

# WOMEN'S POLICY JOURNAL OF HARVARD,

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



VOLUME 4 • SUMMER 2007

## ARTICLES

Women Entrepreneurs and Access to Finance in Pakistan

*Carmen Niethammer, Tania Saeed, Shaheen Sidi Mohamed, and Yasser Charafi*

HIV Prevention in Sex Worker Populations: A Policy and Program Review

*Katy Quissell*

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John F. Kennedy School of Government,  
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## CALL FOR PAPERS

**DEADLINE: 17 DECEMBER 2007**

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The *Women's Policy Journal of Harvard, John F. Kennedy School of Government* is accepting submissions for its summer 2008 volume. The journal is a student-run, nonpartisan review dedicated to publishing interdisciplinary work on policy making and politics affecting women. By bridging the divide between academics and practitioners, the journal seeks to educate and provide leadership that improves the quality of public policies affecting women with the intention of furthering female economic, social, and political empowerment.

We seek papers that explore the impact public policies have on women both in the United States and around the world and provide new insight into issues affecting diverse groups of women. Articles and commentaries can also offer a gendered or a woman's perspective on pressing political, social, and economic policy issues or investigate the role of women in the policy-making sphere.

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- **Research articles** should be between 4,000 and 7,000 words and include a 100-word abstract.
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- All figures, tables, and charts must be submitted as entirely separate files.
- A cover letter should include the author's name, address, e-mail address, daytime phone number, and a brief biography.
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## EDITOR'S NOTES

As graduate students at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, we are trained to consider data, whether quantitative or qualitative, as central to the policy making process. Fundamental to our education is thus learning how to work with data—to analyze it, critique it, synthesize it, communicate it, apply it, and even create it. Yet in the real world, we discover that all too often there is a disconnect between research and practice; although the data exists, it is not adequately utilized in policy formulation.

It is this disconnect that, in part, motivates the publication of the *Women's Policy Journal of Harvard, John F. Kennedy School of Government's* fourth volume. In it we showcase works that seek to bridge the divide between research and practice, thereby illuminating policy, program, and research priorities. The value of such efforts is evident in Katy Quissell's "HIV Prevention in Sex Worker Populations: A Policy and Program Review," which, in assessing the current research and interventions to combat the spread of HIV within this vulnerable and often hard-to-reach population, highlights what works and what does not.

From how governments can provide women access to finance beyond the traditional microfinance model and how gang interventions can ensure that their services are meeting the distinct needs of females, to how changing norms and workplace policies can help increase rates of exclusive breastfeeding—the articles contained here offer practical, evidence-based solutions to some of the most pressing, and often overlooked, problems women face today. Even the book reviewed, *Her Place at the Table: A Woman's Guide to Negotiating Five Key Challenges to Leadership Success* by Deborah M. Kolb, Judith Williams, and Carol Frohlinger, bridges the research/practice divide by distilling hundreds of primary interviews with women leaders into operational strategies that women can use in their daily lives. Whether you are an advocate, an educator, a program manager, a policy maker, or just a curious citizen, we hope you'll find the content of this volume to be interesting, enlightening, and, most of all, useful.

The publication of this volume would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the journal's staff. Collectively they have labored for countless hours to ensure that the articles included here are of the highest quality. In particular I must acknowledge the contributions of Cheryl Baum, our managing editor, who has been a tremendous help to me in the deft and efficient way she handles every task and in the sound advice she offers at every turn. I also would be remiss if I did not show our appreciation for our publishers, Christine Connare and Jennifer Smetana, and our faculty advisor, Professor Richard Parker, all of whom have been invaluable sources of guidance and encouragement. In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the extraordinary support provided to the journal by two research centers at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations and the Women and Public Policy Program, as well as the office of Senior Associate Dean and Director of Degree Programs Joseph McCarthy, and the Kennedy School Student Government. This publication is truly a group effort and an accomplishment to be celebrated by the entire KSG community.

Sincerely,  
Marissa Bohrer  
Editor-in-Chief



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# WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND ACCESS TO FINANCE IN PAKISTAN

*Carmen Niethammer, Tania Saeed, Shaheen Sidi Mohamed, and Yasser Charafi*

*This paper does not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank Group.*

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## **Abstract**

Women are emerging as important players in Pakistan's economy. Despite an increasing presence in the micro, small, and medium enterprise sectors, women's lack of access to finance remains one of the key constraints for enterprise growth. This paper highlights the benefits of greater access to finance for women in Pakistan and provides an overview of the constraints and opportunities for increasing access. In addition to financial and nonfinancial recommendations for microfinance institutions, the paper provides suggestions for how the government can promote women's access to finance and, in so doing, support women's social and economic empowerment.

