

Margaret C. Rung

Paternalism and Pink Collars: Gender and Federal Employee Relations, 1941–50

Women substantially increased their presence in Washington, D.C.'s federal civil service during World War II. Accordingly, agency administrators struggled to define and address the "needs" of these new government women. This article analyzes the crucial role that gender played in the renegotiation of management strategies and policies during the 1940s. It examines the popularization of the human relations school of management in federal agencies and reveals how gendered concepts of authority impacted the employment prospects of female civil servants. The war provided an opportunity for some managers to promote a more "feminine" interpretation of human relations, but as this article demonstrates, that interpretation rested upon stressing the difference between male and female workers. In addition, postwar conservatism allowed for a reassertion of more hierarchical, "masculine" approaches to employment management in the civil service.

Gender was central to the construction of federal labor relations in the 1940s. Masculine and feminine perceptions affected both policy and structure. Indeed, an examination of management policies and practices within the federal government during one of the most important eras of state building, the 1940s, reveals that the process of internal state building was often informed by gendered perceptions of work. By promoting a specific paternalistic brand of the human relations school of management, public administrators—often unintentionally—codified gender inequities within the civil service. These

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public administrative policies and ideologies, moreover, influenced the private sector as the government regulated the personnel policies of various industries during the war.¹

Most scholars agree that the Second World War had a profound impact on the employment prospects for American women. Traditionally, scholars have portrayed the war years as a reversal, if perhaps only a temporary one, of the discriminatory patterns entrenched during the Great Depression. As William Chafe has noted, "The eruption of hostilities generated an unprecedented demand for new workers, and in response, over six million women took jobs, increasing the size of the female labor force by 50%." In addition, he observed, women received dramatic wage increases, joined unions in growing numbers, and encountered more positive attitudes concerning their place in the work force. Moreover, substantial numbers of married women went to work.²

Women's participation in the federal work force clearly illustrated these trends. As Table 1 indicates, from the 1920s through the 1930s, women as a percentage of the federal work force in Washington, D.C., remained around 40%, but by the end of the war, their presence had increased by half to nearly 60%. As a percentage of the federal civilian work force both in the field and in Washington, D.C., women increased their representation from 18.8% in 1941 to 37.6% in 1944. Indeed, between 1941 and 1944, women accounted for half of all new employees hired by the federal government; their presence in many major departments and especially in war agencies rose dramatically (see Table 2).³ Three months after Pearl Harbor, the *Washington Evening Star* observed that "singly and in groups" nearly five hundred women came to Washington each week from "North, East, South and West to be fitted, coglike, into the huge civilian war machine that is being fashioned here."⁴

Although Chafe has found much to praise about the opportunities afforded by war employment, he, like many other scholars, recognized

¹ James N. Baron, Frank R. Dobbin, and P. Devereaux Jennings, "War and Peace: The Evolution of Modern Personnel Administration in U.S. Industry," *Journal of American Sociology* 92 (Sept. 1986): 350–82.

² William Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York), 121.

³ Susan Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston, Mass., 1982), 56; U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *Women in the Federal Service, 1923–1947: Part I. Trends in Employment*, Bulletin No. 230-1 (Washington, D.C., 1949), 19, 29, 35.

⁴ *Washington Evening Star*, 8 Feb. 1942.

Table 1
Women in the Federal Work Force

Year	Total Number of Women		In District of Columbia	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1923	81,521	14.9%	27,469	41.4%
1929	82,501	14.0	25,646	40.1
1934	101,525	15.4	34,955	40.1
1939	172,733	18.8	49,312	40.0
1944	1,106,132	37.6	157,710	58.3

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *Women in the Federal Service, 1923–1947: Part I. Trends in Employment*, Bulletin no. 230-1 (Washington, D.C., 1949), 16; U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *Employment of Women in the Federal Civil Service, 1923 to 1939*, Bulletin no. 182 (Washington, D.C., 1941), 49.

that the war ultimately did not eliminate gender discrimination from the workplace. Most scholars have attributed the persistence of discrimination to prevailing biases against working women, and to the lack of a sustained, collective protest against these prejudices by women.⁵

More specifically, however, these discriminatory forces resulted from gendered definitions of work and leadership; ironically, these definitions developed within the context of women's wartime employment experiences. In commenting on a recent sex discrimination suit lodged against Sears, Roebuck and Company, Joan Wallach Scott stressed the need to understand "fixed gender categories as normative statements that organize cultural understandings of sexual difference." To her, the history of women's work must be made part of a larger "story of the creation of a gendered work force." A study of management ideology and strategies within the federal bureaucracy provides an opportunity to examine how gendered notions of work evolved and how specific

⁵ The literature on this issue is voluminous. See, for example: Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War Two* (Westport, Conn., 1981); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, 1982), 273–99; Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 53–99; Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana, Ill., 1987); Chafe, *The Paradox of Change*, 121–53. Sharon Strom's study of women and office work addresses the tensions between early twentieth-century feminism and unionism. Her work allows us to examine why and how women sought to achieve employment equity through individual rather than collective action. Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern Office Work, 1900–1930* (Urbana, Ill., 1992).

Table 2
Women in Selected Federal Agencies

Year	Treasury	Labor	Justice	Agriculture	War	State	OPA	Selective Service	War Manpower Commission
1923	(N/A) 29.7%	(N/A) 30.9%	(N/A) 31.6%	(N/A) 20.1%	(N/A) 11.1%	(N/A) 24.0%	—	—	—
1929	(15,261) 28.7%	(1,061) 23.3%	(1,228) 29.3%	(4,722) 19.9%	(5,759) 12.2%	(1,406) 30.5%	—	—	—
1934	(14,548) 29.2%	(1,985) 25.8%	(1,318) 21.5%	(5,559) 16.1%	(6,672) 13.7%	(1,497) 34.3%	—	—	—
1939	(24,601) 36.3%	(2,211) 33.3%	(2,327) 24.2%	(21,575) 20.0%	(14,042) 12.8%	(2,074) 36.0%	—	—	—
1944	(N/A) 55.8%	(N/A) 63.5%	(N/A) 45.8%	(N/A) 30.4%	(N/A) 45.3%	(N/A) 63.2%	(43,917) 74.1%	(18,556) 85.1%	(16,602) 63.1%

() = Total number of women in agency
% = As percentage of total agency work force

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, *Women's Bureau, Women in the Federal Service, 1923-1947: Part I. Trends in Employment*, Bulletin no. 230-1 (Washington, D.C., 1949), 29, 35; U.S. Department of Labor, *Women's Bureau, Employment of Women in the Federal Civil Service, 1923 to 1939*, Bulletin no. 182 (Washington, D.C., 1941), 50; U.S. Civil Service Commission, *Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1929* (Washington, D.C., 1929), 15; U.S. Civil Service Commission, *Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1934* (Washington, D.C., 1934), 7.

historical circumstances, such as war, shaped and gave strength to gender categories.⁶

In an article published in 1945 in *Public Personnel Review*, Margaret Barron told the story of a Miss “A.” Like many young women during World War II, Miss “A” came to Washington, D.C., in search of work. Described by her superiors as bright, attractive and capable, Miss “A” was hired by the Federal Security Agency. Initially she performed exemplary service, but after a year her work began to deteriorate. Co-workers began to observe her wandering around the office, jerking her shoulders and swinging her arms in a “peculiar way.” During interviews, a staff counselor discovered Miss “A” to be a “lone wolf” who rarely socialized with others in or out of the office. After further investigation, the counselor concluded that Miss “A,” who had been a talented pianist in her home town, was suffering from lack of attention. Indeed, her jerky movements were not, as first thought, a nervous tic, but an attempt to “imitate one of the motion picture actresses!” To compensate for her feelings of inadequacy in her new urban environment, Miss “A” was engaging in “affected mannerisms.” As soon as the counselor introduced Miss “A” to the agency’s choral group and a local drama troupe, her peculiar mannerisms apparently disappeared.⁷

Psychological counseling was a relatively new phenomenon in the federal bureaucracy. Along with other management-sponsored programs, it constituted part of a larger movement begun by government personnel administrators to use human relations management techniques in government agencies. These techniques were intended to downplay the importance of inflexible rules and eliminate autocratic management styles. By evaluating “nervous tics” and offering financial and housing assistance, public personnel officers sought to address individual employee problems in an effort to create a more stable and productive work force.⁸ In many respects, this approach to management encouraged and aided female civil servants in their quest for independence and stability. Indeed, perhaps Miss “A’s” insecurities were remedied through the counselor’s efforts. But, in other respects, as we shall see, human relations practices also perpetuated concepts of

⁶ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 175.

⁷ Margaret Barron, “The Emerging Role of Public Employee Counseling,” *Public Personnel Review* 6 (Jan. 1945): 9–16, quotes from 9–10.

