

**PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT:
EMERGING GENDER-BASED ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

by
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INTRODUCTION

With increased emphasis on the empowerment of women, participation of women in management has increased during the past thirty years. By 1986, fifty-two million women were in the civilian labor force showing an increase of 180 percent since 1950. By 1985, 57.5 percent of all children under the age of 18 had mothers in the labor force. It is no longer true that married women do not need to work. For financial as well as personal development reasons, the workplace belongs to women as well as men. The concern for representative bureaucracy and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act have significantly contributed to the increased participation of women in the labor force. More women are entering the workforce and the level of their participation is expected to increase 50 percent by the year 2000, when six out of seven working-age women will be at work.¹ Almost two-thirds of the new entrants to the labor force between 1985 and 2000 will be female.² Despite their increased participation, the role of women in management (labor force) is characterized by continued and newly emerging issues and challenges that need to be addressed or resolved by designing and establishing appropriate policies. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to assess the level of women's participation in public management, analyze the continuing issues affecting the balance between the family and work life, and to identify the emerging challenges.

SOCIO-CULTURAL ATTITUDES AND EVOLVING ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Constraints on the participation of women in the workplace have their origin in the traditional interpretation of socio-cultural attitudes and the gender-based division of labor between the sexes. As human kind evolved from hunting-and-gathering to agrarian societies, then into industrial-based urban cultures, the traditional concept of a division of labor did not change much. Women were expected to preserve the hearth and home and men were expected to explore the external world and struggle for the family's existence. Much of this division of labor was based on the anatomical realities of species' preservation among mammals. Women bore children and were the principal source of nourishment and nurturing during the early stage of life. Throughout human history, an arbitrary value judgment has been made to assess the efforts of the "weaker sex".³ Neither contributions made by women to society valued as highly as men, nor were women thought to be equally capable of full participation as citizens in various political systems. For example, among all western democracies, the United States was the last to grant the basic right of suffrage to women in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution--more than a century after the original document was drafted. Women's groups gained this basic right only after years of organizing efforts and demonstrations.⁴ However, the traditional cultural attitudes and barriers began to change during the second half of the 20th Century.

Economically, the male-headed nuclear family found it increasingly difficult to meet basic needs on a single income. It was recognized that a single income was not adequate to satisfy the family needs and enjoy the quality of life engendered by the increasing proliferation of consumer goods. Consequently, married women began entering the work force in ever increasing numbers. Divorce, once a stigma, became an acceptable solution to

terminate unsatisfactory marital relationships. The increase in divorce rates resulted in dramatic increase in the number of female head of the households. The impact of the women's movement in 1960s and 1970s pushed for a number of changes in the socio-economic roles of the family and created new institutions such as child care facilities for working partners. Another achievement influenced by the women's movement was the passage of the 1989 Pregnancy discrimination Act which required that pregnancy be included under employer's short-term disability programs.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AFFECTING THE WORKFORCE

In recent years, several government reports and studies⁵ have been issued predicting significant demographic shifts and changes in the social makeup of the national workforce by the year 2000. Since all employees will be drawn from the "new" pool of workers, these changes have implications for both the government and private employers.⁶ The aggregate data showing demographic changes in the labor force by the year 2000 are reported in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

The Hudson Institute Study entitled Workforce 2000 also reflected upon the aging of the workforce. The break down of percentages for each age group since 1970 is provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Several inferences can be drawn from the data projected in Table 1 and Table 2. They include: (1) two-thirds of the new entrants will be women; (2) average age of the workforce will increase; (3) minorities will constitute a large share of new entrants in both public and private sector employment; and (4) immigrants will also increase their job share.

The increased diversity in the workforce is expected to enhance the employment status of women. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that by the year 2000, women's share of the labor force will increase to 47.3 percent.⁷

TABLE 3

Despite socio-economic changes and gains made by women's movement, the participation of women in the labor force continues to be affected by cultural inertia, gender stereotyping, and other psychological factors. There are also structural and situational hurdles that continue to impede women's progression up the organizational hierarchy. Special problems encountered by women personnel include: (1) pay disparity; (2) child care; (3) sexual harassment; (4) occupational segregation; (5) lack of upward mobility; (6) tokenism; (7) organizational climate and structural factors; (8) retirement benefits; and (9) specific job requirements.

