for improvement in emergency services. Most pressingly, professional and organizational practices in firefighting and policing occupy a problematic space. At the professional level, ethical expectations of firefighting and policing, embodied in codes of ethics, show potential in naming and addressing gender disparities. Firefighters adopted a broad code that specifically highlights gender. However, the

major policing code of ethics does not mention gender specifically, and given that the code was adopted in the late 1950s, the code needs updating. We suggest that all professional codes of ethics name inequities explicitly, because this is a first step in identifying a problem that is often overlooked once calcified as a "norm."

Perhaps the most pressing issue at the professional level, as embodied by ethics codes, is that given the highly gendered nature of firefighting and policing, much-needed messages about gender equity are lacking, a problematic situation because ethics codes are critical to professionalizing a field (Guy & Rubin, 2015). Ideally, codes should be aspirational and guiding, by extoling desired behaviors and possibly sanctioning undesired behaviors. When professions omit equity standards or if agencies do not abide by professional standards, it can legitimately be questioned whether the public interest is served and if all are welcome (Plant, 2001), especially given that codes send messages about what a field stands for to both external and internal audiences (Chandler, 1989).

Part of this professional difficulty lies in public administration's struggle to define precisely its ethical character, and the precise need for equity is an enduring debate (Cooper, 2004). A traditionalist view of public administration sees ethics as present simply if public-oriented persons serve as administrators (Svara, 2015), which Henry (1975) once summarized as public administrators thinking they were in no more need of morality than hotel employees exercising their everyday duties. Still, the professionalism debate is often not only in need of ethical principles as embodied in codes but what those principles should be (Plant, 2015; Svara, 2015).

Determining what those principles should entail necessitates a profession's continually examining and adapting its ethical principles, addressing new challenges, and owning up to existing challenges, including a lack of gender equity. Creating a professional climate should involve everyone in a profession actively discoursing on its professional identity, especially on the ethical standards it seeks to exemplify (Svara, 2015), because professionalism requires helping members not only to work but also to work well, which further necessitates constant and inclusive activity to query and create ethical norms, especially when those experiencing the consequences of such norms (or their absence) are likely to be greatly affected (Plant, 2015). Thus, when equity norms are not present at the professional level, a profession's organizations, as well as external and internal messages, may not live up to the standards of public service (Svara, 2014), raising issues as to whether professions are accountable to the public and their own members (Johnson & Svara, 2015).

At the organizational level, both firefighting and policing still often are cast as masculinized professions. They remain intensely hostile to women, whether through poor recruitment strategies; internal dynamics that keep women from leadership positions; aggressive cultures; harassment; assault; and more. These organizations, like many in the public sector, are far from being gender neutral. Yet organizational practices can be improved. Essentially, the male-centered "norm" of organizational structures, policies, and practices should be questioned. Some potential avenues for greater gender equity include challenging masculinized assumptions in hiring, promotions, equipment choices, and internal workplace policy.

It is perhaps encouraging that some of the movement in improving ethical standards comes from the ground up, such as individual agencies leading the way regarding equity. For instance, despite the major policing code of ethics lacking an explicit mention of gender equity, Seattle's Police Department has taken a lead through several tactics: (1) admitting the

lack of representation, including in the department (i.e., women compose only 15% of the department); (2) adopting a change orientation to improve gender representation; (3) promoting gender sensitive discussion of physical requirements; and (4) encouraging the need to hire, retain, and cultivate women (Seattle Police Department, 2019). Such tactics go a long way to improve ethics in the field by naming, blaming, and claiming problems (Gooden, 2014), and they can serve as inspiration that gender equity is both desirable and possible.

Ultimately, firefighting and policing codes of ethics do not sufficiently account for the gender inequities entrenched in their professions, and this lack of acknowledgment sets up the professions and organizations for persistent failure in achieving greater gender equity. Likewise, organizational policies, whether written or unwritten, are extensions of masculine performances when they distinctly promote competition, discipline, punishment, and control (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016), which both firefighting and policing have historically fostered (National Institute of Justice, 2019; USFA, 2019). An organization's everyday practices are extensions of professional norms and preferences. Such norms display masculine preferences and stereotypes that are present not only from the founding of a profession and organizations within that profession, but also are continually reinforced in multiple types of interactions, especially interpersonal (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Without explicit mechanisms to keep such gender disparities from perpetuating, they become further engrained and manifest throughout organizations and in their interactions with the external world (Chen & Chen, 2012; Mastracci & Bowman, 2015; Stivers, 2000). Given the important public service dimensions of firefighting and policing and given current legitimacy crises in policing and that women may be less likely overall to use force and less likely to engage in misconduct (Bolder, 2014; Todak, 2017), fostering gender parity is all the more critical, and more scholarly exploration is needed.

Future research should go beyond textual explorations of professional codes of ethics by analyzing how these codes are interpreted and implemented in practice. Studies should include surveys and interviews on gender perceptions of frontline firefighters and police officers as well as those in supervisory roles to understand better the relationship between codes of ethics and gender equity. Further, questions of how professional codes are devised and updated should be considered to account for power and discourse that underlie these codes. If gender equity progress is to be made in firefighting, policing, or any other public sector profession, hard questions should be raised. The language, structures, and practices that often go unquestioned in professional codes of ethics and public sector organizations should be examined closely. Ultimately, professional codes of ethics have the potential to serve as a foundation for working toward greater gender equity if we can tackle these hard questions.

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