## **Introduction**

This paper sheds light on some of the issues regarding women's access to finance in Pakistan at the micro, small, and medium enterprise levels, both from the demand and supply sides. The paper argues that improved access to financial instruments that are appropriate for women, as well as the provision of nonfinancial services, would help women grow and professionalize their businesses into more competitive ventures (Goheer 2003). This is especially important not only for women's empowerment in general, but also for increasing female employment in the private sector, where participation stands at about 15.9 percent as of the fiscal year 2003–2004, one of the lowest in the region (Pakistan Federal Bureau of Statistics 2006).

This paper is divided into five sections: (1) the development case for women's access to finance: why is it important?; (2) the economic justification for providing access to finance for women; (3) obstacles to women's access to finance—demand-side issues; (4) obstacles to women's access to finance—supply-side issues; and (5) recommendations, which includes proposals for how to make women more bankable clients and outlines the policies, approaches, products, and services required to build women's capacities to access institutional finance.

The paper builds on the premise that economic development and women's empowerment are interrelated. In order to be effective, economic development must go hand in hand with women-focused policies (Duflo 2005). This paper thus seeks to make appropriate policy recommendations to help promote market-based financial services for women as a tool to alleviate poverty, promote women's asset ownership, create employment, empower women, and promote gender equality.

## **The Development Case for Providing Access to Finance for Women in Pakistan: Why Is It Important?**

Women-owned businesses are a minority in Pakistan, but recent trends suggest that women are beginning to emerge as increasingly important players in the country's economy (IFC). Social gender bias is a major obstacle to women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan, and providing access to finance can be an important tool for the empowerment and development of women, both at the social and political levels (Goheer 2003).



### Poverty Alleviation and Improved Social Well-being

While not a panacea, women's access to finance is an important tool for poverty reduction. In Pakistan, the weight of poverty falls primarily on women. A comparison of males versus females in the United Nations Human Poverty Index revealed that 55.8 percent of Pakistani women, compared with 41 percent of men, were living below the poverty line (Goheer 1999). Microfinance programmes in Pakistan have increasingly focused on women and have been an important aspect of the country's poverty alleviation strategy. The Ten-Year Perspective Development Plan (2001–2011) and the Three-Year Development Programmes (2001–2004) of the government of Pakistan emphasize microcredit as the main approach to improving the conditions of poor Pakistani women (Goheer 2003).

Increasingly programs not only give women and men access to credit but also savings, with the aim of promoting poverty alleviation. Savings are recognized as playing a critical role in smoothing the incomes of the poor and providing them with more predictable revenue streams (Rutherford 1999). Savings are also an important determinant of both individual and national well-being (Carpenter and Jensen 2002). According to a quarterly update on microfinance in Pakistan undertaken by MicroWatch in 2006, women comprise 39 percent of active savers, compared with 61 percent of men.

Women often view an increase of their own income, and their control over it, as a valuable tool to enhance their overall well-being and power within their household. Typically, however, the financial sustainability paradigms applied to microfinance schemes focus mainly on women's time and resources required for program efficiency or community development, while paying little attention to the impact on familial gender relations (Mayoux 2006). A participatory empowerment survey conducted by Kashf Microfinance Pakistan<sup>1</sup> found that the majority of its client base view an increase in their income as a vehicle for improving their status within the household (Hussein and Hussain 2003). For instance, 90 percent of the women considered themselves to be disempowered in matters of domestic issues and basic rights. The women aimed to improve their status through having their own income (85 percent), freedom of mobility (70 percent), and equal decision-making power with men (92 percent) (Mayoux 2006). In Kashf's 1998 Impact Assessment Study, 40 percent of respondents noted that domestic fights decreased when income increased as a result of lending. Similarly, a 2002 study of Aga Khan Rural Support Programme members concluded that the majority of men and women surveyed reported an increase in joint decision-making regarding domestic, financial, and other issues (Hussein and Hussain 2003).