⁸ Council members discussed questions concerning marital status at the 133rd Council Meeting, 5 March 1942, RG 146, Federal Personnel Council (FPC) meetings, box 13, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.

gender difference that were often used to justify discriminatory practices in the workplace.

Human Relations and Gendered Bureaucracies

Formally initiated by Elton Mayo of the Harvard Business School and practiced in the 1920s by corporations such as Western Electric, the field of human relations encouraged supervisors not only to devise company programs building esprit de corps, but also to take an active, personal interest in their employees in order to elevate company loyalty and morale. This theory also suggested that workers were to participate in the construction of workplace rules, although management authority was to be preserved. Human relations required managers to become versed in and then to utilize their knowledge of psychology, sociology and anthropology to promote worker productivity. Supervisors along with professional counselors were to discover, diagnose, and resolve those personal problems that might adversely affect employee morale and hence efficiency.⁹

By examining management rhetoric and programs, gender and the issue of discrimination can be examined not from below, through the lens of women workers themselves, but from above, through the lens of management. While scholars have generated a vast amount of information about the experience of female industrial workers, we know less about gender assumptions in the offices of large-scale organizations.¹⁰ We can no longer assume, for instance, that large public and private bureaucracies developed outside of contemporary conceptions of gender (or race and ethnicity, for that matter). Although Max Weber examined the standardization of bureaucratic forms of authority, he did not integrate into his analysis the cultural biases that inevitably informed the construction of rules and regulations in the “ideal” bureaucracy. Cultural perceptions of the female nature, for instance, were deeply entrenched in political institutions and influenced policy formation as well as the construction of a “merit”-based civil service.¹¹

⁹ On Mayo and the development of the human relations school of management see Richard Gillespie, *Manufacturing Knowledge: A History of the Hawthorne Experiments* (Cambridge, 1991).

¹⁰ For two insightful accounts of the influence of gender in the business corporation see Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870–1930* (Baltimore, Md., 1994) and Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*.

¹¹ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York, 1947), 328–63.



Stenographic Pool, National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics . A lack of workspace in wartime Washington, D.C. often led to innovative solutions. In some cases, the government moved agencies out of the city. In this instance, however, the stenographic pool of the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics operated out of the old Leiter Mansion at 1500 New Hampshire, N.W. (August 1943). (Photograph courtesy of the Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library.)

A growing body of recent scholarship has addressed this issue. Theda Skocpol and Linda Gordon, for example, have tied female reform efforts to the emergence of the welfare state. Others, such as Sharon Strom and Angel Kwolek-Folland, have examined the intersection between gender and management in private-sector bureaucracies. Their analyses uncover the story of both gendered management discourse and its impact upon white-collar female workers. As Strom has noted, although executives and influential administrative experts “fought a constant holding action to exclude people of the ‘wrong’ sex (and class and race) from positions of influence, both masculine and feminine traits found their way into managerial strategies.”¹²

The sex of those engaged in personnel work was not irrelevant to the development of this occupation. At the beginning of the century,

¹² Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York, 1994); Linda Gordon, “Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1890–1935,” *American Historical Review* 97 (Feb. 1992): 19–54; Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*, 11; Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business*.

women played an active role in establishing personnel or employment management, while men generally promoted Frederick Taylor's scientific management. Scientific management served to reinforce contemporary social definitions of "masculine" behavior, including individualism, aggression, ambition, and competitiveness within new corporate structures. It also promoted rationality, standardization, and efficiency as masculine traits. Personnel work that focused on the welfare of workers was deemed a more appropriate concern for female white-collar workers.¹³

Even so, the relationship between masculine and feminine approaches to management remained ambiguous and contested. In an effort to assert a more professional image, male personnel practitioners began to stress the more "masculine," technical aspects of their occupation. They emphasized the need to systematize personnel functions by devising organizational charts, standardizing job classifications, quantifying work output and devising tests to determine the fitness of job applicants. By the 1920s, the "feminine," welfare-oriented approach to personnel management had become increasingly peripheral to the field. Despite the growing numbers of women entering America's corporations, few controlled the development of management programs.¹⁴

But what of the state's managerial practices with respect to its own work force? More specifically, how did federal officials deal with the influx of women into the civil service, especially in Washington, D.C.? In her study of office workers, Strom has observed that the federal civil service laid the foundation for a gender-neutral civil service in the World War I era. Under pressure from the Women's Bureau, the Civil Service Commission agreed in 1919 to eliminate gender criteria as a basis for administering its exams. While the ruling allowed women to take any exam they pleased, it did not prevent agency officials from specifying sex when requesting eligible candidates from the Civil Service Commission's rosters. Moreover, the bureau's celebration of this ruling was based upon the Weberian notion that a rational bureaucracy was by definition gender-neutral. Sex discrimination was therefore perceived as an aberration in an ideal bureaucracy.¹⁵

¹³ Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business*, 72–76.

¹⁴ Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*, 5–6, 109–171. Those in the public administration field followed a similar path to professional status. See Camilla Stivers, *Gender Images in Public Administration: Legitimacy and the Administrative State* (Newbury Park, Calif., 1993), 109–118.

¹⁵ Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*, 137–40.



In the recording service of FBI, many girls are employed on the job of recording and detecting the cards containing fingerprints



Women cartographers prepare charts and maps portraying the results of FBI investigations

Uncle Sam's G-women

BY

HENRY CHARLES

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In the great federal organization which is engaged in detecting crimes against our country, many women hold positions calling for many different kinds of work

proper sections for careful and immediate attention. The feminine side of the FBI merits the fervent praise heaped upon it by John Edgar Hoover, director of FBI, who has declared that in the FBI laboratory, in the radio field and in fingerprinting, the work of women has been most capably performed. Moreover, he emphasizes that in technical fields they are rendering inestimable aid to law enforcement throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Numerous citations might be made of the detective acumen manifested by women in the world's smartest investigation system, much of it coming from intricate scientific labor involving accurate, positive conclusions. Some of the instances can, to be sure, be attributed partly to coincidence, but all are backed by alert judgment and efficient action.

Here is a case which opened with a commonplace incident in the USO headquarters in Washington. A Canadian soldier met an attractive girl who introduced him to her roommate. The roommate, it seems, had a remarkable memory for faces, as well she might, since one of her jobs was filing "wanted" posters in the FBI. Suddenly something flashed into her mind. The next morning she consulted her files and, as she expected, identified the soldier she had met as a deserter from the Canadian Army.

Then there is the case of the private who disappeared from a Southern army camp, and was later found dead. The chief suspect was another soldier from the same camp who, at the moment, was absent with-

NEVER heard of G-women! Probably not. It may, therefore, come as a surprise to you to learn that almost half the personnel of the huge FBI organization in field offices and Washington headquarters is composed of women.

Here are the figures: If you wish to be more precise, there are 3,300 feminine FBI employees out of a total of 7,500, which is five times as many as there were before the war.

The work of Uncle Sam's G-women is important and interesting even when not spectacular. Many are engaged in doing office work that is far more exacting than any they would encounter in private business. Even the girls who don't the hat have important tasks, since it is up to them to classify letters from citizens offering information, and to relay these communications to the

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"Uncle Sam's G-Women" · Articles such as this one published in a 1946 issue of *Independent Woman*, a magazine for women in the business and professional world, celebrated women's wartime employment in government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation. (Photo published by permission of *Independent Woman* (BPW/USA)).

Scholar Kathy Ferguson, among others, has offered an alternate view of the bureaucracy. This institution, she has argued, itself was a "masculine" entity, embedded in and built upon a masculine concept

of relationships, including hierarchy. In her “feminine” bureaucracy, conciliation, cooperation, and compromise, rather than top-down authority characterize the institution. A Weberian bureaucracy is therefore by definition a masculine one.¹⁶

But Ferguson did not fully examine the historical processes that gave life to these “masculine” bureaucracies. Institutional cultures and structures often emerged from the interaction of and tension between masculine and feminine administrative styles and ideologies. This process was especially evident during World War II, when women had greater economic power, and in war service agencies, where women had more room to negotiate. Feminine management styles—practiced and articulated by both men and women—benefitted women to a certain degree, but they did not necessarily provide women with long-term economic empowerment.

In part because the public sector was not driven by the profit motive, “feminine” management strategies—embodied in the human relations doctrines—actually had some chance of success. Public-sector unions were often less cohesive than those in the private sector, and public administrators were not as inclined to use human relations as a means of preempting employee organization. Moreover, most public service managers took the democratic rhetoric of human relations quite seriously, believing that the federal government’s internal management structure should reinforce democratic ideals. For many, it was essential that the government set an example as an enlightened employer. Administrators, however, frequently disagreed on the nature of “enlightened” management practices; many modified feminized management approaches and ultimately strengthened the civil service hierarchy. In the civil service, hence, management strategies were both gendered and politicized as personnel administrators sought to advance liberalism, preserve democracy, and retain some type of sexual division of labor.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kathy Ferguson, *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1984); Anne Witz and Mike Savage, “The Gender of Organizations,” in *Gender and Bureaucracy*, ed. Witz and Savage (Oxford, 1992), 3–62.