PAY DISPARITY AND COMPARABLE WORTH

Although women have made significant progress in terms of their increased participation in male-dominated careers, recent employment statistics indicate that compensation paid to women employees is still generally lower than men.

Overall, women earn sixty-four cents on the dollar compared with men. This figure, however, does not take into account the duties and responsibilities of individual persons, so part of the disparity can be attributed to the concentration of women in traditionally female dominated occupations. Despite the gains made by women's movement in promoting gender equity, the U.S. government statistics demonstrate that women are still paid, on average, only 70 percent of the salaries paid to men.⁸ Figures in Table 4 show women's

salaries as a percentage of men's salaries for various echelons of federal, state, and local governments.

TABLE 4

Comparatively, the figures reported in Table 4 suggest that women employed in state and local governments did better than the federal service. Except in the category of administrators, women experience greater disparity in the federal service. Current studies continue to maintain that dominance of males in elite positions still exist. For instance, women occupy only 9.4 percent of the slots in the federal Senior Executive Service.⁹

The pay disparity within the professional category is less when the data are controlled for entry level versus experienced workers. Table 5 reports the differences for these solicited professional categories where the compensation received by the female employees falls within 90 percent of their male counterpart.

TABLE 5

Although the concept of comparable worth is considered to be a useful tool in achieving pay equity, it has its own critics and supporters. Supporters favor comparable worth because it can be used to achieve pay equity for women employed in traditionally female dominant occupations. Critics of comparable worth argue that the point system does not take into account market forces. Based upon the open market, a truck driver's pay grade is partly determined by what is necessary to attract and retain truck drivers. Other criticisms of comparable worth involve the relative weight assigned to various criteria (e.g., hazardous working conditions v. managerial skills - Police and fire fighting personnel). Comparable worth as a social policy draws its major support from the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Civil

Rights Act of 1964, and judicial decisions such as AFSCME v. The State of Washington, 1985.¹⁰

It is important to note that neither the courts nor the federal agencies responsible for enforcing equal opportunity statutes are willing to endorse comparable worth as a necessary step in equal opportunity compliance. Both the EEOC and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights have issued opinions rejecting comparable worth, largely because the current approaches are inexact and comparable worth does not adequately address market forces.

ADVANCEMENT TO MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

Although women have made significant progress during the past three decades, they have not been able to make appreciable gains at the managerial level. Their participation in the top three grades of the federal service (GS 16-18) has increased from 2 percent to 11 percent in 1990. The representation of women in managerial positions at the state and local levels does not differ significantly. Women continue to dominate in lower grade jobs. The percentage of women in grades 9-12 increased from 19-38% and in GS 13-15 from 5-118 percent during the period of 1974-1990. The percentage of women in Senior Executive Service (SES) has also risen from 2-11 percent during this period. However, men still hold the majority of jobs graded GS 9 and above.¹¹ Although the distribution of occupational and grade-level among women has changed since 1974, they continue to face a dual bind with regard to their potential for rapid advancement. They occupy a minority of professional and administrative positions. Figure 1 shows the portion of each grade group held by women for professional and administrative occupations.¹²

FIGURE 1

Katherine C. Naff argues that differences in experience and education only partially account for the lack of advancement among women. The basic assumptions about women's potential and career commitment remain in conflict with traditional criteria for evaluating employees potential for promotion.¹³

The perceptions of men and women also differ with regard to which factors have helped them in their career advancement. The differences in male and female responses reported in the U.S. Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) Survey are provided in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

The MSPB Survey further reported that minority women even experience greater difficulty in seeking advancement. The average number of promotions received by women were lower than the average number of promotions received by men. Not only were the average number of promotions for women were lower than the average number of promotions received by men, but the average number of promotions received by minority women was also less than the average number of promotions received by non-minority women.¹⁴ The survey data suggest that minority women have had less opportunity for advancement than non-minority women. The differences are significant and are reported in Table 6.