### Female Employment Generation

The small to medium enterprise (SME) sector can make a significant contribution to women's employment, which is particularly important in a country like Pakistan where the female labor force participation rate is 15.9 percent, among the lowest in the region. This gap is even visibly larger in urban areas where female participation rate is as low as 9.44 percent (Pakistan Federal Bureau of Statistics 2006).



According to the State Bank of Pakistan, SMEs are defined as (1) service businesses which employ fewer than 250 people and have total assets (excluding land and building) of up to Rs 50 million; (2) manufacturing businesses which employ fewer than 250 people and have total assets (excluding land and building) of up to Rs 100 million; and (3) trading businesses that employ fewer than 50 people and have total assets (excluding land and building) of up to Rs 50 million. Alternatively, any business, whether in the trading, service, or manufacturing industry, with net sales of no more than Rs 300 million also is considered to be an SME. SMEs have played a significant role in Pakistan's economy. In 2002–2003 they contributed over 30 percent to GDP, 140 billion rupees to exports, and 25 percent of manufacturing export earnings. SMEs constitute about 90 percent of all private enterprises in the industrial sector, and employ some 78 percent of the nonagricultural labor force (SMEDA 2004).

Even though “hard data” is difficult to obtain as research on female entrepreneurs in the SME sector is scarce, a survey undertaken by the International Labor Organization (ILO) of 150 women entrepreneurs in Lahore and the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad found 39 percent of women from the sample engaged in small enterprises and 9 percent in medium enterprises. Furthermore, the sample revealed that women entrepreneurs in the SME sector provide greater employment to women. On average, women entrepreneurs were found to hire more females than their male counterparts (Goheer 2003).

### **The Economic Justification for Providing Women Access to Finance**

Evidence suggests that women's entrepreneurship is on the rise in Pakistan. The majority of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan are engaged in traditional sectors such as boutiques, aesthetics, bakeries, apparel, handicrafts, jewelry, and other similar micro and small businesses (IFC). According to a 2005 report by the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in Pakistan, the number of self-employed women has increased from 11.7 percent in 1997–1998 to 15.7 percent in 2001–2002.

While relatively modest compared to demand by men, research also shows an increase in women's demand for credit (Hussein and Hussain 2003). Even though microfinance institutions are the main players in providing financial services to women, women continue to be a minority of the borrowers of NGO credit programs. The latest microfinance performance indicator report points out that Pakistan has the lowest global ratio of female to male borrowers and suggests this discrepancy could be one of the reasons why Pakistan's microfinance sector has not been able to scale-up as successfully as other countries (PMN 2005). There is significant potential for increased outreach by NGOs as well as other financial institutions to serve this potentially rewarding market segment.

Further, increases in economic activity of women in Pakistan can represent a potentially profitable market niche for the financial sector. Over the last year, banks from developing countries have started to join the Global Banking Alliance for Women, a consortium of best practice banks that leverage the women's market for profit as well as for social purposes.<sup>2</sup> Many of these banks have reported that



the default rate for their women entrepreneur portfolio is lower than that of their overall portfolio. Women also tend to request smaller loan sizes than men.

### **Obstacles to Women's Access to Finance—Demand-side Issues**

Lack of access to finance remains a business constraint for both women and men, but evidence suggests that women face greater hurdles. A major limitation identified by women entrepreneurs is the lack of access to institutional finance to fund their start-ups and business expansions. Research conducted by the IFC in the Middle East and North African countries (MENA) indicates that women entrepreneurs at the micro and SME levels generally fund their business start-ups and expansions from personal sources (i.e., savings or loans from family and friends) to a greater extent than men. Access to formal capital is further restricted by the fact that women often do not know how to access formal finance. Because women use nontraditional financing means and often do not know how to access finance through the existing chain, finance institutions do not perceive their demand. Pakistani women also suffer from a lack of access to—and control over—capital, land, and business premises (Roomi 2005), a general trend true of women entrepreneurs in most developing countries. As a result, women-owned businesses often do not meet the minimum borrowing requirements for existing financing schemes; they tend to remain undercapitalized and are unable to reach their growth potential.

Highlighting women's difficulty in accessing credit, a 2005 study of 256 women entrepreneurs in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Quetta, and Peshawar found that access to finance remained a huge challenge for women (Roomi 2005). Women entrepreneurs faced more difficulties in mobilizing start-up capital, credit guarantees, investment capital, and experienced discrimination from bankers. The study also noted that "most of the women are shy to approach banks because of the unavailability of collateral, their inability to develop viable business plans, and above all social unacceptability of their interaction with the male bank professionals" (Roomi 2005, 7).