¹⁷ Private-sector studies of human relations tend to emphasize its anti-union functions. Neither Richard Gillespie’s study of Elton Mayo’s pioneering human relations studies nor Elizabeth Fones-Wolf’s examination of postwar business management focuses on human relations from the perspective of gender, although it is noteworthy that women workers were chosen as the first subjects of Elton Mayo’s Hawthorne experiments. Gillespie, *Manufacturing Knowledge*; Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945–60* (Urbana, Ill., 1994), 73–96.

Scholars Kwolek-Folland, Strom, and Laura Downs concentrate on the intersection between gender and management strategies in the private sector, but all three focus on time periods before the popularization of the human relations school of management. Kwolek-

Miss “A’s” encounter with a counselor illuminates the critical role that gender played in the construction of new employee relations programs during the 1940s. First of all, managers altered their supervision techniques in response to a growing pink-collar work force. A severe wartime labor shortage encouraged personnel managers to hire women and to experiment with innovative and creative employee services. The increasing feminization of the work force, combined with the personnel directors’ fears that high turnover rates would hinder war productivity, helped to make managers sensitive to the needs and demands of women.¹⁸

The counselor’s description of Miss “A” as a “lone wolf” in need of social activities reflected the gendered terms upon which these management strategies were constructed. In this case, the counselor believed that Miss “A’s” business maladies could be cured by fulfilling her through the “feminine” endeavor of art. By the end of the 1930s some personnel managers had begun to implement programs based upon the concept of “psychological paternalism.”¹⁹

Folland, *Engendering Business*, 136–39, 169–76; Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*, 190–71; Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995), 147–85. For an early examination of women’s experiences in the civil service see Cindy Sondik Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service: Middle-Class Workers in Victorian America* (New York, 1987).

¹⁸ While some of these women engaged in jobs traditionally assigned to men, most were concentrated in positions within the clerical, administrative, and fiscal service (CAF) and were clustered at the lower end of employee grades. In 1939, female civil servants in Washington, D.C. represented 69.3% of the entire CAF service. Of the 8,190 women appointed to federal jobs in 1939, 73% of them received clerical appointments. At the same time, women made up 1.5% of all professionals. See U.S. Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, *Employment of Women in the Federal Government, 1923–1939*, Bulletin No. 182 (Washington, D.C., 1941), 19. For an explanation of the government’s classification service, see Paul P. van Riper, *History of the United States Civil Service* (Evanston, Ill., 1958), 296–304.

On the twentieth-century feminization of the clerical force, see Lisa Michelle Fine, *Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1990) and Margery Davies, *A Woman’s Place is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1982).

¹⁹ The term “paternalism” has a multitude of meanings within the context of labor history. I use the term in the context of twentieth century labor relations. Prior to the rise of corporate bureaucracies, paternalism referred to the very personal relationship that existed between employers and workers in family-oriented firms. After the emergence of impersonal bureaucracies, top officials engaged in more impersonal and institutionalized forms of paternalism. The company town and company store, for instance, were managerial strategies designed to make the company appear benevolent and concerned about the welfare of workers. Similarly, welfare capitalism which mandated the creation of pension, safety, health, and recreation plans was another form of paternalism that was designed to fit into a complex organization. While human relations also belongs to the twentieth-century bureaucracy, its emphasis on the personal relationship between supervisor and subordinate harkens back to relations within the family firm. Nevertheless, it too relied on standardized and institutionalized programs.

This form of paternalism appropriated social science language to demonstrate that behavior traditionally classified as “feminine” was antithetical to leadership qualities. At times managers reverted to biological explanations, insisting that sex differences caused different behavior; but at other times, they asserted that the way in which women were socialized made them unsuited for high-level, high-paying positions. In either case, female career “disabilities” were linked to scientific observations. These ideas, which formed the basis of psychological paternalism, manifested themselves in new management programs and at times limited upward mobility for women in the civil service.²⁰

New management programs also evolved, however, from liberal and feminine traditions associated with New Deal politics and welfare work. Indeed, women had long been instrumental in promoting the welfare aspects of personnel work. These nurturing impulses within the personnel occupation were revived during World War II in the federal government’s human relations programs.²¹ Progressive managers emphasized the democratic principles in the human relations approach, insisting on a more open communication system and a gender-neutral merit system. In asserting a strong commitment to equal opportunity, these managers labored to eliminate gender inequities through promotions and child care provisions for working mothers. Many of these liberal personnel managers encouraged women’s participation in their field and felt confident that the war would further the cause of social justice in the workplace.

Human relations strategies were not simply an attempt by managers to dominate workers. The development and application of these programs was much more ambiguous and complex than that. Some managers perceived this strategy as an opportunity to create a more democratic and just workplace that would benefit women. Others, however, used it to perpetuate cultural stereotypes about the female nature and hence to limit opportunities for women. Wartime labor shortages, along with the anxieties produced by rapid mobilization and

²⁰ The case lodged by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against Sears, Roebuck and Company in the late 1970s revolved around this issue of feminine versus masculine behavior and the suitability of these behaviors to certain occupations. See, for example, Ruth Milkman, “Women’s History and the Sears Case,” *Feminist Studies* 12 (Summer 1986): 375–400 and Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 167–77.

²¹ On the welfare roots of the personnel profession see Sanford Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900–1945* (New York, 1985), 49–64. For a comparative view of welfare supervision see Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality*, 147–85.

social change, encouraged both of these impulses. But even though a new political climate spawned by the Cold War would ultimately favor a more conservative use of human relations, both interpretations of human relations ultimately relied upon an essentialist categorization of masculine and feminine behavior.

Human Relations and World War II

By the 1940s, personnel offices had become common in government agencies. The steady expansion of New Deal programs and the support from a new generation of public administrators, such as one-time Civil Service Commissioner Samuel Ordway, Jr., had led to the development of a more systematic personnel structure in the 1930s. In 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order mandating the establishment of personnel offices, with directors in government executive departments and independent agencies. The order also provided for the creation of an advisory Council of Personnel Administration, consisting of these personnel directors, to coordinate procedures between agencies. This body was instrumental in spreading the human relations approach to management.²²

Uncertain of their professional and organizational status, public personnel managers enthusiastically supported the human relations school. It effectively linked their occupation to the social sciences and allowed them to associate their programs with the large, sophisticated corporations using this management approach. Both associations enhanced the prestige and professional standing of managers. In addition, the human relations emphasis on harmonious labor-management relations promised to further the government's efforts to unify people behind the war effort.

Government practitioners of human relations stressed the importance of evaluating worker psychology as the first step in achieving harmonious labor relations. Personnel managers in the Agriculture Department, for instance, linked morale not only to "good salaries, reasonable hours,...and job tenure," but also to the "imponderables of human relations—attitudes, omissions, commissions, suspicions, personalities, ambitions, and fears." To foster labor-management cooperation, the department's personnel office implored supervisors to recognize that employees had "feelings," and to understand that "what [an

²² Executive Order 7916, 24 July 1938; see also *Washington Post*, 12 March 1939.



As vice president in charge of personnel at The Namm Store in Brooklyn, New York, Miss Bloodworth a Federation member is one of the top women in the field she writes of. Here she is seen in one of the conferences that are all in her day's work.

So You Want to be a Personnel Director!

Then marshal your keen interest in people, your ability to teach, your objectivity, emotional stability, imagination, good health, and good looks, and choose from the four broad divisions of personnel work — industrial, educational, governmental, and social services. You may climb from \$25 a week to \$10,000 a year, but fewer women hold top jobs today than they did a decade ago.

I have been in actual personnel work only fourteen years. All those fourteen years have been spent with one concern, and I succeeded a competent personnel director who left me an excellent employment manager who is still here, and a well organized training department. I cannot say, therefore, that I am a pioneer in personnel work *per se*, though as an executive of many years' experience before entering the personnel field, I had already discovered that the proper relationship between management and the worker is more necessary in successful operation than the technical or commercial knowledge required.

But the years I have spent in this interesting work have seen a boom and a depression of great magnitude, and kaleidoscopic changes in economic and industrial conditions. Personnel work has weathered them all, and its value and necessity for the proper conduct of any business have been established for all time, I hope.

