

Utilizing Gender Diversity Initiatives at U.S. State Level Agencies

Helisse Levine
Long Island University

This exploratory research empirically examines the impact of the utilization of diversity organizational practices on the career progression of women to executive positions in state-level government organizations in the United States. The design includes an online survey instrument sent to a purposive sample of 600 female administrative agency executives in 50 states. A standard OLS regression model tested the predictive power of diversity utilization practice variables on the dependent variable, career progression of women to upper level management. As hypothesized, women who utilized diversity initiatives offered by their organizations decreased the amount of time it took them to achieve executive-level status ($B = -.243, p = .065$). It is suggested that in order to guarantee that women, and particularly minority women, participate in the effective managing of public organizations – regulations, laws, procedures and policies must be advanced through utilization.

Despite the statutory legal framework for gender equity over the past decades (Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Executive Order 11375 and most recently, The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009), the advancement of women into executive-level (Oakley, 2000) and elected (Arceneaux, 2001) positions, particularly among immigrants and women of color, continues to lag behind that of their male counterparts at both the federal (Ricucci, 2009; Hsieh & Winslow, 2006) and state (Bowling, Kelleher, Jones & Wright, 2006) levels. Most recently, the U.S. Bureau of Labor reported that since the Depression of 2008, men in the prime working age group (25-54 years) experienced greater increases in unemployment and larger declines in employment than did women (Borbely, 2008; Hartmann, English & Hayes, 2010). Of the total 8.1 percent unemployment rate for all women in 2009 (10.3 percent for men), unemployment among Asian and White women stood at 6.6 percent and 7.3 percent, respectively.

In contrast, unemployment for Hispanic women stood at 11.5 percent and black

women unemployment topped at 12.4 percent (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Further, The Center for American Women and Politics (2010) indicates that in 2010 of the 315 statewide elective available positions, women held 72 or only 22.9 percent. As women are at the point to exceed men on the nation's payroll for the first time in American history (Rampell, 2009) caution must be taken to the persistent gender and racial inequities in upper level executive positions of government agencies. Cooper Jackson's 2001 survey of middle managers reminds us that the glass ceiling remains an issue for women – emphasizing that organizations have not successfully implemented initiatives to help women overcome barriers to career advancement.

This study broadens the conceptual framework within which the factors affecting women's career advancement have previously been examined to determine whether utilization of policies aimed at gender diversity facilitates women's career advancement to executive positions in state level agencies. Based on the gendered organization model of diversity introduced by Bell and Nkomo (1992), it is suggested that in order to guarantee that women participate in the effective managing of contemporary society - regulations, laws, procedures and policies must be advanced through utilization. Prior research, including D'Agostino and Levine (2009), McDonald, Brown and Bradley (2005); Konrad and Linnehan (1999), and Knaff and Kellough (2003) suggest that even when policies have been adopted they may still remain ineffective in achieving their aims.

This study is distinct in considering the importance of utilization of diversity policies as the primary indicator of women's attainment of executive-level positions in U.S. state government agencies. Further, this research adds value to previous literature by surveying women who have actually attained an executive position in the public sector, and by determining not only the impact of diversity policies and practices on breaking the glass ceiling but also the degree to which utilization of those practices impacts women's ability to attain upper-level positions. Women's under-representation in executive and elected positions precludes long term realization of social equity in our public organizations. Achieving equal representation of women in executive level positions is a necessary step in closing the gender diversity gap and realizing social equity in our public organizations. Of critical consequence is the future of a sustainable, diverse and competent workforce that is necessary to compete in an always changing, seemingly resource constrained, and ever competitive global market.

The following section examines earlier research on gender diversity, including organizational barriers, managing diversity, and diversity policies and practices. Next, utilization variables commonly associated with the underrepresentation of women in upper-level management are developed using models that build on previous studies. Using descriptive and inferential statistics, the impact of the utilization of diversity policies is measured. The paper concludes with a discussion and areas for future research.