An analysis of women's credit needs in the cities of Rawalpindi and Karachi found that many women do not have the necessary know-how to access finance in order to run businesses effectively (Hussain, Hashmi, and Hussain Rao 1997). Similarly, businesswomen are often unfamiliar with the various nonfinancial services that are available to them.

Women entrepreneurs often resort to different sources of financing than men. Their businesses tend to be concentrated in the service sectors and usually require a small initial capital outlay and less technical knowledge (UNESCAP 2005). The majority of the 256 respondents in the Roomi 2005 study had to generate most of their business finances from personal savings, family, and friends. The research noted that "because of their limited earning potential, it is quite impossible to have significant savings to start a business. Therefore, it is only possible for a female to start a business if her family has some extra cash as start up capital and she has a strong support from members of the family to do so" (Roomi 2005, 7).

This trend was also apparent in the ILO survey, which observed that 73 percent of women used their private savings as start-up capital for their enterprises, with



only 4 percent accessing formal credit sources. Similar trends were found beyond the start-up phase. Women who borrowed from formal sources mainly used their personal assets for collateral: 27 percent used their personal belongings; 18 percent pledged their house; 18 percent used the guarantee of government officers; 9 percent used dollar account security; and 9 percent used their immovable property (Goheer 2003).

Accessing finance is also particularly difficult for women who typically do not own land and other property which they could use as collateral. According to UNICEF's 2007 State of the World's Children report, research on Pakistani women revealed that they owned less than 3 percent of plots in surveyed villages, despite having the right to inherit land in most villages. Even though Shariah law clearly entitles women to inherit land and property, Pakistani women—especially in rural areas—rarely receive their share of immovable property, according to the World Bank's 2005 country gender assessment. The same study notes that when women do inherit property, it is typically controlled by the men of the family “due to general powers of attorney, gift deeds, or voluntary relinquishment of the property by the female to the male heirs” (World Bank 2005, 20). Moreover, it is interesting to note that the tendency of women to retain inherited property does not vary according to the family's wealth. However, regional differences were observed. For instance, women in the Punjab were three to four times more likely than women in Sindh to retain inherited land. The issue of inheritance is not so much related to knowledge of women's rights as it is about culture. The assessment points out that 95 percent of women interviewed were aware of their right to inherit land, though only a minority knew the amount they were entitled to (World Bank 2005).

### **Obstacles to Women's Access to Finance—Supply-side Issues**

Women are often undervalued as economic participants and viewed as being able to handle only small loan amounts. According to Pakistan's 1998 Rural Financial Markets Study, men have over three and a half times greater access to credit compared with women in rural Pakistan. Moreover, men borrowed 91 percent of large loans, with the average size of loans given to women at 8,000 rupees, compared to 19,000 rupees borrowed by men (Hussein and Hussain 2003).

While both men and women often cite accessing formal credit as a problem, particularly at the SME level, women often face higher hurdles because financial institutions often do not have products and services that meet the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. Women typically have smaller businesses that tend to be in the service sector and may be viewed by bankers as representing higher risk—even though experience from microfinance shows that women can be excellent customers.

With NGOs' focus on microfinance and most banks serving large corporations, SME banking still remains the “missing middle” of financial services. Banks in Pakistan—similar to banks in many emerging markets—often do not have the technical know-how or expertise for dealing with SME clients. This is further hindered by traditional biases formal institutions have against small business owners operating in the informal sector—they are seen as risky clients who lack the necessary collateral needed to obtain loans (Afzal 2006). Formal institutions



are further biased against women, an outcome of social and cultural prejudices which view women solely in their domestic roles and frequently ignore or undervalue them as economic participants (Goheer 2003). This is reflected by the facts that women themselves are often not confident or able to apply for larger amounts of financing and that bank staff view women's loan applications with greater scrutiny. Respondents to the ILO survey also identified a gender bias when requesting formal financing. Of those surveyed, 66 percent agreed that being a woman was a major constraint in obtaining formal finance; 90 percent cited "procedural snags relating to their sex and strict terms of financing" (Goheer 2003, 33).