It would hardly be fair to speak from a single woman's experience on the general opportunities for women in personnel work, the jobs they hold, the background they should have to fit into this work, and the fields which may be open. Hence we have made an informal survey, and I am merely the interpreter of facts offered by various women—from heads of departments in colleges where personnel administration is taught, from social service agencies such as the Y. W. C. A., from certain government agencies, and from some of my conferees in department store personnel throughout the country.

Personnel work, as it is understood today, seems to divide into four classifications:

1. Industrial—I use this term in the broad sense *covering all business opened on a profit motive.*
2. Educational—vocational guidance and placement in high schools and colleges, university associations, foundations, etc.
3. Governmental state and federal employment bureaus, labor divisions, also city welfare departments, etc.
4. Social service—vocational guidance, training, placement, welfare activities.

INDUSTRIAL PERSONNEL WORK

In industry, the main personnel functions are employment, training, general welfare, and social activities, promotion, transfer, dismissals, etc. These functions, depending upon the size of the business, are usually performed by interviewers, employment managers, industrial teachers, welfare directors, and personnel directors. In a large business, there will be several or at least one person for each year reporting to a personnel director, whereas in a small concern all the work may be centered in one or two people.

Women seem to predominate in these positions only in industries where a large number of women are employed, and even in these ac-

INDEPENDENT WOMAN

"So You Want to be a Personnel Director!" According to this 1941 article, women wishing to enter the personnel field should possess compassion, patience, an interest in people, strong teaching skills, objectivity, and imagination as well as "a healthy attractive appearance." While it stipulates that opportunities for women in the field are expanding in the social service and public sectors, it is less sanguine about women's progress in private businesses. It recommends that women shed their "dainty minds" and "white hands" and learn the industrial process from the shop floor up. More importantly, the article urges women to "take another notch in our belts, and try harder." (Photo published by permission of *Independent Woman* (BPW/USA)).

employee] thinks...may be determined by a complex of mental patterns only tenuously related to the real situation.” Hence, personnel officers warned, “the real situation is not so important as what [the employee] thinks the real situation is.” Because “the observed facts are filtered through mental stereotypes and a host of relevant, near relevant, and irrelevant experiences,” supervisors would have to learn about each employee’s personal life. Only then could supervisors successfully discern the difference between “fancied” and “real” grievances.²³

For many managers educated in the social sciences during the 1920s and entering government service during the New Deal, this approach mandated that supervisors try to understand the worker’s perspective. Consequently, personnel managers sought to use the human relations approach to address the perceived needs of women entering the work force. Some perceived those needs in economic and career-oriented terms. These managers were often younger and worked in newer agencies with more liberal missions, such as the Office of Price Administration (OPA) and the Foreign Economic Administration (FEA).

Kenneth O. Warner, who headed the personnel office at OPA before moving to FEA, was a strong believer in human relations. He welcomed union participation, pursued charges of racial discrimination, and pushed for the promotion of women. When one young FEA secretary discovered that low-level employees, including stenographers and typists, knew little about the agency and its overall workings, she began to hold informal orientation seminars on her own time. Warner quickly invited her to join the personnel office as a training person. In holding frequent staff meetings, Warner stressed open communication. According to one former colleague, he insisted on combatting destructive rumors by giving people the “straight dope.”²⁴

OPA personnel staffers likewise intervened when an employee seemed to be having severe personal problems. In one case, an OPA administrator discovered that a young woman whose work was “intolerably bad” was a single parent with a three-year old child living in a small, dirty apartment. The woman had become dissatisfied with her child’s nursery school, and hence began to leave the child at home while she was at work. Her job performance was suffering because she

²³ Roy Hendrickson, “Employee Relations,” 6 May 1940, RC 16, Office of Secretary, box 875, Personnel (2 of 5), 1 Feb. to 31 May 1943, NARA.

²⁴ Kenneth Warner phone interview with author, 22 May 1995; Marian Norby phone interview with author, 5 June 1995.

was dashing home two or three times a day to check on her child. Upon discovering this, the administrator did not fire the employee for incompetence, but discussed the problem with her, at which time she concluded that she should return to her family in New York, because "her situation was hopeless."²⁵ Although he was unable to offer substantive assistance, the agency tried to promote a more nurturing environment.

Human relations revived the "feminine" approach to personnel administration popular in business administration before World War I. This approach emphasized nurturing rather than a technical, statistical evaluation of workers and jobs. As a consequence, those women who had been marginalized in the profession during the 1920s began to reassert their right to personnel jobs during World War II. Although they rarely held positions as personnel directors or as statisticians, more women in the civil service began to break into the personnel field as counselors, assistants, and orientation advisors. For example, Dr. Helen Pallister, a psychologist who had served as an instructor at Barnard College and a research specialist at St. Andrew's University in Scotland, became the Civil Service Commission's employee counselor in 1943. Dorothy Bailey, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Minnesota, also had distinguished academic credentials before entering government service as a clerk in 1933. By 1947, she was earning nearly \$8,000 a year as a training specialist with the United States Employment Service. At the time, only a few dozen women in the entire service earned over \$8,000 a year.²⁶

Progressive Era and New Deal female reformers often relied on an ideology of maternalism to legitimate their access to politics. As Molly Ladd Taylor and Gwendolyn Mink have explained, this ideology stipulated that women had a special value system based on nurturing and

²⁵ William Bradbury, "Racial Discrimination in the Federal Service: A Study in The Sociology of Administration" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1952), 339–40.

²⁶ *Washington Evening Star*, 11 Feb. 1943; 27 March 1949. On women and personnel work in the private sector, see Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*, 146–54. In the federal government, the gradual professionalization of personnel managers in the late 1930s marginalized the contributions of women to employee relations. Many of the women who were working as agency appointment clerks were not given jobs as personnel directors when professional personnel offices were organized. Nevertheless, the ideals of social work and welfare impacted significantly on the management philosophy of personnel administrators in the civil service.

On women's salaries see U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *Women in the Federal Service: Part II, Occupational Information*, Bulletin No. 230-11 (Washington, D.C., 1949), 17.

caring.²⁷ These reformers were not only instrumental in attaining welfare and protective labor legislation, but in securing a niche for women within the personnel field. As counselors, orientation advisors and personnel assistants, women in government personnel positions sought to ease the plight of the “government girls” pouring into Washington, D.C., during the war.

But the feminine approach to management proved problematic for the field of public personnel administration. Many personnel workers realized that such an approach might undermine their status as professionals. Hence, at times, personnel officials likened morale-building exercises to those of the military. Department of Agriculture personnel officials maintained that they increased employee motivation because their policies assumed, “as military leaders do, that men must not only be put in the right place at the right time, but also in the right spirit.” Frederick Davenport, head of the federal government’s Council of Personnel Administration, continually compared the government’s efforts to foster enthusiasm, teamwork, and morale among government employees to those of the military.²⁸

Many personnel officials therefore tried to distance their work from its “feminine” side, recognizing that this might weaken their status as objective, scientific professionals. One human relations supporter, for example, denied that counseling constituted maternalism, which she described as the desire to “direct” or “manage” the affairs of another. Others warned executives and personnel officials not to “‘mother’ workers in the usual sense of that word” or to “squander” their time “acting as nursemaid to those perennial ‘problem employ-

²⁷ Molly Ladd Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State* (Urbana, Ill., 1994), 3; Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917–1942* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995), 10.

My aim here is to suggest that both male and female personnel workers were nervous about associating their work with what they defined as maternal activities. Hence, at that time, not all women perceived maternal impulses as an attribute to be celebrated and promoted. As Strom has revealed, personnel managers who advocated a more “sentimental (and effeminate)” approach to employee relations had to temper these aspects of their profession in order to be accepted in a masculine business environment. She also reminds us that both men and women expressed feminine and masculine elements of personnel management. “Men and women contributed to the feminine aspect of personnel management, and both women and men sought to toughen the profession.” Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*, 111–13.

²⁸ Roy Hendrickson, “Employee Relations,” 6 May 1940, RG 16, Office of Secretary, box 875, Personnel (2 of 5), 1 Feb. to 31 Mar. 1943, NARA; Frederick Davenport, “The Personnel Office and the Full use of Manpower,” *Personnel Administration* 5 (Jan. 1943): 4–5.

ees” who were hopelessly “maladjusted.”²⁹ While the maternal impulses remained embedded in the human relations philosophy, personnel managers continually tried to mask them.

Psychological paternalism therefore acted as a bridge between an extremely “masculine” organizational style based upon the military and an extremely “feminine” style associated with maternalism. This paternalism allowed managers to appear professional, but not domineering or authoritarian. In addition, by highlighting this management school as “objective,” administrators succeeded in *depersonalizing* management strategies without making managers seem *impersonal*.

