PROFESSIONAL NOTES

Gender and Personnel Administration

A Review Essay Reflecting International Perspectives

JANINE ALISA PARRY

Jane H. Bayes, ed. 1991. *Women and Public Administration: International Perspectives*. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Kathleen Staudt, ed. 1990. *Women, International Development and Politics: The Bureaucratic Mire*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Meredith Ann Newman. 1993. "Career Advancement: Does Gender Make a Difference?" *American Review of Public Administration* 23:361-384.

Meredith Ann Newman. 1994. "Gender and Lowi's Thesis: Implications for Career Advancement." *Public Administration Review* 54:277-284.

Though women either are subjects of or work for public agencies throughout the world, relatively little examination of public bureaucracy and gender has thus far taken place. The status of women within bureaucracies (and the impact of those bureaucracies upon them) has been systematically examined only to a limited extent in the women and politics and the public administration literatures. While several theoretically-oriented products of study have emerged from the perspective of the feminist critique—Ferguson's *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* (1984) and Stivers' *Gender Images in Public Administration* (1993)—the infrastructure for widespread data collection and social scientific analysis of the practical situation is just emerging.

This review examines three recent efforts which contribute to the development of a social science of gender and public administration. First, I summarize and critique Bayes' 1991 volume *Women and Public Administration*. If less uniform than the highest quality edited work would demonstrate, Bayes and her contributors do much in their primarily descriptive analysis of women in public administrative positions toward providing us with a rich future research agenda. Next, I devote some discussion to the development of this topic in the United States via two recent works of public administration scholar Meredith Newman.

Finally, I examine Staudt's 1990 collection *Women, International Development, and Politics*. If also a bit eclectic, this edited monograph presents a commendable empirical and theoretical treatment of (especially) third world women and their struggle with the "bureaucratic mire" of international development and relief agencies. All three authors, in their efforts to remedy the empirical neglect of gender and public administration, suggest fertile additions to our conceptual frameworks as well.

Women and Public Administration: International Perspectives

The Bayes (1991) volume is the result of a global-scale research project begun in 1982. The contributors were committed to providing a report on the status of women in public administration (with special emphasis on the career routes and perceptions of women in top-level positions) to the United Nations Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. The project, thus, is of a distinctly exploratory nature. Unfortunately, this is true of form as well as content. While the editor's introduction suggests several clear hypotheses for explaining the variation in women's public-sector status across the six countries represented, few of the chapters examine her suggestions systematically; even fewer (and perhaps only her own essay on the United States) attempt to determine which factors were most influential.

Bayes suggests four broad areas for study by symposium contributors. She suspects, and to some degree she and her coauthors find evidence for, an important role for the structure of the economy, the role of the state in the economy and in the society, the structure of the labor force, and access to higher education in determining the possibilities for women in higher administrative positions (Bayes, 1991: 112). Also explored to a greater or lesser degree by the authors of the case studies, however, are women's networks (communications and support systems) and mentoring activities (see especially Germany); the functions or purpose of the agencies studied (see especially Finland); the size of the public sector in terms of employees (all countries); the predominant religious affiliation and cultural norms, and subsequent philosophy on women's roles (see especially India); and the federal versus centralized bureaucratic nature of state organization (see the Netherlands, West Germany, and the United States).

Readers of the Bayes volume are left to wonder, then, just what factor, or combination of factors, is most significant in promoting or hindering the advancement of the world's women in public agencies. Bayes (1991: 129), herself, concludes:

> The above comparisons show that no simple correlations emerge from the data to explain in a general way either why women have been able to obtain positions in higher administration in some countries or why they have not. Each country demands its own story. . . . Weak linkage between a host of variables seems to define the situation in most cases.

The exploratory, hypothesis-generating nature of the project thus is realized, though a general theory of women's experiences in public administration cer-

tainly is not.

Career Advancement in Public Agencies: Gender Makes a Difference

The two Newman pieces presented here —"Career Advancement: Does Gender Make a Difference?" (1993) and "Gender and Lowi's Thesis: Implications for Career Advancement" (1994)—also are largely descriptive efforts, and this time are singularly derived from the U.S. context (specifically, upper-level administrators in the Florida State government). While the conclusions are somewhat limited by such a restricted scope, readers are treated to a more systematic attempt to build hypotheses about the implications of gender (or, more accurately, perceptions of gender) for public agency personnel.

In the 1993 piece, Newman groups the barriers to women's career advancement into three categories. The resulting conceptual framework includes: (1) the *human capital model*, which incorporates the individual-level variables of level of formal education, ability, marital status, number of dependents, and character of upbringing; (2) the *sociopsychological model*, which proposes society-level variables such as sex-role socialization, sex-role stereotypes pertaining to capacity for managing, level of motivation, and self-concepts; and (3) the *systemic model*, which points to the presence in the workplace of organizational/structural variables such as sexual harassment, sex segregation, differential access to training and information, differential benefit of mentors and veterans preference, disproportionate access to power, restrictive female role models, and a phenomenon Newman terms the "lack of fit" source of gender bias.[1]

Newman's case study reveals the systemic/structural model to be of the most import. Her 1994 work suggests that we delve deeper into this broad explanatory category. Specifically, why not explore if agency type—its mission and structure—alter how gender is played out and, subsequently, how women are (or are not) employed and promoted in public bureaucracies?