## **Recommendations**

### Develop Financial Products That Cater to Women Entrepreneurs

Women customers typically have to run their own businesses while being responsible for household expenses, food, and child care. They are extremely vulnerable when it comes to taking on loans with tight repayment schedules. Institutions looking to broaden their female customer base should design innovative loan products (including those meeting lifecycle needs) and marketing programs (for example, through sponsorship of nonfinancial services and rewarding referral systems). Training bank staff on the particular needs of potential (and existing) customers can be an important first step to increasing the women's portfolio. For example, while women customers can be attracted by providing lower interest rates and lower collateral requirements, they are often equally concerned about the transaction costs of the loan, repayment schedules, and the value of each installment. To this end, financial institutions may want to develop more appropriate procedures and flexible repayment schedules. In other countries, financial institutions have also promoted women's savings in innovative ways where group lending and guarantee schemes have encouraged lending to women.

Leasing can be a good financing alternative for women who, more often than men, do not have access to collateral to obtain loans from formal institutions. Leasing in a country like Pakistan is therefore an important source of financing because it is asset-based. Leasing products is less risky for institutions, as the equipment constitutes a security in itself and the ownership remains with the lesser. It can also be particularly useful for women SME owners who typically have difficulties qualifying for bank financing given a lack of sufficient working capital, credit history, and resources to provide collateral. Financing equipment was the main reason cited by women entrepreneurs for borrowing, with 66 percent of ILO women survey respondents having borrowed funds for equipment. This compared to 44 percent having used finance for working capital, 18 percent having borrowed for trade finance, and 9 percent for land and buildings (Goheer 2003). Thus, leasing is especially useful for women-owned microenterprises and SMEs that often lack the necessary collateral needed to obtain loans for equipment financing from banks (Murad 2005). Other advantages include simple documentation without the hassle of a mortgage registry—another area where



women entrepreneurs are often at a disadvantage as the male head of household is typically the one registered on mortgage titles. Moreover, because women are usually owners of smaller businesses that tend to rely on working capital, leasing is a preferred method of finance as it frees up capital normally invested in fixed assets.

While it is, in general, not recommended to use consumer credit cards for SME financing, retail products have proven to be a first step in helping banks reach out to the women's market. Consumer credit cards can, for example, finance women entrepreneurs' smaller office supply and equipment needs. Bank Alfalah offers a "Women's Exclusive" consumer credit card on its Web site "with unique features which have been tailor-made for the women in Pakistan."

#### Help Women Become More Bankable Clients Through Nonfinancial Services

Nonfinancial services provided by the government, NGOs, and other interest groups can improve the financial performance of women-owned businesses. For example, the *Daily Times* of Pakistan reported in its 6–12 November 2006 issue that the Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Lahore (WCCI) has been providing skills training to women in Lahore "to a point where they have income tax returns for registration of businesses, deep insight into the banking system and know-how to benefit their businesses." The ability to accompany loan applications with business registrations, tax return forms and audited financial statements has helped many of its nine hundred members to secure financial loans (Akram 2006).

Providing clients with nonfinancial services and improving their financial literacy can also have a positive impact on bottom-line targets. In 2001, First Women Bank Limited (FWBL) developed the Financial Services Desk in response to a finding that the main obstacles for their women clients were a lack of knowledge of financial rules and a lack of legal awareness. The clients, among them confident and capable businesswomen, were not familiar with the legal issues surrounding company registration, taxation, and accounting. FWBL's president notes that "it wasn't as if they lacked the dedication and hard work required to do business. As women in a patriarchal set up, they simply had not been equipped to deal with such problems. As a result, they were more susceptible to hoodwinking by the men in their lives" (Aziz 2005, 5). The Financial Services Desk offers legal advice, advice on tax matters, and corporate and trade financing among other facilities. Even though the costs associated with providing nonfinancial services were not insignificant, FWBL benefited from clients' improved bankability (Aziz 2005).

#### Promote Financial Sector Outreach to Women

In order to assist women in becoming more bankable clients, financial institutions themselves need to develop their outreach "through innovative approaches, the hiring of mobile credit teams, and staff training which promotes greater outreach to women" (Hussain, Hashmi, and Hussain Rao 1997). In many instances, it has proven useful for financial institutions to partner with NGOs to improve their outreach to female customers at the micro-loan level—where NGOs



handle the loan and repayment process while the financial institution provides the necessary capital.