Although human relations contained “feminine” elements, it did not necessarily promote gender equity. While accepting of women, progressive personnel managers still suggested that women were in the field because they had a special gift for nurturing. Furthermore, even the liberal interpretation of human relations focused on individual opportunity and clouded the larger issue of cultural stereotyping. Liberals were able to use merit and human relations to challenge some stereotypes, but the standard case-by-case approach they favored downplayed the collective, more subtle forms of institutional discrimination experienced by women and the persistence of a sexual division of labor.³⁰ Often liberal managers justified a promotion for a woman by insisting that she was “different” from other women.

A paternalistic management orientation afforded women some opportunity to negotiate. While the participation encouraged by the human relations school of management did not make employees equal to their supervisors or alter agency hierarchy, it allowed employees to lobby for reforms. Women and employee unions, for instance, petitioned for and obtained child-care programs for working mothers. Similarly while the United Federal Workers of America (UFWA) set up a conference to address the needs of women with children, the government sponsored “Working Mother’s Clubs” which helped reconcile conflicts between work shifts, shopping schedules, and household

²⁹ Margaret Barron, “Employee Counseling in a Federal Agency,” *Personnel Administration* 4 (Mar. 1942): 10; Thomas Nelson, “Human Relations in Management,” *Personnel Administration* 7 (Dec. 1944): 7; “A Placement Program for the Federal Service Report for 1945–46,” attached to Sayre to Davenport, 5 Sept. 1946, Papers of Raymond R. Zimmerman, box 5, Civil Service File, CAP 1, Harry S. Truman Library (HSTL), Independence, Missouri.

³⁰ On the persistence of this division of labor in the automobile and electrical industries during World War II see Milkman, *Gender at Work*.

duties.³¹ Thus, the feminization of labor policies did help women achieve short-term relief from the rigid work schedules imposed by the war.

Psychological Paternalism and Government Women

The psychological foundations of the human relations approach to management helped fortify the authority of managers to evaluate and define appropriate personality traits for government workers. This proved to be damaging to women whose job descriptions and training often mandated that they focus on developing such personal traits as appearance, poise, deference, and gentility rather than cultivating their intellectual or technical skills.³² In a 1942 training guide for secretaries written by the Farm Credit Administration's (FCA) personnel office and released by the Civil Service Commission, personnel managers argued that the difference between an effective and ineffective personal secretary was one of personality and political skill. Like a "coiffure," personality took "determined effort" to develop.³³

The FCA training manual insisted that female secretaries be efficient, tough, and hardworking, but appear soft, accommodating, and subservient. They had to play dual roles—the private role as the boss's ruthless protector and partner and the public role as his subservient, genteel helpmate. Furthermore, the manual considered secretaries responsible for the emotional and psychological health of their co-workers and bosses. To maintain this emotional equilibrium, secretaries were to treat their bosses as both sons and husbands, catering to their every need, yet also steering them away from trouble and subtly helping them create a successful image. All of these mandates assumed a woman's innate ability to "read" other personalities and her feminine responsibility to arbitrate disputes and ease friction.³⁴

³¹ Press Release, 7 July 1944, United Federal Workers of America and War Manpower Commission—Working Mother's Club, 20 March 1944, both in RG 146, FPC Project Files, box 11, C80 Child Care—Facilities, Welfare, 1944, NARA.

³² For instance, Leonard White, a highly respected academic in public administration and former civil service commissioner, suggested that as governments became compelled to use more women during the war, they consider devising "special training courses for them." Civil Service Assembly of the U.S. and Canada, "Wartime Policies of the United States Civil Service Commission," Special Bulletin No. 15, April 1942 (Chicago, Ill.).

³³ U.S. Civil Service Commission, "Secretarial Practice," 1942, copy in William McReynolds Papers, box 3, Committee on Administrative Personnel—II, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL), Hyde Park, New York.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Secretaries in the business world were described in very similar ways. See Davies' account of private business secretaries from the 1920s to the 1930s. *A Woman's Place is at the Typewriter*, 129–62.

The characteristics assigned to the “good” secretary were those that potentially limited her upward mobility in the federal bureaucracy. On the one hand, personnel officers urged secretaries to be ambitious. Her pursuit of a promotion, however, was to be achieved through efficiency, enthusiasm, a knowledge of the organization and a serious commitment to her job. She was not, the manual warned, “to show discontent with her present job, curry favor with higher-ups, or play office politics.” Nor was she to appear so efficient “as to seem managerial to her supervisor, for most men put bossy women in the same class with rattlesnakes.” Thus, the very maneuvers that men had to perform to gain promotions within the business and political world were deemed inappropriate for women. As the guide implied, women who used these maneuvers were not meritorious and would not be promoted.³⁵

As the rattlesnake metaphor reveals, management programs conveyed a tension between a desire to encourage individualism through personality on the one hand and a concern that too much individuality would threaten the organization on the other. Democracy encouraged individuality and individual achievement, but too much nonconformity threatened the stability of the community. Women who became too ambitious were “rattlesnakes”; they acted alone and could poison the group. Frequent use of the term “lone wolf” also suggested that those who deviated from the behavior accepted as normal by management were dangerous and needed to be re-integrated into the pack.³⁶

Management experts insisted that the successful (and well-balanced) female worker remain modest and in some ways, invisible. According to one contemporary article about women and office pro-

³⁵ U.S. Civil Service Commission, “Secretarial Practice,” 1942, McReynolds Papers, box 3, Committee on Administrative personnel, FDRL. Kwolek-Folland noted in her study of the life insurance industry that masculine and feminine character traits were assigned to different occupations. Female managers, hence, were supposed to adopt masculine business behavior and beliefs. *Engendering Business*, 71–73, 189–90.

Similarly, Elizabeth Faue argued that the bureaucratization of unions marginalized the contributions of women in the Minneapolis labor movement of the 1930s. Women were excluded from union leadership because the qualifications needed to operate in these positions were culturally linked to men. Elizabeth Faue, “Paths of Unionization: Community, Bureaucracy, and Gender in the Minneapolis Labor Movement of the 1930s” in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), 297–98.

³⁶ One woman on the staff of the Democratic National Committee criticized a female candidate for vice-chairman because she appeared “unable to adapt herself to either work in a group or with a group, or to delegate authority to another.” She categorized her as a “lone wolf,” just as Miss “A” was, indicating that women who tried to establish a strong, separate (and perhaps “aloof”) attitude were considered maladjusted. Picketts to McHale, 14 Oct. 1947, papers of India Edwards, box 15, Correspondence, 1947–1977, HSTL.

motions, “Mrs. Rhoades,” a supervisor of a large number of women, was resented by her subordinates because “they unconsciously realize that her efforts [to be a perfect supervisor] spring not from a spontaneous interest in them and their welfare, but from a self-interested desire to advance herself.” Her individual ambition threatened to disrupt the equally low status shared by women at the bottom of office hierarchies.

Female executives hence were never to demonstrate feelings of superiority. Those who did were depicted as authoritarian. One female executive, as described in the periodical *Independent Woman* in 1947, continually failed to reach the top ranks because of one “fatal flaw”: her blatant ambition. Subordinates labeled her a “dictator” because she wanted to “dominate and control.” They also described her as “haughtily aloof from all but the big shots in the office,” with whom she engaged in “shameless efforts to curry favor.” Thus, the author concluded, she was afflicted with “an all too common disease” among women known as “executivitis.” This disease attacked “women with particular frequency and virulence” because female executives suffered from deep insecurities about their position in the organizational hierarchy. Once women forgot about their own ambitions and concentrated on their job and their associates in a detached, objective way, the author claimed, they would earn the recognition they deserved. Hence those who demonstrated initiative and individual ambition were criticized and categorized as dysfunctional. Managerial experts not only scrutinized the personalities of female workers, but they also suggested that women with strong personalities might be unfit for leadership roles.³⁷

During the war, the psychological paternalism practiced by management tended to reinforce the concept that men and women had inherently different dispositions; each contributed something unique to the workplace and war effort. Women, for instance, were perceived as natural conciliators by human relations experts. As office subordinates committed to group effort, they would be capable of protecting democracy at its roots. Women were to facilitate cooperation among members in a group by establishing a common purpose and a sense of equity between office workers. Without such an effort, said one author, “personal ambitions and jealousies [would] grow like weeds” and destroy democratic principles.³⁸ Women were to nurture and

³⁷ Louise Snyder Johnson, “Are You Polishing Off Those Rough Spots?” *Independent Woman* (Jan. 1947): 28.

³⁸ “Democratic Attitudes Test,” *Independent Woman* (June 1945): 165–66.

serve democracy at its lowest levels. Men, in contrast, were to lead, and to save, democratic institutions.