TABLE 6

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Another civil rights controversy of concern to women is the problem of sexual harassment in the work place. The term sexual harassment has come to describe a variety of

undesirable sexual behaviors involving romantic and coercive actions. Sexual harassment has been defined by the Working Women's Institute as “any repeated or unwanted verbal or physical sexual advances; sexually explicit derogatory statements; or sexually discriminatory remarks made by someone in the work place which are offensive or objectionable to the recipient, or cause the recipient discomfort, or humiliation; or interferes with the recipient's job performance.”¹⁵

The way males and females relate to one another at work has a sexual component in that the behavior of each is constantly influenced by the sex of the other. Most obviously this occurs when that person is viewed in terms of sexual attractiveness. As the participation of women in the workforce has significantly increased during the past twenty-five years, the incidence and reporting of sexual harassment by female and male employees has also increased. Since the establishment of EEOC guidelines, there has been a constant search for a more precise definition of sexual harassment and organizational response.¹⁶

The legal treatment of sexual harassment complaints (cases) has also produced mixed results. There are many contradictory opinions expressed by the courts. Most of the cases are tried under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. With respect to the question, what avenues for legal recourse are available other than Title VII, it appears from the legal cases that other legitimate grounds for court action are wrongful dismissal, tort action, and criminal charge. However, a criminal charge (assault or battery) must be proved beyond any reasonable doubt. The main difficulty is how to define sexual harassment. In a 1986 case (Meritor Savings Bank, FSB, Petitioner v. Michelle Vinson, et. al., 1986), the Supreme Court made some progress and defined two types of harassment: the first involves making employment benefits conditional on sexual favors, and the second involves creating a hostile

or offensive work environment. The Court ruled that even though this victim's participation in the sexual relationship was voluntary, the test of harassment is whether or not sexual advances are welcome. Based on this case, it can be concluded that the issue goes beyond whether or not the person charging harassment initially entered into the relationship voluntarily. While the quest for better or more acceptable definition is understandable, it may not be fully achievable. As the Supreme Court's 1993 decision in Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc. suggests about the precision of sexual harassment definitions, "this is not, and by its nature cannot be, a mathematically precise test."¹⁷

However, federal employees define sexual harassment in a much broader way to include a variety of behaviors ranging from sexual remarks to pressure for sexual favors. The MSPB survey data on this issue are provided in Table 7.

TABLE 7

Table 7 reveals that the proportion of respondents (men & women) who classified behaviors as sexual harassment continues to rise between 1980 and 1994. For example, the percentage of women who consider co-worker's sexual remarks to be sexual harassment increased from 54 percent of respondents in 1980, to 64 percent in 1987, and to 77 percent in 1994. The similar figures for men showed the increase from 65 percent in 1980 to 93 percent in 1994.¹⁸

The MSPB Survey also reported that 42 percent of women have experienced sexual harassment during their working lives.¹⁹ The other commonly occurring behaviors experienced by the employees included unwanted sexual looks or gestures, and unwanted touching, leaning over, cornering, or pinching. The least common harassing behaviors were actual or attempted assault or rape and pressure for sexual favors.

FIGURE 3

CONFLICT BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

The composition of the workforce in the United States is changing rapidly. More women are entering the workforce along with their husbands creating an essential need for the provision of child care. In 1990, the U.S. Labor Department reported notable changes in family statistics. The statistics suggest that in 1940, 68 percent of households were traditional families and this percentage decreased to only 20 percent in 1989. These data also reported that 25 percent of households are headed by single men or women.²⁰ Several factors have encouraged women to work outside the home. These factors include societal mobilization during World War II, socio-economic changes, feminist movement, and increased emphasis on gender equality.²¹

The increased participation of women in the workforce has caused potential conflict between the family and work related responsibilities. Creating new challenges in the areas of child and elderly care. In response to these challenges, the public and private employers have designed such programs as day care, flex scheduling, job sharing, flexible staffing, flexible leave, and flexible location. The problem of child care is the most critical problem faced by working parents today. Currently, only a small number of employers are able to provide on-site child care services. According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the federal government has taken the lead in providing child care benefits to its employees. The information on the provision of child care and locations is provided in Table 8.