Partnering of business membership organizations and financial institutions has also proven successful. For example, since members of the WCCI in Lahore identified access to finance for women-owned SMEs as a main obstacle to expanding their businesses, the body negotiated in 2006 a special women entrepreneur financing scheme with the Bank of Punjab for loans up to five hundred thousand rupees. The scheme accepts WCCI member customers without any collateral requirement (i.e., no assets will be mortgaged to issue a loan) provided that their loan application is accompanied by two letters of personal guarantee (from two guarantors that have prime real estate properties in urban centres) and a WCCI letter of recommendation (Akram 2006).

The government can also play a valuable role in coordinating and disseminating information on financial services for women: addressing one of the key problems highlighted by Pakistani women entrepreneurs (Goheer 2003). Through targeted awareness-raising campaigns and efficient business networks, the government can help women entrepreneurs understand the range of financial instruments available to them (UNESCAP 2005). In addition, government policy should encourage financial institutions to target women customers and specifically address the gaps in women's access to finance for lifecycle and business needs.

#### Promote Women's Access to Microfinance

The government of Pakistan should encourage microfinance institutions to adopt a targeted, articulated gender focus as part of the national strategy to address poverty alleviation and women's economic empowerment. It is often assumed that microfinance institutions have larger numbers of women clients. The case of Pakistan demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case. This idiosyncrasy can be easily explained in the Pakistani context: with strong disincentives to risk-taking (higher social punishment for women), a social structure that may discourage women of entering more lucrative business ventures and with microfinance institutions that charge high interest rates and do not differentiate between men and women, it is natural to see fewer women borrowers in Pakistani microfinance institutions. This low volume of lending to women further compounds the problem as it masks their true entrepreneurial capabilities and thus indirectly discourages traditional bankers from lending to women.

Experience from around the world demonstrates that well-designed microfinance programs can be potentially rewarding markets for financial institutions. By catering their services to meet the needs of women clients, microfinance institutions can do much to attract this market segment. For instance, providing women-only credit windows, female staff, and trained personnel adept at serving the banks' female clientele can do much to foster a female client base. Also, a careful assessment of women's repayment profiles (e.g., testing whether women are truly better borrowers and whether the theory of higher social punishment in case of failure for women holds) as well as a better understanding of the expected returns from women's business investments (e.g., understanding the dynamics and attractiveness of the sectors women choose to start businesses in) can provide



helpful clues to the nature of the intervention microfinance institutions need to think about in terms of expanding their outreach to those market segments with highest potential growth and profitability. Institutions should also be encouraged to collect gender-disaggregated data to ensure that their targets to reach female customers are being met and to start collecting empirical evidence that would allow them to better target their products to women.

### Implement Sound Policies

By providing well-designed microfinance, SME, and leasing instruments that meet the needs of women, financial institutions can tap into a growing market of female clients. Similarly, the supply of financial products needs to go hand in hand with well-thought-out policies in order to increase women's demand for finance. This must include improving women's ownership and control of their land and assets (i.e., property rights) to help them meet collateral requirements, as well as promoting women's financial literacy to access existing finance schemes. Policy makers should also encourage business development services that build the capacity of women to access capital from banks.

In the long term, women's access to collateral can be increased by improving property and land title laws and procedures. In India for example, the Mann Deshi Mahila Sah Bank Ltd. was able to convince the authorities to include women's names on property papers in recognition of a woman's right to own household property. By providing women with clear property rights and control of their assets, their economic standing and their ability to access institutional finance is significantly improved, as noted by Harsh Kabra on 28 December 2006 on the BBC News Web site. This was also economically appealing for the bank because it was able to increase the number of female customers who were able to provide collateral. Moreover, including women in joint mortgage loan applications also resulted in faster pay-back rates and reduced the number of late payments. For the municipality, in return, having included women on joint property has resulted in the authorities witnessing faster tax payment rates (Sinha 2007).

The financial sector is a powerful vehicle for alleviating women's poverty and increasing their participation in the formal economy. The government of Pakistan can play an important role in harnessing the ability of the financial sector to meet women's demand for financial services by creating enabling policies for financial institutions to increase their outreach to women. By encouraging the development of financial institutions that treat women as potentially lucrative customers, the government will do much to empower women to break out of poverty cycles, participate more fully in the private sector as businesswomen, and generate wealth and employment.

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### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> Kashf Foundation, inspired by the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, started operations in 1996 “as an action research program focusing for the first two years on understanding the key aspects of providing microfinance to poor women.” Among its various initiatives Kashf Foundation began the “Dastkaari (meaning that which is hand crafted)” enterprise development program promoting the skills of female artisans. “Dastkaari aims to be market led,” improving women artisans’ access to international markets (Mosedale 2001).