This did not mean that all women were thought to be the same. Managers encouraged women to express their individual personalities in another fashion—through fashion. Departmental personnel counselors, with the assistance of the Federal Recreation Committee, sponsored a series of “charm schools” or “government girl clinics,” because clothes and glamour were crucial to “social adjustment and a girl’s satisfaction with her job.” Could a government girl, they wondered, be happy without a girdle? According to one article “[g]overnment girls interested in the do’s and don’ts [sic] of correct office etiquette and job grooming can begin the do’s by throwing away their low-heeled shoes and covering up those sun-back dress tops and bare legs.” Consultants hired by agencies targeted their presentations to women earning below \$1,440 a year, who with proper budgeting could “dress like they’re making \$5,000.” Each woman was to achieve fulfillment, despite her low pay, from her appearance. One “guinea pig,” a correspondence clerk, claimed that she “noticed a definite increase in wolf whistles and horn-honking” after her make-over. When informed that one war plant was asking female office workers to wear uniforms, Labor Secretary Frances Perkins said this was “ridiculous,” because women, like all people, liked individuality.³⁹

As with the FCA’s training manual, clinics also advised women on proper behavior. In a series of skits, models acted out proper workplace etiquette for their audience of government girls. They demonstrated how to walk and stand with “stomachs in, shoulders back, chests out and bottoms tucked under”; how to answer the phone; and how to avoid gum chewing, clock watching, and personal phone calls on company time. Women learned how to express their individuality within a set of parameters designed to make them better workers.⁴⁰

Psychological paternalism was most evident in the government’s decision to hire counselors. In Washington, D.C., alone there were approximately 350 agency positions available for counselors by 1945. To help employees cope with their jobs, and therefore remain productive, human relations experts stressed the need for personal interaction. Counseling, they argued, was a necessary element in any successful personnel program. Although available to both men and

³⁹ *Washington Evening Star*, 9 July 1942; 24 Nov. 1942; 3 March 1943; 3 Nov. 1943; 16 Aug. 1949.

⁴⁰ *Washington Evening Star*, 12 Aug. 1949.



Stenographers Genevieve Johnson, Olga Schultz, and Secretary Tilly Simon Relax during Their Lunch Break at the Quartermaster Corps in Southwest Washington, D.C. · A dearth of shops, restaurants, and recreational facilities in the area around the corps caused deep concern among administrators worried about the daily health and comfort of war workers. An anonymous donor from New York contributed money for lounges, offices for the agency's Welfare and Recreation Association, a library and an all-equipped sewing room for use by the Corps' employees (November 1942). (Copyright *Washington Post*; reprinted by permission of the Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library.)

women, counseling highlighted the attention government officials gave to the welfare of women workers. Counselors, personnel managers maintained, could improve morale and productivity by aiding employees (usually women) with personal problems.⁴¹

By trumpeting the success of counseling programs, however, personnel managers reinforced an image of the emotionally frail female worker. Unless provided emotional support, personnel managers suggested, women's work would suffer. One personnel director, for instance, detailed how the resolution of a landlord-tenant dispute restored the productivity levels of three "girls." According to him, an

⁴¹ Barron, "The Emerging Role of Public Employee Counseling," 9–16; U.S. Civil Service Commission, Report of the Committee on Employee Counseling (attached to Department Circular No. 356, 10 July 1942), Committee on Administrative Personnel II, box 3; Sarre to Davenport, 11 June 1943, Council of Personnel Administration, box 5, both in McReynolds Papers, FDRL.

irate landlord had threatened to have the “girls” fired if they did not pay their phone bill. Once their counselor informed them that the landlord could do no such thing, the personnel officer noted that their efficiency increased again. Counselors often seemed to perceive themselves as taking care of strained government girls.

At times, the focus on personal problems as the root of worker discontent obscured more relevant and substantive causes of discontent, like inadequate pay and lack of autonomy. In one case, a single mother of two who earned \$1,260 a year complained to her counselor that her supervisor often made her shoulder the blame for problems for which she was not responsible. She told the counselor that she was thinking of resigning. When the counselor learned that the woman needed \$50 for an emergency, she deduced that it was this, rather than the supervisor, that was causing her stress. The counselor, therefore, arranged a loan for the woman. Then, according to the counselor, the woman was able to “adjust” to her job.⁴² From the perspective of the counselor and personnel officer, her adjustment had little to do with her conflict with her boss. Under psychological paternalism, there was no need to change the system, only the person.

Counselors, as noted earlier, often provided valuable services to workers in need. When one woman’s husband was diagnosed with an incurable disease, the counseling office helped her find a nursing home, offered her financial aid, and when the husband died, helped find a home for the woman’s child. Within a month, claimed the counselor, the woman was back on her feet again. Stories such as these reveal the ambiguity of personnel services. While they clearly provided a service, managers were always interested in productivity. They remained less concerned about how work generated personal conflicts outside the office. In the wartime labor crunch, agency managers were not focused on directing women into career training, but in preserving stability and production levels.⁴³

With large numbers of women flooding into the Potomac region after 1941, personnel managers focused even more intently upon the perceived needs of working women.⁴⁴ Through the establishment of recreation facilities, dormitories, and social clubs, personnel directors

⁴² 143rd Council Meeting, 21 May 1942, RG 146, FPC Meetings, box 14, NARA.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ In 1940 there were 53,038 women working for the government in Washington, D.C. A year later the number had grown to 77,774. By 1945, it had almost doubled to 153,844. In percentage terms, 42% of government workers in D.C. were women in 1941; in 1945, they constituted 59.7% of the departmental service. Women’s Bureau, *Women in the Federal Service, 1923–1947*, 16, 19.

hoped to build a nurturing environment for the civil servants they referred to as “our girls.” As Daniel Nelson has observed, businessmen with large numbers of female employees constructed welfare programs along gendered lines. Hence, firms built lunch and “rest” rooms, offered classes in child care and home economics and established social clubs. During World War II, government personnel directors urged federal officials to build dormitory and recreation facilities as a means of easing disoriented girls into a stressful urban environment.⁴⁵ In contrast, programs for male-dominated firms emphasized financial security through the establishment of pension, saving, and stock-sharing plans.⁴⁶

Personnel officers consistently portrayed women as naive and homesick and thus represented these recreation and housing facilities as “essential safety valves for fatigued bodies and frayed nerves.” Severe housing shortages in Washington, D.C., did, of course, create problems, and many women were forced to double, triple, and quadruple up in rooms. Indeed, four single women who were on two different shifts might share a room with two beds. Administrators addressed this shortage by constructing government dormitories, like the Arlington Farms complex in Virginia. In many respects, this was an appropriate response to the crisis, for it offered women affordable housing, conveniently located near their jobs.⁴⁷ Yet government offi-

⁴⁵ Employee Relations Committee Meeting, 24 Sept. 1941, RG 146, Council Files, box 4, Council—Committees 14. Employee Relations, Prior to 1944, NARA. Efforts to “protect” working women through legislation was one manifestation of how managers sought to cater to the special needs of women workers. The Women’s Bureau established in the aftermath of World War I, for instance, supported protective labor legislation as the best means of elevating the plight of working women. Judith Sealander, *As Minority Becomes Majority: Federal Reaction to the Phenomenon of Women in the Work Force, 1920–1963* (Westport, Conn., 1983), 76–77.

⁴⁶ Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880–1920* (Madison, Wisc., 1975), 118. Kwolek-Folland labeled the construction of welfare departments in private business part of “corporate domesticity.” She argued that firms used gender imagery as a means of enhancing their reputation with the public. *Engendering Business*, 129–39, 144–59, 152–57.

Oliver Zunz also described how women changed the organizational culture of offices. He asserted that unlike federal offices where work relations remained informal into the early twentieth century, private sector firms formalized gender roles and separated the sexes. He also noted that women working in clerical jobs in the private sector had fewer opportunities than those in the civil service to engage in skilled work. While gender may not have been as rigidly defined in the public service, I argue that women changed the organizational culture, in particular federal labor relations policies, in very significant ways. *Making America Corporate, 1870–1920* (Chicago, Ill., 1990), 117–18.