TABLE 8

TOKENISM

Merely having more women in managerial positions may not mark the end of discrimination against women. An important personnel function is to see that integration goes beyond tokenism and women are treated as equal partners in the workforce. Women comprised 63 percent of the total workforce in 1995, but only 6 percent were classified as middle level managers. Currently, only three of every one hundred top jobs in the largest U.S. Companies are held by women.²² Factors enhancing the career advancement opportunities for women must be encouraged.

OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

Participation of women is still concentrated in teaching, health care, public welfare, and communications. Occupational segregation of women in certain professions/occupations is considered to be associated with lower level of compensation. Women also occupy 85 percent of all clerical positions and their strength is confined to traditional female jobs such as nursing, health technology, elementary or secondary education, libraries, and social work.²³ More creative ideas and practices are needed to promote diversity in male or female dominated occupations.

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

Employers should not permit sexually hostile or offensive working environment. Management must ensure that persons in authority conduct themselves appropriately, and organizations must make sure that harassment is not perpetrated against an employee by his/her fellow workers. Procedures must be established providing for the registration of complaint by employees involving charges of sexual harassment. Unhealthy organizational culture and climate may adversely affect not only the behavior of female employees but also the organizational productivity and public image. The prevailing organizational culture and

employee attitudes ought to be changed in order to allow equity based partnership among male and female employees in the workforce.

SPECIFIC JOB REQUIREMENTS/BARRIERS

Women have aggressively sought to breakdown artificial barriers to many career fields. Some of the strongest barriers were personnel policies based upon the stereotype belief that women should not be employed in hazardous or uncomfortable working conditions. In the public sector, this stereotype virtually prevented women from becoming fire fighters and severely limited the career opportunities open to them in law enforcement. Other barriers resulted from civil service hiring criteria related to height and weight requirements which typically stated that candidates must be at least 5' and 9" with proportional weight. Such requirements unrelated to job content or performance not only discriminated against women in general, but also against Hispanic and oriental males. The organizational "architecture" characterizing such factors as formal structure, position classification system, work design, effect of formal structure on leadership style, selection procedures, socialization and developmental efforts may also play a significant role in determining participation of women.²⁴

RETIREMENT BENEFITS AND INCOME SECURITY

Income security for women during the post retirement stage depends on social security, a pension, and savings. Since women tend to earn less and have fewer years in employment than men, older women (over 65 years) are twice as likely as older men to be poor or near poor. Social Security benefits received by women are only three-fourths the size of men's benefits. Women are less confident than men about their retirement.²⁵ They also begin saving for retirement at an older age than men. As compared to 28 percent of

men, only 21 percent of women stated that they began saving at the age of 18-24 and the corresponding percentage in the age group 25-34 were 34% and 27% for men and women respectively. However, women's savings were larger than men's in the age groups ranging from 35-44 to 45-54 years.²⁶ Figure 4 provides the corresponding percentages for men and women in each age group. Lack of resources or poverty among minority or non-minority women may adversely affect the quality of life for children, especially in those families where women serve as head of the households.

FIGURE 4

The public policy concern for the plight of older women retirees is reflected in the White House proposals or initiatives proposed by President Clinton to enhance retirement security for older women. The President noted that "Women reach retirement with smaller pensions and fewer assets than men, and thus encounter greater poverty..." As compared to men, the poverty rate for women 65 and older was 13 percent in 1997. Among unmarried women 65 and older, the rate was 19 percent.²⁷

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

During the past thirty years, the participation of women in public employment has increased. However, the question of gender equity is not fully resolved. Women still continue to face a variety of problems associated with pay disparity, comparable worth, advancement to managerial positions, sexual harassment, work and family responsibilities, retirement benefits, occupational segregation, male dominated organizational culture and attitudes, and the specific job requirements or barriers. Despite the fact that women constitute 51.4 percent of the national population, men account for 43.4 percent more in

appointed leadership positions.²⁸ Also, the minority women experience the most difficult problems in finding employment with adequate compensation and benefits.