Literature Review

Gendered Organization Structure

The overriding theoretical framework that informs this study centers on the gendered organization model of diversity first introduced by Bell and Nkomo (1992) and drawn on sub-

sequently by Cooper Jackson (2001), Pitts (2006) and Pitts, Hicklin Hawes and Melton (2010). The gendered organization structure model (GOS) explains the status and experiences of women (and men) in organizations across organizational culture and organizational structure (Cooper Jackson, 2001). For example, researchers of gender diversity including Gilbert and Ivancevich (2000), Brudney, Hebert and Wright (2000), and Soni (2000) contend that organizational culture is an integral indicator of the representation of women in upper-level management in both the public and private sectors. White and Rice (2005) indicate that an inclusive work culture is an essential condition in achieving long term efficiencies in public service. Fagenson (1993) discusses how organizational structure impedes women's entry to and advancement in the workplace. That structure can include job recruitment, job assignment, mentoring, retention, training, employee work and family balance, and promotion and reward systems. Bajdo and Dickson (2001) found that the greatest predictor of the number of women in management positions results from organizations that focus on aspects of organizational culture relating to gender equity practices. Similarly, Miller (2009) argues that organizational culture in general, and stereotypical masculine styles of management deter female career progression.

Notably, Acker (1990, 1992) proposed a systematic theory of gender and organizations as a result of gender inequalities in the workforce created and promoted by organizational practices. Specifically, Acker defines organizations as "gendered processes in which both gender and sexuality have been obscured through a gender-neutral, asexual discourse" (p. 140). Looking at policies and practices in women's and men's prisons, Britton (1997) extends Acker's theory of gendered organizations and the perpetuation of gendered inequalities to reflect the ways officer assignments benefit male officers working in men's institutions when compared to their female counterparts. Britton suggests that a policy or practice is defined as gendered to the extent that, "although it may be gender-neutral on its face, it reproduces and sustains gender stratification and/or gender-based inequality in an organizational or occupational context" (p. 798). Recent work by Acker (2006) reports that feminists have looked at the gendering of organizations and organizational practices to understand how the persistence of inequalities between women and men continue despite numerous attempts to erase such inequalities.

Diversity Management

Although the GOS model is intended as an intervention and a proactive approach to fully and equitably utilizing, integrating and rewarding workers of different racial/ethnic and gender backgrounds there exists variation in defining diversity management (Pitts, 2006; Wise & Tschirhart, 2000). Pitts (2006) for example defines diversity management as recruitment programs, programs aimed to increase cultural awareness and pragmatic management policies. Most definitions of diversity management consider only processes that occur after the hiring stage, differentiating diversity management from affirmative action programs. According to Riccucci (2002) managing diversity is behavioral and strategic, whereas EEO is legislative and quantitative. Soni (2000) defines managing diversity as "developing organizational structures and processes that effectively utilize diversity and create an equitable and fair work environment for employees of all racial/ethnic and gender

groups” (p. 396). In general, however, diversity management programs are aimed at: 1) Increasing sensitivity to cultural differences; 2) Developing the ability to recognize, accept and value diversity; 3) Minimizing patterns of inequality experienced by women and minorities; 4) Improving cross cultural interactions and interpersonal relationships among different gender and ethnic groups and 5) Modifying organizational culture and leadership practices (Cox 1993; Loden & Rosener 1991; Roosevelt, 1991; Carrell & Mann 1995). Moreover, seven core components of diversity management were identified by Kellough and Naff (2004): ensuring management accountability; examining organizational structure, culture, and management systems; paying attention to representation; providing training; developing mentoring programs; promoting internal advocacy groups; and emphasizing shared values among stakeholders. .

Corporate climate has also been cited as a cultural barrier embedded in organizations (Cooper Jackson, 2001). According to a report by the U.S. Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), America’s corporate climate is still not open to diverse ideas of acceptable behavior. Such barriers can influence women’s performance evaluations and potentially contribute to “inhospitable and exclusionary environments” (Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998). Moreover, national (Fagenson, 1993; Tsui & Gutek, 1999; Stivers, 1993, 2000) and international (Burton, 1997; Bayes, 1991) organizational studies document the inequalities between men and women in management. Bell and Nkomo (1992) add that gender inequality literature envelops three fields of inquiry: women as managers (Carli, 1999; Lewis, 1998), differences between male and female behaviors in organizations (Martin, 2000; Chiu, 1998), and organizational barriers to the career progression of women (Morrison, 1995). These organizational barriers include career development patterns, workplace policies, and lack of mentoring that directly affect women’s ability to progress in organizations (Guy, 2003). The existence of informal networks, the stereotyping of women’s capacity for leadership, and a lack of female role models have also been identified as preventing women from ascending to board-level and chief executive officer positions in both private and public organizations (“Conundrum” 2005). Scholars of diversity management including Rose and Hartmann, 2003 and Blau, Ferber, and Winkler, 1998 insist that in order to achieve gender equality, organizational policies, including flexible work hours, paid leaves of absence, subsidies for child care, job sharing, home-based employment, mentoring, networking, and finding ways to create a better work-life balance must be encouraged