⁴⁷ Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, “Recreation and Housing For Women War Workers: A Summary of Standards, Policies, Procedures,” Feb. 1942, McReynolds Papers, box 19, Labor Department: Executive and Judiciary Departments (Agencies) File, FDRL.

cial also took the opportunity to impose curfews, mandatory meal plans, and guest restrictions on residents in order to make certain that government girls lived in a "wholesome environment" and presented a morally upright image to the public.⁴⁸

Morality became a contentious issue in employee relations. In 1942, hiring officials asserted that "girl workers" were kept happy by "pleasant and continuous association with young men." They expressed concern that the dearth of men in wartime Washington would cause domestic distress for the government girl. As evidenced by the diagnosis of Miss "A's" curious behavior, personnel officials worried that women lacking a social life would become dysfunctional and unproductive or leave their jobs. One Civil Service Commission employee suggested that a series of parties in the same place would do more than an isolated dance in establishing "steady social contact" and a feeling of "belonging" for the "girl worker."⁴⁹

Although many stressed the importance of a social life, others had different concerns.⁵⁰ Representative Earl Wilson (R-Ind.) recommended that government girls have a 10 p.m. curfew in order to combat inefficiency. Too many female workers, he complained, came to work sleepy, then spent an hour in the rest room putting on make-up, before going to lunch. When they did work, he explained, their work was full of mistakes because they were probably a little "woozy." His suggestion brought forth a storm of protest as women wondered why the curfew should not also apply to men and by what means government officials intended to force female workers into bed at a reasonable hour. Finally, several women pointed out that they often worked

David Brinkley, *Washington Goes to War* (New York, 1988), 243. Federal officials made a similar decision during World War I when the Bureau of Labor decided to house female clerical workers hired in war agencies. See JoAnne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago* (Chicago, Ill., 1988), 89.

⁴⁸ See, for example, "Letters to the Star," *Washington Evening Star*, 19 Oct. 1944. The author of the letter was a government supervisor in charge of orientation. While she emphatically stated that neither the Civil Service Commission nor personnel offices should be responsible for the "moral training" of women workers, she claimed that personnel directors uniformly believed that they had a duty to acclimate incoming workers through orientation and other programs. In her orientation program, this supervisor explained, she offered to help women with personal problems and asked them to maintain, at all times, "the standard of morals which they had had back home and which they had brought here with them."

⁴⁹ *Washington Evening Star*, 16 April 1942. Not all were pessimistic concerning the availability of dates. One guest home owner whose boarders included men and women claimed that there were five or six marriages a month, and ten to fifteen every June. *Washington Evening Star*, 31 Aug. 1944.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Washington Evening Star*, 8 Feb. 1942; 16 April 1942; 31 Aug. 1944.

ten hours a day or longer, leaving little time for shopping, cooking, and cleaning, let alone parties. In an “Ode to Mr. Wilson,” one government worker penned:

Since Washington women
Outnumber the men
Just who is to keep us
All out after 10?

Wilson denied that he was questioning the wholesomeness of working women, claiming that they were “the cream of the Nation’s crops, mentally and morally.” Nevertheless, concerns with morality surfaced frequently.⁵¹

The “problem” of morality was brought into sharp relief by the rape and slaying in October 1944 of a seventeen year-old Pentagon employee, Dorothy Berrum. Berrum, who had come to Washington, D.C., from Wisconsin, was a resident at the Arlington Farms dormitory complex. She had gone into town one evening to meet a friend, but instead joined a young stranger, a marine. After taking her on a walk near the Jefferson Memorial, he raped and strangled her.⁵² This crime shocked the city. It also resulted in an outpouring of anger and concern that the United States government had been careless in recruiting teen-age girls without protecting them from the seedy side of the city.

Letters and editorials about the fate of young female war workers dominated the papers for weeks. Members of the Washington, D.C., community engaged in lengthy debates about the responsibility of the government to safeguard morality. Several suggested that the government send home all women under age twenty; Eleanor Roosevelt urged parents to keep their daughters at home unless these daughters were mature enough to handle living in the city; others implored the Civil Service Commission to screen recruits more carefully. Many referred to the government’s recruiting practices as “reckless” and “irresponsible.”⁵³

The debate demonstrated a wartime preoccupation with the emotional health of female civil servants. Public assessment of these young women, both implicitly and at times explicitly, revealed the widespread

⁵¹ *Washington Evening Star*, 30 Jan. 1942; 31 Jan. 1942; 1 Feb. 1942; 4 Feb. 1942.

⁵² *Washington Evening Star*, 8 Oct. 1944.

⁵³ See, for example: *Washington Evening Star*, 11 Oct. 1944; 12 Oct. 1944; and 14 Oct. 1944; *Washington Post*, 10 Oct. 1944; 11 Oct. 1944; 13 Oct. 1944; and 14 Oct. 1944.



Private Rooming Houses Offered Another Housing Alternative for Government Workers · Here a landlady shows a furnished room to two women (above), who then happily show off their new quarters for a photographer (opposite page). These women shared a single room with two twin beds. Many women recalled the lasting friendships they made living in such close quarters. Others encountered significant problems with both roommates and landlords. (Photograph courtesy of the Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library.)

belief that “promiscuous” (and thus “immoral”) women were emotionally unbalanced. Perhaps, one person stated, “girls from church homes” would be better “risks” because they would be able to avoid the temptations the city offered. Writing to the editor of the *Evening Star*, District resident Evelyn Drayton argued that if parents had “properly trained” their daughters, they would be more discriminating about their social activities. As anyone trained in psychology would know, she said, governmental educational campaigns would do little to alter the behavior of wanton women.⁵⁴ A woman who conducted orientation seminars at OPA agreed. Neither churches, government agencies, nor the Civil Service Commission should assume the “duties of parenthood,” she wrote. “If the parents so sheltered a daughter that she still needs sheltering [when she is recruited by the government], then let them keep her home until they have trained her in the art of

⁵⁴ *Washington Evening Star*, 14 Oct. 1944; 16 Oct. 1944.



living without such shelter.” One editorial writer made more explicit the link between moral behavior and psychological stability. “It has been argued, of course, that it is mostly girls of naturally unstable personality who become sexually amoral or who get into serious trouble in Washington” the author noted. “However, since personality defects of this sort are said to be detectable by psychiatric examination, it is hard to see why girls, and especially minors, in this category were ever accepted in the first place by the civil service.”⁵⁵

Underlying these arguments was the concept of gender difference, for as this quotation revealed, the problem was perceived to be *the woman's* rather than the man's. Women who were victimized needed better moral training; they were psychologically unbalanced to begin with and therefore put themselves in danger. It was a woman's responsibility to retain a chaste image and to resist “temptations.” Nowhere did the commentators describe the rapist-murderer's behavior as abnormal.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Washington Evening Star*, 19 Oct. 1944; *Washington Post*, 14 Oct. 1944.

⁵⁶ Women entering the female military services in World War II faced nearly identical difficulties. As Leisa Meyer explained, “[w]hile the military's masculine culture encouraged man's heterosexual activity, manpower needs dictated that men should not be responsible for their sexual behavior.” Women in the services, on the other hand, were disciplined and

Many commentators stressed that immorality was a personality defect evident only in particular women. Those who were nervous about labor shortages and those who were worried that all women would be discriminated against insisted that the problem could be corrected through better screening, or if necessary, individual counseling. Even prior to this case, Pauline Baker Chambers, the “dean of women” at the Office of Production Management, offered counseling to women overwhelmed by the pace and temptations of Washington life. But she admitted that the adjustment was “largely an individual problem. It depends on the individual girl, whether she can learn to take it.”⁵⁷

Despite assertions that the government could not change the behavior of young women, officials did concentrate quite a bit of effort on securing the psychological stability of their female work force. The same woman who denied that the government should be involved in “parenting” lauded OPA’s employee relations staff for assisting employees with “practically every type of personal problem.” And during orientation meetings she gave women information on cultural events, church services, and agency-sponsored recreational activities. Through these efforts, she concluded, the agency had become “organized as one large family....” All employees were “sincerely interested in helping each other to be happy in a strange new territory.” Arlington Farms officials targeted “immature” women and lectured them against getting into cars, picking up people, and spending money frivolously.⁵⁸

Personnel administrators assumed that men, on the other hand, could cope with the uncertainties and strains of city life. As a group, personnel directors rejected suggestions that recreation facilities and accommodations be constructed for men. Several personnel managers maintained that unlike women, most men in the civil service headed stable family units. Issues of job instability and social disorientation, said one, were specific to women. When one administrator pointed out that most government “girls” were over thirty, another noted that although these “older” women might be more “stable,” they were not

blamed for pregnancies and “passing” venereal disease to men. *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women’s Army Corps During World War II* (New York, 1996), 100–147, quote from 100.

⁵⁷ *Washington Evening Star*, 3 Nov. 1941.