The federal government has been more successful in resolving issues faced by women employees as compared to the state and local governments and the private sector. Nationally, figures suggest that women hold just 28.3 percent of the 1086 top ranking positions in the executive branches of state governments. Among “top advisors” in governors’ offices, women comprise only 39.7 percent of the total. While in department head jobs, women showed less participation accounting for only 23.7 percent.²⁹ As women’s participation in public employment continues to improve, more effective public policy responses are needed to address the continuing and emerging challenges. The prevailing male dominated organizational culture can be modified through education, training, legal sanctions, and the establishment of more progressive egalitarian personnel policies. Organizational leadership should be held accountable for providing an effective organizational response in preserving productive and healthy work environment.

With increased participation of women and minorities, modern organizations are becoming more complex and reflect a greater degree of diversity in knowledge, values, skills, abilities, attitudes, and leadership styles possessed by their members. Literature analysing the contributions of women to effective functioning of the organization recognizes gender-based behavioral differences among men and women. Women are often considered to be “nurturant, interactive, intuitive, sharing and more personalized.”³⁰ in their dealings with their fellow employees and organizational publics (customers). The value of these qualities should be carefully analyzed so that it can be more effectively utilized in the modern public and private sector organizations. Contemporary organizations can benefit by

valuing integration, diversity and individual differences in enhancing the organizational success and the quality of human resources.

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TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN THE LABOR FORCE BY THE YEAR 2000

	Labor Force, 1985	Net New Workers, 1985-2000
	%	%
Nonminority Males	47	15
Nonminority Females	36	42
Minority Males	5	7
Minority Females	5	13
Immigrant Males	4	13
Immigrant Females	3	9

Source: Based on the study conducted by the Hudson Institute, Indianapolis (1987), these data are reported in Carolyn Ban & Norma Riccucci (eds.), Public Personnel Management Current Concerns and Future Challenges (New York: Longman, 1991), p. 91.

TABLE 2

THE AGING WORK FORCE

Age Group	1970 %	1985 %	2000 %
16-34	42	50	38
35-54	40	38	51
55+	18	13	11

Source: Adapted from Workforce 2000, Hudson Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana, June 1987, p. 81.

TABLE 3

**WOMEN ARE INCREASINGLY EMPLOYED
BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
(Numbers in Thousands)**

	1976		1986		2000	
	Women	Women's Share	Women	Women's Share	Women	Women's Share
Total Workforce	35,701	40.1%	48,661	44.4%	65,639	47.3
Federal Workforce	599	33.9	717	39.8	915	44.7

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Office of Personnel Management:
Civil Service 2000, Hudson Institute, Indianapolis (1988), p. 25.

TABLE 4

**WOMEN'S SALARIES AS A PERCENTAGE OF
MEN'S SALARIES FOR VARIOUS ECHELONS
OF FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

	State/ Local 1987	Federal 1988
All Employees	78%	67%
Professionals	84%	78%
Administrators	81%	82%

Sources: Developed from U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Indicators of Equal Employment Opportunity: Status and Trends* (Washington, Dc, EEOC, 1990), pp. 36, 39; Ronald D. Sylvia, Public Personnel Administration (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1994), p. 161.

TABLE 5

**PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYERS PAYING
WOMEN SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME
AS THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS**

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Entry-level</i>	<i>Experienced</i>
Accountants	86	61
Chemists	84	71
Computer operators	86	80

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Women in the American Economy*, Series P-23, Number 146 (1986): 33; Ronald D. Sylvia, Critical Issues in Public Personnel Policy (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1989), p. 89.