Operationalizing agency (or system) type in terms of Lowi's classic typology of regulatory, distributive, and redistributive agencies, Newman (1994: 283) attempts just this. She finds that indeed, "organizations are not created equally." Peculiarities of mission lead to variance in structure and behavior, and therefore to differential outcomes at the nexus of gender and opportunity. She fails to determine, however (and, to be fair, it was not her aim), which agency type is most conducive to the career advancement of women. Instead, she has raised the subject, demonstrating an important dimension of the effects of gender in public personnel systems. As she concludes:

> The foregoing analysis is revealing but not telling. It suggests that the theoretical structure of the Weberian bureaucracy rests not on a unisex foundation but a masculine one. At the very least, the peculiarities of mission and agency type are the silent partners in any analysis of structure of opportunity and gender (Newman, 1994: 284; see also Ferguson, 1984, and Stivers, 1993, on the former point).

Women, International Development, and Politics: The Bureaucratic Mire

Both Newman and Bayes have suggested, then, that we do not know what kind of difference gender makes unless we take into consideration the kind of agency within which it is at work. In other words, context matters for the employment and (especially) the advancement of women in public agencies. From Staudt's 1990 volume, *Women, International Development, and Politics*, we learn further that context matters in terms of gendered policy implementation and bureaucratic outcomes as well.

Specifically, contributors to the Staudt volume focus variously upon the influence of international development agencies (in nearly all parts of the Third World); societal and political "space" for women's voices (see especially Brazil and Malawi); and the internal structure and operations of the respective public institutions and the economy (see Egypt). More broadly, Staudt finds evidence for three broad categories of the conditions under which bureaucracies begin to empower women, conditions in which they become "gendered."

In the volume's concluding chapter, she suggests first that the engulfing state apparatus in which politics takes place can be either an important facilitator or a hindrance to the implementation of fairly gendered public policies. In general, a revolutionary tradition and context is discovered to be "good for women" and an authoritarian situation to be "bad." She further suggests support for the explanatory import of internal bureaucratic structures and staffing (much akin to the arguments and evidence presented in the Bayes and Newman pieces). Finally, Staudt proposes a broad examination of the number and activity of constituencies outside of the official apparatus. Many of the case studies highlight the importance of this factor. Staudt (1990: 312) specifically suggests holding bureaucratic structure or political context constant for rigorous, comparative examination of the "gendering" of bureaucracies. She joins Bayes and Newman, then, in her provision of a fertile agenda for future research.

Conclusion: Parallels and Proposals

Broadly speaking, the collection of works featured in this review share as their dependent variable women's status within public bureaucracies and in relation to them. *Within* agencies, hiring, promotions, and job satisfaction are the emphases. *Outside of* agencies, the gender implications of policy outcomes are considered. From both perspectives of analysis, the authors find that bureaucracies tend to be highly "gendered" institutions. Their structure and operations, and therefore the products/policies they produce, have implications for the feminine gender that they do not have for the masculine gender. The reverse also is true, though it is women, as MacKinnon has repeatedly asserted, who perpetually belong to that gender which ends up "on the bottom" (MacKinnon, 1987).

The independent variables, if a rather mixed bag in all but the Newman works, also share substantial commonalities. We witness an emphasis on social/cultural norms, especially with respect to the position and purpose of women. We are introduced, though it certainly could

be emphasized further (see Stetson and Mazur, 1995), to the import of the "state" and perceptions of its use as an active tool in shaping private and public life. Also featured is the impact of feminist (and antifeminist) constituencies external to bureaucratic agencies which influence both internal operations and policy outcomes. Finally, and it appears most importantly, we are instructed to examine bureaucratic structures and mission: are they "flat and open" or "hierarchical and closed?" Are they merely refereeing competing claims for societal goods, or are they actively redistributing benefits to promote social equity? Rather crudely, are they "fathering" or "mothering?" These are the hypotheses with which future empirical researchers can be expected to have the greatest success.

The approach may be rather unsystematic in the case of Bayes and Staudt, or rather narrow in scope in the case of Newman, but the works of these three authors have much to offer. Undoubtedly, their efforts supplement the existing literature on gender and bureaucracy (thus far very limited) by exploring multiple avenues for empirical work and grounding within the theoretical works of both feminist (Stivers, 1993, and Ferguson, 1984) and organizational (Weber, 1946; Lowi, 1964; 1969; 1976; 1985; and Wilson, 1989) thinkers. Staudt especially does a superb job of integrating theory with empirical evidence, of questioning the bureaucracy as a "masculine" structure and examining women's entanglement with it in that light.

Of particular relevance to practitioners, we also learn that those who advocate more fairly "gendered" public policies cannot "write off" bureaucracy. To reject bureaucratic institutions entirely as inherently "masculine" and therefore wholly oppressive and unapproachable, is to take the theoretical high ground at the sacrifice of any potential for real change. Finally, we are duly reminded that gender and bureaucracy are complex topics in themselves; in combination, and in the various contexts of the world's nation-states, they leave us with a very rich opportunity for future study.

Notes

[1] Bayes (1991: 115) suggests at one point a similar three-category summary of influential variables in women's bureaucratic success: society as a whole, public administration structures and practices, and characteristics peculiar to women. Such generalizations are not drawn consistently, however, leaving the reader (and future scholars) to grapple independently with a rather eclectic collection of hypotheses thought to be largely context/country specific.

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