

BOOK REVIEW

Women and Public Service: Barriers, Challenges and Opportunities

Mohamad G. Alkadry and Leslie E. Tower
(M.E. Sharpe, 232pp., \$34.95)

By Rachel A. Breslin

In the summer of 2012, Anne-Marie Slaughter reignited a debate when she published *Why Women Still Can't Have it All*. Written in response to her own experience attempting to serve at the highest levels of government and fulfill her role as a mother, Slaughter writes that she felt compelled to share this realization of why women can't have it all—at least, not right now. Slaughter's article not only questioned the "you can do it all" discourse, but also, and more broadly, whether or not women could ever achieve equality in the workplace. Mohamad Alkadry and Leslie Tower's book *Women and Public Service: Barriers, Challenges, and Opportunities* is a timely continuation of that dialogue. The authors offer an interesting twist on the discussion regarding women in the workforce in general and present a case for pressing for social and policy change that would ensure women's adequate and fair representation specifically in the field of public service.

In a foreword by Camilla Stivers, the book begins by praising the contributions of women in public service despite the unfair treatment, social bias, and limited extent to which society values women in the workplace as important and beneficial. Stivers is a sound choice for opening the book given her research

on early differences in the interpretation of men and women's roles in the field of public administration (Stivers, 2000). In the ensuing introduction, Alkadry and Tower cite Stivers as one of only several authors to explore the issue of women in public service. Hence, their purpose and goal for this book is to expound upon a very limited body of literature and to offer recommendations for the future.

Alkadry and Tower close the introduction by articulating six principles that guide the book. First, that "men and women are equal" (Alkadry and Tower 2013, xvi). Aside from physiology, the norms and roles typically associated with men and women are social constructs that can and should be changed in order to achieve parity in the work place. Secondly, parity, the authors assume, requires a strict adherence to demographics; that is, a 50-50 split between men and women workers. It is worth noting here that the authors assert in later chapters that demographics alone do not ensure the representation of various viewpoints and beliefs. Third, "time is capable of resolving some things, but not everything" (2013, xvii). This third point is meant to tackle the oft-asserted claim that changes in women's status in the work place will come with time. While the authors acknowledge this pragmatic

component of the solution, they do not accept it as the panacea that it is often made to be. Fourth, expectations of appropriate behavior for leaders are changing from historically masculine (assertive and dominating) to historically feminine (participatory and caring) traits. Hence, suggestions of differences in male and female achievement as a matter of capability no longer stand to reason. Fifth, the discussion of work–family balance is not only relevant but also critical to this discussion. “Fairness for women in the workplace and their ability to excel in their careers is largely dependent on how well women negotiate their roles at home” (2013, xix). Much has been written about work–life balance, and, in the end, the recommendations seem to consistently call for men to do more—to take on more of the responsibilities of home and family. Alkadry and Tower are quick to emphasize that a reversal of roles is not what they suggest. Rather, they champion policy changes that would create an environment that supports work–life balance for everyone. Finally, Alkadry and Tower acknowledge the progress that women and men have fought for over the years, but they emphasize that their aim is to address the barriers, challenges, and opportunities that remain.

The first chapter of the book lays the theoretical groundwork for the discussion. Alkadry and Tower outline the birth and evolution of public administration. They highlight the lasting impact of the politics–administration dichotomy debate advanced by Wilson (1887)—that a strict divide exists between politicians who create policy and administrators who implement it—and recognize Weber’s contribution to the field of public administration. Alkadry and Tower use this brief history to question representative democracy and what constitutes adequate representation. Over time, and especially given the issues raised by the civil rights movement, the authors contend that representation in nonelected institutions became a means to “augment representation through political elected of-

fices” (2013, 5). Alkadry and Tower assert that, contrary to the limited role assigned to administrators by those that supported the politics–administration dichotomy, administrative organizations do much more than simply implement policy. They “play a central policy role as advisers in the legislative process, as rule makers” (2013, 7). Hence, the Wilson-Weber orthodoxy that is grounded in the objectivity and neutrality of these public servants disregards the much broader role and contribution of the administrator. It is this broad role—public administrator as implementer and rule-maker—that raises the question of diversity and representation; and, specifically, representative bureaucracy.

Diversity, Alkadry and Tower contend, is essential to effective management and is the cornerstone of a truly representative bureaucracy. The assumption here is two-fold. First, that “when administrators reflect the demographic characteristics of the people, they are more likely to serve them better” (2013, 7). Secondly, absent equal representation, women and minorities’ perspectives are left out of the policy formulation and implementation process. This is a shortcoming with consequences since “women constitute more than half of the recipients of public services” (2013, 3). Alkadry and Tower purport that the very legitimacy of the administrative state is based on equal and fair representation, not merely passive representation or identity diversity—the diversity strictly associated with demographics. Rather, Alkadry and Tower assert the importance of functional diversity and active representation, which implies a diversity of ideas, beliefs, and skills with the ability to actually affect change.