<sup>2</sup> The alliance’s secretariat is housed by IFC, the private sector arm of the World Bank Group (see <http://www.gbaforwomen.org>).



# HIV PREVENTION IN SEX WORKER POPULATIONS: A POLICY AND PROGRAM REVIEW

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## **Abstract**

While social and structural determinants of health have become a greater focus of public health research, programs, and policy making, gender is often missing as a priority for analysis and implementation. Even in work around HIV prevention in sex work populations, where gender relations between individuals are extremely visible, attention to the broader mechanisms of gender has been limited. This paper analyzes published public health projects and policy documents for their understanding and consideration of gender regimes. It begins with a review of the current literature, which is followed by a discussion of the implications of examining gender for future programs and policies to address structural level factors affecting HIV transmission and the health of sex workers.

## **Introduction**

Prostitution and the field of public health have a long and often conflicting relationship. For centuries, public health crusaders have targeted prostitutes for the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In many sex work communities, rates of STIs, including HIV, are extremely high, as in Natal, South Africa, where HIV prevalence is 61 percent and active syphilis prevalence is 43 percent (Ramjee 1998). However, those working in the field are beginning to recognize that prevention becomes complicated in environments where poverty, gender, race, and sexuality intersect. The goals of this paper are (1) to review the different contemporary research projects, programs, and policies of the field, paying particular attention to the conceptualization of gender, and, in doing so, to make more apparent the strengths and limitations of the research methodology and findings and interventions; and (2) to analyze current best practices in the field to



determine if they are sufficient enough in their treatment of gender as to offer efficacious solutions to HIV transmission.

Understanding how gender functions in sex work is more challenging than it might appear. Because sex work most often involves women exchanging sex as a resource for material gain from men, it is often understood as a form of oppression or coercion taking place on the level of individuals and their interactions. Some researchers and theorists have discussed sex work as a symptom of larger systems of gender inequality. There are conflicting beliefs, though, about whether sex work is a manifestation of inequality and therefore an inherently dehumanizing and dangerous practice that should be eradicated; whether it represents a strategy for achieving economic stability within a system of constraints; or whether it is a form of resistance against oppressive social structures and is therefore an activity with revolutionary potential, albeit with public health risks under current criminalized conditions.

In examining sex work public health interventions, it is useful to apply the framework of gender regimes to describe the gender relations inherent to structural institutions; in doing so, the level of analysis moves from that of individuals' behavior to the political, economic, and social antecedents of poor health outcomes for sex workers.<sup>2</sup> The complexity of sex work, both in its varied forms of practice and in the numerous forces shaping how and where the sexual-economic exchange takes place and whom the exchange involves, demands that attention be paid to policies and programs that address the fundamental causes of how infections such as HIV/AIDS are spread. Indeed, a focus on the health impact of structural factors has become policy for large intergovernmental organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO). Nevertheless, the analysis of sex work as a phenomenon of larger social structures has been limited, and the practice of sexual-economic exchange is often generalized as monolithic by advocacy groups, intergovernmental organizations, and governments. In the United Nations' Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others of 1949, prostitution was stated for the first time in an international instrument to be "incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person" (Reanda 1991, 209). Framing sex work as an inherent rights violation continues to be the dominant policy approach today. The U.S. State Department has declared that the "United States Government takes a firm stand against proposals to legalize prostitution because prostitution directly contributes to the modern-day slave trade and is inherently demeaning" (State Department 2004a) and that "prostitution is not the oldest profession, but the oldest form of oppression" (State Department 2004b). While the dangers and health risks for sex workers are well documented, these two policy statements do not even begin to address the lived realities of people in sex work worldwide, nor do they effectively address the economic, political, and social structures that create the harmful conditions in which sex work takes place.

Researchers in the field of public health often have more nuanced understandings of sex work systems, but their research projects tend to remain at the community level and rarely make it to the scale of national or international policy. Many AIDS-related research projects also get caught up in the day-to-day



efforts of individual behavior change, which is necessary but not sufficient for changing the course of the pandemic. The most common models of programs and research in sex work include the community-building model of strengthening group identity and community resources; targeting the purchasers and third-party purveyors; working with sex worker social movements; environmental interventions to create safer spaces for sex work; legal reform; and ethnographies of individuals in informal sex work. The strongest programs consider the myriad ways in which sex work takes place, while attending to the fundamental causes of the inequalities that lead to poor health outcomes for sex workers.