TABLE 6

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF PROMOTIONS FOR
MINORITY AND NONMINORITY SURVEY RESPONDENTS,
BY SEX, ACCOUNTING FOR LENGTH OF GOVERNMENT
SERVICE AND EDUCATION**

	WOMEN	MEN
Minority	3.22	3.63
Nonminority	3.41	3.85

Source: A Question of Equity - Women and the Glass Ceiling in the Federal Government
(Washington, D.C.: U.S. Merit System Protection Board, 1992), p. 33

TABLE 7
Is It Sexual Harassment?*

Type of Uninvited Behavior by a Supervisor	Percentage of Women Who Consider It Harassment		
	1980	1987	1994
Pressure for sexual favors	91	99	99
Deliberate touching, cornering	91	95	98
Suggestive letters, calls, materials	93	90	94
Pressure for dates	77	87	91
Suggestive looks, gestures	72	81	91
Sexual teasing, jokes, remarks	62	72	83

	Percentage of Men Who Consider It Harassment		
	1980	1987	1990
Pressure for sexual favors	84	95	97
Deliberate touching, cornering	83	89	93
Suggestive letters, calls, materials	87	76	87
Pressure for dates	76	81	86
Suggestive looks, gestures	59	68	76
Sexual teasing, jokes, remarks	53	58	73

Type of Uninvited Behavior by a Coworker	Percentage of Women Who Consider It Harassment		
	1980	1987	1990
Pressure for sexual favors	81	98	98
Deliberate touching, cornering	84	92	96
Suggestive letters, calls, materials	87	84	92
Pressure for dates	65	76	85
Suggestive looks, gestures	64	76	88
Sexual teasing, jokes, remarks	54	64	77

	Percentage of Men Who Consider It Harassment		
	1980	1987	1990
Pressure for sexual favors	65	90	93
Deliberate touching, cornering	69	82	89
Suggestive letters, calls, materials	76	67	81
Pressure for dates	59	66	76
Suggestive looks, gestures	47	60	70
Sexual teasing, jokes, remarks	42	47	64

*Based on the percentage of respondents who indicated that they “definitely” or “probably” would consider the identified behavior sexual harassment.

Source: Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace – Trends, Progress, Continuing Challenges, (Washington D.C.; U.S. Merit System Protection Board, 1995), p.7.

TABLE 8

**THE UTILIZATION OF CHILD CARE SERVICES BY
WORKING WOMEN**

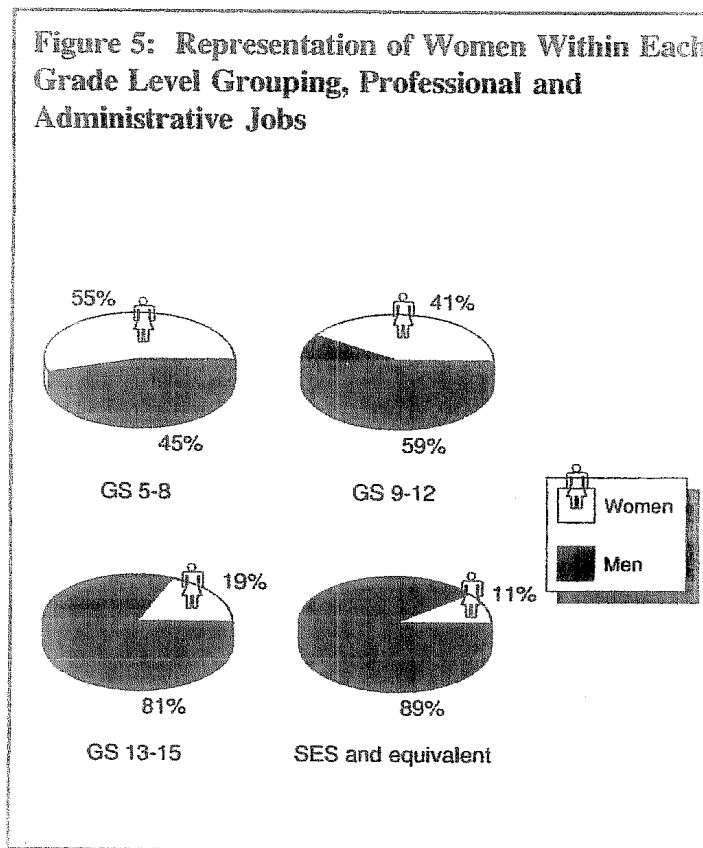
Place of care	Percentage
Child care facility	3
Place of mother's work	8
Own home by someone else	31
Nonrelative's home	22
Grandparents' home	10
Other relatives' home	5
Kindergarten/school	1

Note: For children under five years of age.