Among the barriers to women in public service, Alkadry and Tower cite “societal expectations and gender roles” as one of the most significant (2013, 25). More specifically, the authors call attention to the notion of the “working man” versus the “family woman,” whereby a greater share of the responsibility for the home

falls upon women. Alkadry and Tower suggest that only when these roles are deconstructed and the roles of both women and men are balanced between work and family commitments—a task to which society at large must be ready and willing to commit—can greater diversity be achieved in the workplace.

Alkadry and Tower describe laws affecting women in the workplace as adhering to two categories: those that protect against discrimination and those that guarantee benefits. They find both categories lacking in that “the protections for U.S. workers tend to lag behind those of other developed countries” and, likewise, the benefits do not do enough to promote equal pay (2013, 39). Much of the issue stems from the aforementioned gender roles whereby the responsibilities for child and senior care predominantly fall on women. This responsibility often results in transitions from full- to part-time work, or opting out altogether, which eventually translates to less pay. Alkadry and Tower extol Congress to look beyond the US for policy options that would better protect women’s ability to participate in work outside the home.

Chapters five and six of the book are dedicated to the contentious and related subjects of segregation and equal pay. Alkadry and Tower present empirical data that display the concentration of women in specific areas of the public sector (though they note similar trends in the private sector). They utilize this data to demonstrate the rampant agency, position-level, and occupation segregation in public administration. Specifically, with regards to agency segregation, the data show that women in public sector agencies are most concentrated in redistributive agencies—agencies concerned with health, welfare, or education. Meanwhile, women are underrepresented in distributive and regulatory agencies—those that focus on more technical and managerial policies, respectively.

In the case of position-level segregation, Alkadry and Tower present data

showing that women are overrepresented in lower echelon positions and underrepresented at higher levels. Even when women are able to attain more senior positions, those positions do not carry the same weight and influence as their male counterparts. Alkadry and Tower later define this as the “new glass ceiling,” whereby position-level within the hierarchy is not the limiting factor but rather the level of authority and responsibility assigned to a position.

Finally, regarding occupational segregation, the authors point to empirical evidence that women are overrepresented in the “caring” oriented fields of social services, education, and nursing but underrepresented in the hard sciences, technology, and engineering. Alkadry and Tower cite gender typing as the cause of this segregation, that is, the social determination of what constitutes appropriate work for men versus women.

The segregation of women into female-dominated fields with less responsibility and less authority amounts to substantially less pay as compared to their male counterparts. In fact, Alkadry and Tower purport that men tend to earn more than women in the same occupation and even more in male-dominated occupations. They assert that despite a vastly increasing pool of well-educated women, the pay gap persists. At issue is not simply equal pay for equal work, but rather equal pay for equal value. Here, the authors present an interesting twist on the pay equity discussion. They emphasize the importance of the value placed on one’s work and note that male-dominated occupations are often more valued than female-dominated occupations.

Alkadry and Tower suggest that among the biggest challenges to women achieving equal representation in organizations are not overt discrimination or lack of human capital (the competencies and skills associated with work). Instead, the issue is a sociocultural one. First, women must be enticed or encouraged

to seek positions outside the traditional female-dominated occupations. Secondly, life events—having a child or caring for a senior—compel women to leave the workforce. This inherently places women at a disadvantage since they re-enter the workforce at lower echelons that pay less. The third challenge to women achieving parity is time, that is, the time it will take for more positions to open as men leave or retire.

Women and Public Service contributes to what is a much needed but lacking dialogue about women in government. The discussion is timely, given the sheer volume of women pursuing graduate-level education, and the authors' approach is succinct. Women's purported choice between family and career is at the very core of the problem. Alkadry and Tower's conclusion—women should not have to choose—is not an original argument but merits repeating. This conclusion suggests, after all, that perhaps women should be able to "have it all". More elaborate details regarding how policymakers might achieve that change is lacking,

and, where recommendations are provided, much of the onus for change is placed on society at large.

There are a number of potential explanations for why the barriers and challenges to women achieving parity in the workplace merit our society's attention. However, in focusing on women in public service, Alkadry and Tower place their emphasis on the matter of representation. It is the authors' discussion surrounding the idea of popular sovereignty and representative bureaucracy—what it means to exclude a significant portion of the population from the policy process—that makes this book unique and relevant for the present and future policymaker. The authors omit any discussion of socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, or other cultural differences between women, perhaps choosing instead to simplify their message by focusing on gender alone. This only goes to show that the barriers and challenges to truly equal representation in public service are complex, and Alkadry and Tower's pursuit of pressing the topic forward invaluable.

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