⁵⁸ *Washington Evening Star*, 19 Oct. 1944; 16 Oct. 1944.

necessarily “happy, because [they were] not so adaptable as the younger group.”⁵⁹

Human Relations in the Postwar Era

The war against fascism and then the war against communism introduced new political ideologies that stunted the more feminist and feminine interpretation of human relations. Those women who might have protested gender inequities would have surely found the civil service during World War II antagonistic to feminism. Frequently, feminism was equated, or at least associated, with socialism and communism. Although elected officials had long demonstrated hostility toward socialists and communists, the late 1930s witnessed a revival in intensity of anti-radical rhetoric and investigations. Most notably, in 1938 the House Un-American Activities Committee under the leadership of Martin Dies began extensive probes into communist activity within the civil service. As the European war accelerated and the Pacific war began, the federal government, under the auspices of the Civil Service Commission and Justice Department, conducted loyalty and character investigations of civil servants.⁶⁰

The war against totalitarianism validated the equation of dissent with non-conformity and therefore helped dilute more radical forms of feminism. Personnel officials and agency administrators who had the power to define “dissent” used it to label outspoken critics of federal labor policies as “communists.” This proved especially damaging for union members, like those from the CIO’s UFWA, who championed gender equity as one of their causes. Helen Miller, a Labor Department employee with high efficiency ratings, was targeted for investigation after she raised questions about the department’s promotion policies. As chair of the UFWA’s adjustment committee, Miller

⁵⁹ Employee Relations Committee Meeting Minutes, 7 Feb. 1945, RG 146, Council Files, 1938–54, 1944–50, box 12, 3. Council Committee (14) Employee Relations 1948, NARA. The Women’s Bureau agreed with the protective approach to labor policies. To support protective labor legislation, Bureau administrators consistently argued that women worked out of economic necessity rather than out of personal choice. Sealander, *As Minority Becomes Majority*, 104–5.

⁶⁰ On the Dies Committee and its anti-communist probes, see Richard Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York, 1990), 45–49, and Eleanor Bontecou, *The Federal Loyalty-Security Program* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1953), 8–10. Bontecou also reviewed a provision in the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1941, section 9A of the Hatch Act and other statutes which prohibited federal employees from belonging to organizations advocating the overthrow of the government. *The Federal Loyalty-Security Program*, 10–21.



*Women War Workers Read and Socialize in the Lounge of Lucy D. Slowe Hall, a 299 Room Government-Sponsored Dormitory for African-American Government Women . Built to alleviate the city's housing shortage, this segregated dormitory, along with others such as Arlington Farms, sought to provide secure and inexpensive living quarters for "government girls." Located at Third and U Streets, N.W., this dorm was only half full as of December 1943. Federal officials speculated that its location, approximately three miles from most government buildings, may have accounted for its low occupancy rate. (Copyright *Washington Post*; reprinted by permission of the Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library.)*

was a vocal and visible supporter of workers' rights. After being labeled a "subversive" by the Dies Committee, Miller was questioned

for nine hours by department administrators without benefit of counsel or union representation. She was then dismissed from the department (with one hour's notice) and denied the right to an open hearing.⁶¹

The government's loyalty concerns deepened after the war, as evidenced by President Harry Truman's 1947 executive order establishing a loyalty-security program in each agency. One of the first employees dismissed under this program was a fifteen-year veteran of the civil service, Dorothy Bailey. As mentioned, Bailey was a highly-paid training supervisor at the U.S. Employment Service (USES), a member of the Society for Personnel Administration and the Society for the Advancement of Management as well as an activist union leader. Bailey had been President of UFWA Local 10, a general vice-president of UFWA, and a member of the International Executive Board of UFWA's successor union, the United Public Workers of America (UPWA). Throughout her union career, she had aggressively pursued racial and gender equity. In 1945 she had assisted the union in devising reconversion policies which would minimize the impact of layoffs on women and minority workers. She had also engaged in a fight to halt her employer, the U.S. Employment Service, from separating black and white job candidates on lists they released to potential employers.⁶²

Bailey, unlike many, decided to fight her dismissal in the courts. But while she insisted that the loyalty program violated her civil rights, others focused on her forceful personality. One newspaper reporter commented on her "active" social life, and claimed that although she was not married, she was not the "spinster type." A judge, ruling on whether she could have her job back while her case was under consideration, wrote that she asked for "too much" and was "too impatient." In the end, in a four to four decision, the Supreme Court let stand Bailey's dismissal and the constitutionality of the President's loyalty order.⁶³

Bailey's case underscored the attack made in the postwar era on the more liberal form of human relations. Bailey was a social reformer

⁶¹ *Federal Record* 4 (20 June 1941; 18 July 1941; and 1 Aug. 1941); C. Renner to Perkins, received 1 May 1942, RG 174, Office of Secretary, box 112, Administration—Personnel 1942, NARA.

⁶² *Federal Record* 7 (6 June 1945; May 1946); *Washington Evening Star*, 27 March 1949.

⁶³ *New York Times*, 18 Nov. 1948; 23 Feb. 1949; 19 March 1949; 29 July 1949; 23 March 1950; 26 March 1950; and 1 May 1951. *Washington Evening Star*, 27 March 1949; 17 May 1949. On the legal questions involved in the Bailey case see Bontecou, *The Federal Loyalty-Security Program* 64, 119, 133, 138–140, 226, 229–31, 233–34.

who became interested in personnel administration while at the University of Minnesota. She had majored in psychology, the basis of human relations, and clearly benefited from this more feminine approach to personnel management as she worked her way up from clerk to supervisor of the USES's training section. Her active work in the Society of Personnel Administration and Society for the Advancement of Management similarly illustrated her commitment to this field. Yet ultimately she, like Helen Miller before her, became threatening because she chose to link her feminism to organizational power. In the postwar era, Bailey's collectivist, liberal, and activist orientation to her work proved incompatible with prevailing political ideologies and cultural norms. Opponents of these UFWA-CIO members may have been more disturbed by their alleged Communist Party connections and advocacy for the working class than by their stand on gender equity. Nevertheless, the postwar backlash against liberal causes had the effect of stifling the more progressive version of human relations championed by some personnel officers and employees.

The Bailey case revealed how the loyalty issue marginalized the feminism linked to the CIO and to groups supporting forms of socialism and communism. It, along with psychological paternalism, narrowed the debate over sex discrimination. Administrators pointed to the success of individual women who occupied professional or high-ranking managerial positions, but failed to acknowledge that institutional biases against women existed in the civil service. This, in turn, made it more difficult for contemporary progressive reformers as well as future feminists to address and debate some of the underlying causes of gender inequity within the workplace.

Conclusion

The new style of employee relations in the civil service had both debilitating and liberating consequences for civil servants. By arguing that supervisors should not dominate employees with an iron fist, personnel managers softened the tone of labor relations. An emphasis in human relations on personal interaction, moreover, reinforced a notion that employees were to be treated with respect. Human relations experts rejected as counterproductive the impersonal relationship between managers and workers. This resulted in a tempering of the harsh environment often associated with the workplace. Likewise recreation, housing, and social programs were important services to

the many employees who sought camaraderie with co-workers, needed housing, or enjoyed organized activity. Finally, the human relations approach gave women roles as counselors and orientation advisors and allowed them to participate in the construction of a new work culture. Indeed, the presence and voices of women in the civil service encouraged the development of this more nurturing method of management. But in the end the approach actually shifted the focus of labor policy away from issues of institutional discrimination to those of adjustment to pre-existing structures and work relationships. Overall, these management policies made it more difficult for the next generation of activists to eliminate the concept of gender difference as the basis of a sexual division of labor.

Gendered management practices and policies were not inherently discriminatory. Rather, as this article suggests, gender was a malleable concept shaped to fit a variety of ideological perspectives. What is crucial, however, is that gender issues were woven into the very fabric of the civil service. Perceptions of the proper boundaries between masculine and feminine behavior enhanced the tendency of management to legitimate authority using gendered terms. This entrenched the concept of difference into personnel decision-making. While “difference” was not necessarily equivalent to inequality, it could and did become a justification for retaining a sexual division of labor. In order to understand more specifically why and how the dramatic changes in the labor market did not produce more lasting benefits for women in the workplace, it is crucial to examine specific experiences such as those in the civil service.

The construction of these gendered management strategies resulted from neither unassailable forces, nor a conscious conspiracy to deny women employment equity. Federal management programs and practices resulted from a complex interaction of political ideologies, labor market shifts, state expansion, and the popularization of certain psychological theories and methods in the late 1930s and 1940s. Because of its permeability as a political institution in a democratic society, the state was perhaps more susceptible to these currents than other large employers. As a further consequence of its permeability and its expansion in the twentieth century, the organizational culture of the administrative state was in a constant state of redefinition. A wartime crisis that brought many more women into the civil service contributed to that redefinition.

The path of federal labor relations has not been gender-neutral. Therefore, the incorporation of gender into the history of public per-

sonnel administration provides a more textured vision of power relations within the federal bureaucracy. Gender helps to explain the construction of federal labor relations in the 1940s and unveils the cultural ideals encoded in this process. Gender and gender relations, then, informed not only the content of employee relations policies, but also the relationship between agency managers and employees. Because of the rapid growth of the state in the late twentieth century, federal labor relations have had a profound impact on the American polity and economy. Only by opening our field of vision can we begin to understand the nature and full ramifications of this impact.