Source: Jay M. Shafritz, et al, Personnel Management in Government-Politics and Process (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1992), p. 533.

Figure 1
Representation of Women Within Each Grade Level Grouping,
Professional and Administrative Jobs

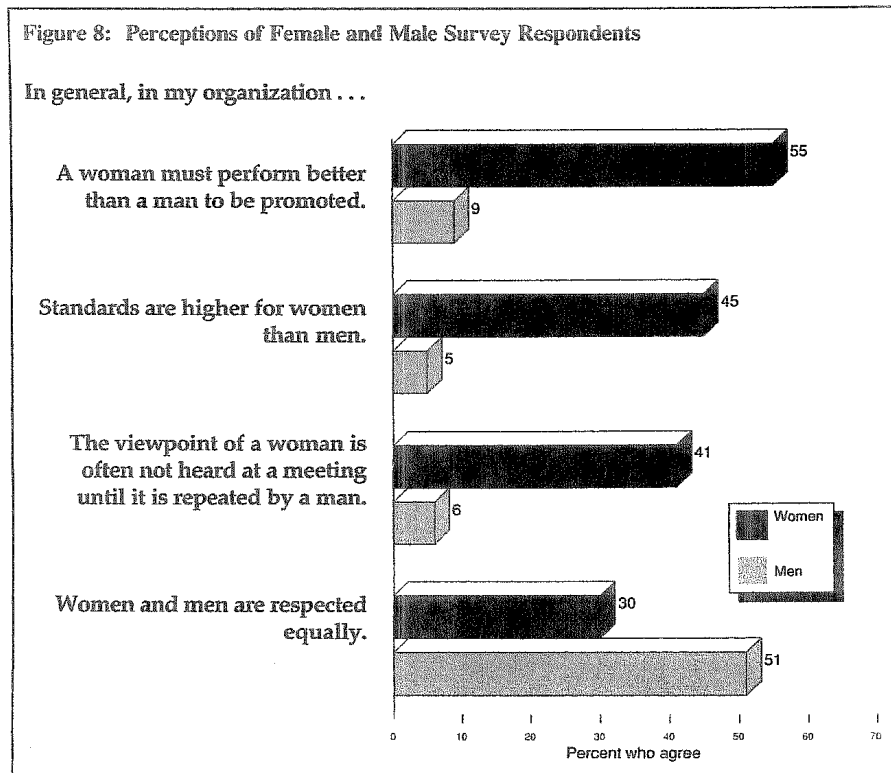
Figure 1
Representation of Women Within Each Grade Level Grouping,
Professional and Administrative Jobs



Source: A Question of Equity – Women and the Class Ceiling in the Federal Government - A Report to the President and the Congress (Washington, D.C., U.S. Merit system Protection Board, 1992, p.9.

Figure 2
Perceptions of Female and Male Respondents

Figure 2
Perceptions of Female and Male Respondents



Source: A Question of Equity – Women and the Class Ceiling in the Federal Government –A Report to the President and the Congress (Washington, D.C., U.S. Merit System Protection Board, 1992, p.31.

Figure 3
How Many Employees Experienced Sexually Harassing Behaviors in the Previous Two Years?