Utilization

Past research on the implementation of diversity policies such as reward systems for achieving inclusionary goals, on communicating the “vision” of valuing cultural and gender diversity through in-house newsletters, and on the existence of active AA/EEO committees, as well as on women’s inclusion in informal networks (Cooper Jackson, 2001), has demonstrated their positive impact on women’s career progression to executive levels (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). Cooper-Jackson’s 2001 survey of middle managers suggests that the glass ceiling remains an issue for women. The female respondents in the study did not believe that their organizations had successfully implemented initiatives to help them overcome barriers to career advancement. Similarly, Mattis (2004) found that women left

corporate America due to the need for more workplace flexibility, experience with glass ceiling factors, and the lack of challenges on the job. Whether policies and practices are successfully utilized also depends on how they are perceived by an organization's members (Kottke & Agars, 2006a, b). One perception is that gender-based policies, often seen as directed exclusively at women – are often underutilized (Konrad & Linnehan, 1999). Konrad and Linnehan (1999) explored the rather modest gains in advancement women have made despite many initiatives designed to help them make such gains. Soni's (2000) study examines how the receptivity to diversity management and receptivity to the diversity climate influence effective utilization of diversity initiatives. These authors maintain that unless underlying organizational processes are addressed and organizational practices are embraced by all members, barriers to women's advancement will remain.

An important study by Pitts (2007) uses policy implementation research as a driver to prescribe diversity guidelines for public managers. Although programs exist that aim to improve organizational outcomes factors other than program usefulness, continue to determine whether employees will utilize those programs (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999) including how policies are perceived by an organization's members (Kottke & Agars, 2006a,b). Other studies examining the utilization of family-friendly policies maintain that employees are reluctant to participate in such programs if they believe that participation will threaten their career path (Connor, Hooks & Mcguire, 1997; Catalyst, 1998; Gerson, 1993; Powell, 1997; Veiga, Baldrige & Eddleston, 2004). Likewise, employees fear that utilizing family-friendly programs may result in a negative assessment of their abilities by others (Gross & McMullen, 1993; Lee, 1997) or that instead of being seen as demonstrating commitment to the organization, they will be stigmatized as prioritizing family responsibilities (Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996). Most recently, using data from the Board of Education, Pitts et al. (2010), examine organizational factors that impact the implementation of diversity management practices, including environmental uncertainty, environmental favorability, and institutional isomorphis. Pitts (2007) provides the most comprehensive review of policy implementation literature to develop five guidelines for public managers who wish to develop successful diversity management initiatives, including devoting resources to diversity management programs and clear communication of the diversity effort.

In studying factors that facilitate efforts to implement Affirmative Action Programs (AA) in three Arizona police departments, Allen (2003) found that the impetus for hiring minorities and women came from externally imposed sources, such as court orders, lawsuits and financial incentives (federal grants) linked to other departmental programs. Both street- and mid-level officers reported that "without external pressure, it was highly possible that AA would not be a part of their departmental recruitment plan" (pg. 414). Most recently, in an examination of the utilization of employee friendly policies, Berman, Bowman, West and Van Wart (2010) corroborate that even though programs are adopted, they might not be used. Importantly, the authors caution that "failure or underutilization of one should not diminish the value of others" (pg. 264).

Although public policy scholars from Friedrich (1963) and Parsons (1994) to Schneider and Ingram (1997) observe the importance of policies in maintaining values, institutions and actions, adherence to those policies is a necessary step to enhance the quality of

Table 1. Survey Respondent Demographics

Age		Ethnicity	
Average Age	53.6	Caucasian	75.0%
Median Age	55.0	Black/African American	4.2%
Range	32.7	Hispanic	4.2%
		Asian	2.10%

Survey Respondent Demographics: n = 61

decisions, rationalize the decision-making process, identify objectives for staff to implement and demonstrate a commitment to long term. Adherence to policies therefore, is critical in achieving women advancement to executive level positions.

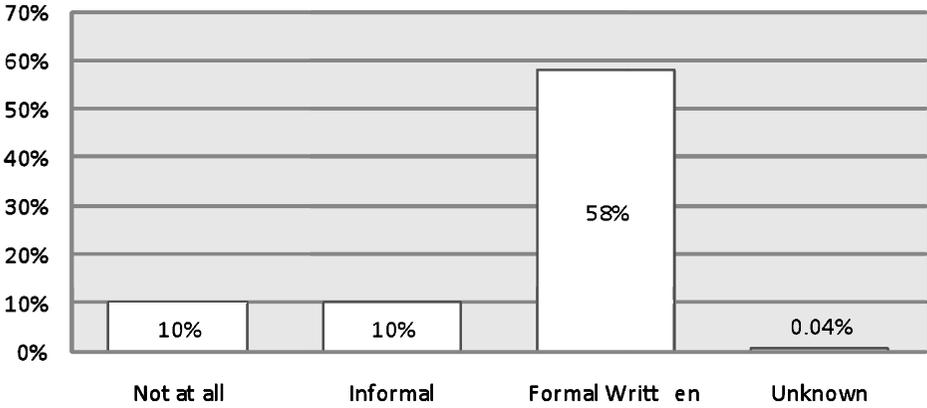
Data and Methods

An online survey instrument was sent to female heads of administrative agencies in fifty states using the professional online survey system Psychdata. The identified sample frame, *Council of State Governments Directory III: Administrative Officials* (2008), is a biennial publication listing the administrative heads by type of agency (function). The listing of agency heads was current as of May 2008, the year prior to the one in which the survey was conducted. (It takes several months to compile and publish each list). Given the limited population of 1,200 female agency heads, the exploratory nature of the study, and research objective, a purposive non-probability sampling method was used (Singleton & Straits, 2010). Although non probability sampling poses challenges to variability and controlling for bias, when conducting exploratory research and working with small samples it is best left to expert judgment rather than chance (Singleton & Straits, 2010). Based on the purpose of our study, 779 female agency heads in all fifty states with e-mail addresses were selected; 109 e-mails were returned as undeliverable. The response rate was 9.1 percent, with a total of 61 responses. Given the use of a purposive sample and the exploratory nature of the research, a low response rate is acceptable since the objective is to learn more about the problem and not generalize back to the population (Singleton & Straits 2010).

The survey instrument consisting of 33 closed-ended questions was constructed to gain insight into whether women who have achieved upper management positions in state government agencies utilized diversity policies and to reflect the theoretical framework of the study. Diversity policies are operationalized on two dimensions, breadth and depth. The degree to which diversity policies are maintained by the agency represented the breadth dimension. The specificity dimension led to an analysis of policies utilized by respondent including 1) diversity awareness programs, 2) recognition programs, 3) active AA/EEO committees, 4) recruitment programs, and 5) public exposure of diversity efforts. Questions were asked about the degree which policies were maintained by the organization; which initiatives were present in the organization; and whether they utilized or participated in the programs.

To determine whether and to what degree diversity policies were maintained by respondents' agency, survey questions were designed on a four-point Likert scale coded as

Table 2. Gender Diversity Policies



4=Unknown, 3=Formal, 2=Informal and 1=None. The respondents also identified first which initiatives were present in the organization and second, whether they utilized or participated in the initiatives. Responses were coded based on frequency of occurrence. Scores for each of the components were obtained by summing the responses to each of the relevant survey items. Initiatives included 1) Diversity Awareness workshops, 2) Awards or Recognition programs, 3) AA/EEO committee office, 4) Recruitment programs for women and 5) Diversity efforts given public exposure inside and outside the agency. Demographics were collected regarding the respondents’ ethnicity/race, terminal degree, the number of years they had been at their present position, the number of years they had been at their current agency, and the title that best described their position. Data from the survey instrument were entered into SPSS statistical software for analysis.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, career progression of women, is defined as women who have achieved the position of agency head – including director, commissioner or chairperson – at the state level. This definition is a standard classification in past and present gender research (Brudney, Hebert, & Wright, 2000). For the purposes of this study, this variable is measured by the length of time each respondent was at her agency prior to attaining executive position.