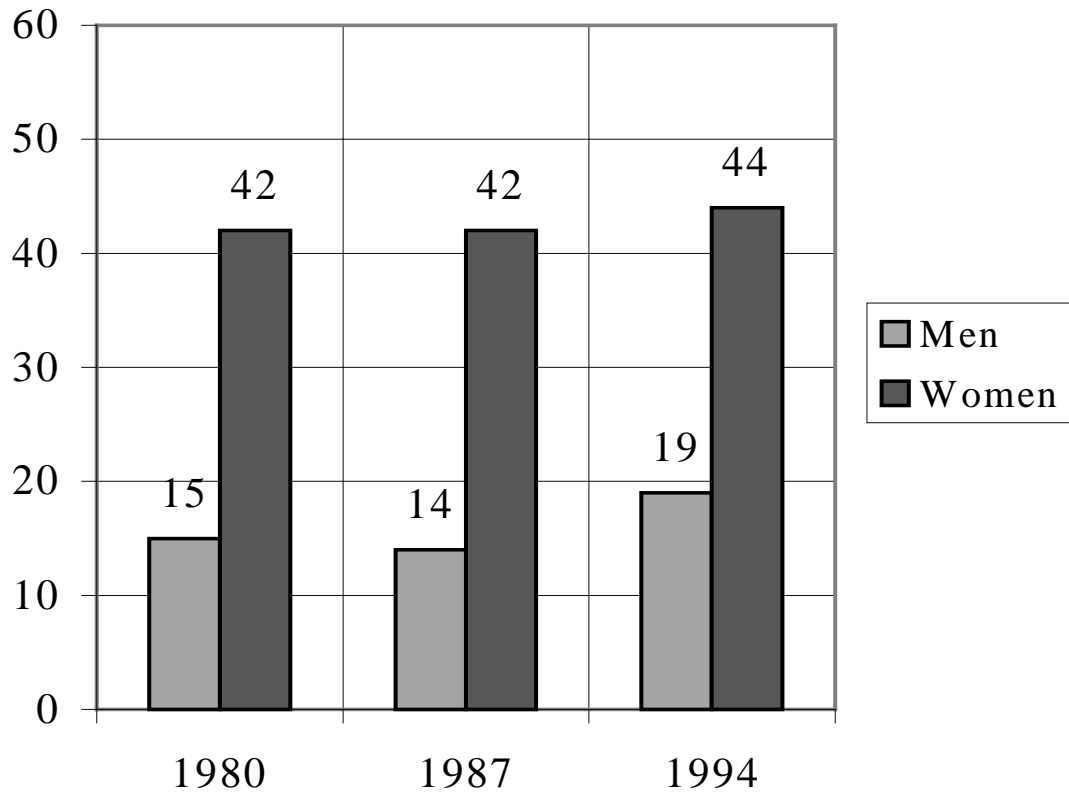
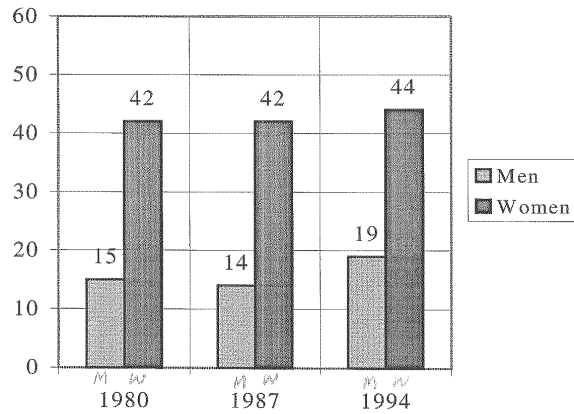


Figure 3

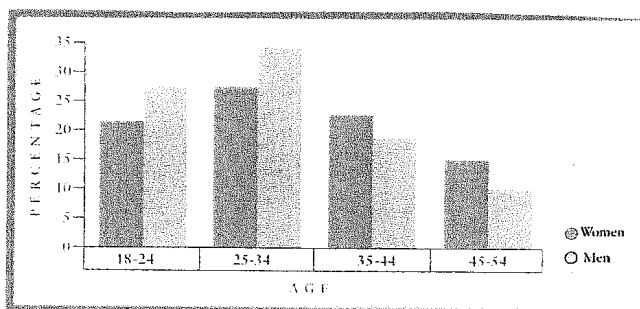
How Many Employees Experienced Sexually Harassing Behaviors in the Previous Two Years?



Source: Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace – Trends, Progress, Continuing Challenges (Washington, D.C., U.S. Merit System Protection Board, 1995), p. 14

Figure 4
Retirement Savings:

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Retirement Savings:



Source: Ronald B. Allen and Paul J. Appeldoorn (eds.), "Saving for Retirement: How Are Women Doing?", *Working Age* (AARP), 14 (1998): 3.