Independent Variables

Utilization is defined as practices, programs, and initiatives resulting from policy implementation that are exercised (i.e., used) by agency employees. Diversity utilization was operationalized using survey questions indicating whether available policies were utilized by respondent. Respondent was asked to identify which diversity initiative she had utilized or participated in including 1) Diversity Awareness workshops, 2) Awards or Recognition pro-

Table 3. Diversity Initiatives Utilization

Diversity	Practices	Utilization	Percentage Utilization of Practices
Diversity awareness workshops	27	23	85.2%
Diversity awards or recognition	4	0	0.0%
An active AA/EEO Committee Office	20	5	25.0%
Targeted recruiting of women for non managerial positions	7	3	42.9%
Diversity efforts given public exposure inside and outside the agency (i.e. newsletters)	18	10	55.6%

grams, 3) active AA/EEO committee office, 4) targeted recruiting of women for non-managerial positions, and 5) diversity efforts given public exposure inside and outside the agency.

Control Variables

In order to achieve gender equality, organizational policies, including flexible work hours, paid leaves of absence, subsidies for child care, job sharing, home-based employment, mentoring, networking, and finding ways to create a better work-life balance must be encouraged (Rose & Hartmann, 2003; Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 1998). Similarly, Mattis (2004) found that women left corporate America due to the need for more workplace flexibility, experience with glass ceiling factors, and the lack of challenges on the job. This study controls for 1) work family and 2) promotional utilization policies. Work family utilization was defined as a composite variable including questions surrounding dependent care services and flexible work options. Promotional utilization included line position, training and development, and gender mentoring.

Results

As illustrated in Table 1: Survey Respondent Demographics, the average age of the 61 respondents was 53.6 years; 75 percent of the women were Caucasian, two were Black/African American, two were Hispanic, and one identified herself as Asian. Respondents had been working in their present executive position nearly 12 years, on average, and had reached executive-level position in an average of 7.2 years. Table 2: Diversity Policies reflects that more than 50 percent of respondents have formal diversity policies in place in their organizations, and a very small amount, less than 5 percent of organizations have no diversity policies at all. Table 3: Diversity Initiatives Utilizations shows that over 85 percent of respondents have utilized diversity awareness workshops yet none have participated in awards or recognition activities.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Model

	B	SE_B	β	t	P
Dependent variable: Career Progression					
Independent variables:					
Constant	4.991	1.764		2.830	.006
Family-friendly utilization	-.005	1.066	-.005	-.037	.971
Diversity utilization	-.243	.892	-.243	1.880	.065(*)
Promotion utilization	.167	.524	.167	1.223	.226

Career Progression = a + B1 (Diversity Utilization) + Control Variables [B2 (Family-Friendly Utilization) + B3 (Promotion Utilization)]

(*) p = .065

n = 61

The next phase of this project used a standard multiple regression analysis, which was performed to model the relationships between the dependent variable – career progression of women to upper level management – and diversity initiatives utilization explanatory variable. Shown in Table 4: Multiple Regression Model, the most important statistically significant finding to emerge is that women who utilized the diversity initiatives offered by their organizations decreased the amount of time it took them to achieve executive-level status, by .243 years (B = -.243, p = .065). While it is common in social science literature to use a 5 percent significance level, given the exploratory nature of the study and the purposive sampling method, using a 6 percent significance level, while compromising generalizability back to the population from which the respondents were drawn, does not compromise the importance of this finding.

Discussion

Legislation was enacted to help women overcome impediments and facilitate their career progression into executive-level positions. These legislative actions have indeed fostered the implementation of many organizational policies aimed at promoting women past the pervasive glass ceiling. Arguably, it was suggested that despite the enactment of these policies, women continue to be underrepresented in upper-level executive positions. Previous studies of organizational barriers, policies, and practices related to gender inequality and the glass ceiling examined 1) middle managers’ perceptions of organizational policies and practices in the private sector, 2) the passive and active representation of women in state agen-

cies, 3) the type of agencies at which women make it to the top and 4) the extent to which women are represented in the top-level administrative and professional positions in state bureaucracies. This study went beyond previous research and built upon the Gendered Organization Structure model of diversity by examining utilization in two ways: by surveying women who have actually attained an executive position in the public sector, and by determining not only the impact of policies and practices on breaking the glass ceiling but also the degree to which utilization of those practices impacts women's ability to attain upper-level positions. In this research, several barriers to career progression with particular focus on the utilization of diversity practices were identified. To control barriers to women's career progression, organizational policies and practices aimed at diversity are increasingly being fashioned and implemented; this study questioned the impact of the utilization of those practices.

As previous research has determined, valuing gender diversity is an integral indicator of the representation of women in upper-level management in both the public and private sectors (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; Brudney, Hebert, & Wright, 2000; Soni, 2000). The results of the regression model support the literature, including Soni (2000) in explaining the importance of utilization of diversity initiatives. Contrary to expectations, however, the statistical data did not support the contention that women who utilized family-friendly and promotion practices, control variables in this study, would reach executive level positions in less time. As discussed by Konrad and Linnehan (1999) these results might be explained by the ongoing perception at that organizational level that view such policies as only women's issues, rather than a matter for society at large. At the organizational level, values, policies and practices related to gender equity need to be institutionalized into the culture as a first step in women's advancement. This finding underscores the importance of developing a national gender policy in order to refocus the benefits and purpose of gender based policies from only women - to society in general. A gender policy discourse on the national level, instead of on a state per state or organizational level, may facilitate such a broader societal transformation.

Findings in this study highlight the necessity of looking beyond practices and policies and focusing on organizational culture and society in order to increase the utilization of certain practices deemed crucial to closing the gender gap. As argued by Guy (2003), the glass ceiling persists due to societal barriers. Women's career progression will not be achieved in isolation of these barriers. Of critical consequence is the future of a sustainable, diverse, competent workforce that is necessary to be competitive in a global market.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research yields both theoretical and practical implications. More research on the utilization of gender practices is needed. Are practices being utilized? If so, why? If not, why not? Although policies – and the implementation of policies – are important to stimulating organizational and behavioral change, I have shown that it is not sufficient simply to have a formal or informal policy, or even a formalized program, in an agency. The influence of both internal organizational factors and external societal factors on the impediments to utilization needs to be examined theoretically.

Practitioners need to think of the gender gap not simply as a policy issue but as an organizational culture issue. Results of this study show that policy and programs cannot be effectively implemented without considering cultural and societal barriers that influence successful utilization. Employees should be encouraged, if not required, to utilize programs.

Limitations and Future Research

Results of this first step toward determining the impact of the utilization of organizational practices on women's career progression is not without limitations. First is the small sample of executive-level women in state public sector agencies. Given the use of a purposive sampling design and the exploratory nature of the research, the main objective is to learn more about the problem, rather than infer back to the population. Because in hypothesis testing a sample size that is too small is likely to produce a fail-to-reject decision and tend to bring forth a Type II error, this may result in not detecting something relevant that had occurred (Allison, 1999). A larger sample may have produced evidence that certain policy differences were significant. However, McClosky and Ziliak (1996) state that a difference, although not statistically significant, can be meaningful for policy and should not be ignored.

Further, the low response rate may be attributed to the use of the CSG Directory, which limited contact information to selected administrative agencies, and an online survey instrument. A mixed-method approach using traditional paper surveys or structured telephone interviews would reach a larger number of women; it would also be a valuable contribution to future research. In addition, interviews would aid in better understanding why women utilize – or do not utilize – certain policies, and what specifically needs to be done to address the career progression of women to executive-level positions.

Future research should extend across gender and sector. The career progression of women to executive status in the workplace is a societal issue, and the implementation of policies and the creation of programs have implications for all members of our society. Although Rich (2005) notes that “diversity in the workplace has generally become an accepted American norm” (pg. 139), if the importance of career progression to executive-level positions is understood and defined as a societal issue that impacts men as well as women, I am hopeful that barriers that impede women's opportunities and perpetuate the under-utilization of practices, as discussed in this study, will render the “gender gap” extinct. After all, as Cooper Jackson (2010) so aptly questions and I reiterate here, “We've come a long way, baby! Or have we?” (p. 30).

Helisse Levine is an Assistant Professor in the MPA Program, School of Business, Public Administration and Information Sciences at Long Island University, Brooklyn, NY. She received her PhD in Public Administration from Rutgers University in 2005. Her research interests include public and nonprofit budgeting and financial management and the issue of gender in the public sector. She can be contacted at: helisse.levine@liu.edu.

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