After a discussion of the different models of public health approaches to HIV prevention in sex work communities, the implications for future research, program implementation, and policy making are illuminated. Even with the innovative work that is happening on the ground, to effectively address the structural challenges to health promotion, the field of public health must move into areas of policy and governance that may seem outside the traditional scope of the field. Some of these areas include concrete policies shaping economic development, migration, and workers' rights, in addition to more abstract spheres such as social norms and cultural symbols.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Attending to Social Context: The Community-Building Model**

Beginning in the mid-1990s, public health research began addressing issues of social context in sex work. A study entitled "Reducing the Risk of HIV Infection among South African Sex Workers: Socioeconomic and Gender Barriers" discussed HIV risk as an added burden imposed on a population of women already harmed by their lack of social, legal, and economic power (Abdool Karim et al. 1995). Examining the poor social conditions of women working at truck stops, the researchers reported the consequences of condom negotiation for these sex workers as potentially leading to the loss of money and clients, and putting them at increased risk of physical abuse. Clients would insist on paying less for sex when a condom was used, and with the competition for clients between sex workers, the direct promotion of condom use was ineffective. To address the *short-term problem of condom usage (as opposed to macro-level problems such as poverty)*, the authors suggested building a stronger group identity to provide peer support for condom use, empowering women to take more control over the conditions of their work, and using their group strength to facilitate unified action in negotiating safer sex practices. This intervention strategy can be described as a community-building model for HIV prevention. While necessary, focusing exclusively on increasing the power of women within the sexual-economic exchange only attends to gender at the individual and relationship level. The researchers place responsibility for safer sex solely on the female sex workers, and not their male clients—upholding the gendered division of contraceptive and barrier method use. Although limited in scope, this method of intervention has been one of the primary responses to gender inequality in sex work.

The community-building model has been used in many other sex work populations. The Mothusimpilo Project in a mining community near Johannesburg based its design on "the insight that changes in sexual behavior . . . are unlikely to



occur without three interlocking factors: the widespread renegotiation of the social and sexual identities of persons living in high-risk communities, [sex workers'] increased levels of perceived control over their health, and the promotion of community contexts which enable and support the desired behaviour changes" (Campbell 2000, 480). The project established support groups for single women, burial societies, and rotating credit funds in the interest of generating social capital. These initiatives were run through peer educators to help build health-enhancing community networks and relationships among the female sex workers. In a second article reviewing the project, researchers emphasized the importance of building programs on the strengths and resources of the community, and thereby designed their program to address the proximate effects of poverty and isolation on this community that impeded behavior change. Unfortunately, preliminary evaluation findings suggest that although the program worked well in increasing the social capital of the peer educators, it had less of an impact on the entire community (Campbell and Mzaidume 2001). In this case, the structural barriers overwhelmed the program design. Women who were not peer educators became jealous of peers' status change, which broke down the program's attempt at unity building.

Although the Mothusimpilo Project was not entirely successful in its goal of community building, the research behind it provided a detailed account of the social organization of sex workers' living conditions, the structural factors shaping sex work in this community, the gendered division of labor (with men as migrant mine workers and women as migrant sex workers), power relationships between men and women and between sex workers, and the subjective identities of the sex workers themselves. Even with its theoretically grounded approach, the community-based program design fell short because the intervention only addressed conditions at the level of the individual. The researchers state,

If the program should achieve its goal of increased condom use over its three-year life, it will be by a route that is somewhat different from that proposed by textbook advocates of participatory development and social capital. Such advocates argue that program goals are best achieved through cooperative participation of target audience members in networks characterized by trust and reciprocity. While this may be the case in more stable or less deprived contexts, such ideals may be more difficult to implement in contexts such as our study community (Campbell and Mzaidume 2001, 1985).

The macro-social problems of migrant labor, poverty, and gender inequality ultimately undermined their HIV prevention efforts. Work to empower women and change group norms, identities, and behaviors was constrained by the high level of deprivation in this community. Implementing programs with a narrow conceptualization of gender and not attending to gender regimes thus is clearly problematic.

### **Targeting the Purchasers and Third-Party Purveyors of Sex Work**

Several research projects in China used the community-building model to target clients and brothel owners more specifically (Huang et al. 2004; Liao, Schensul,



and Wolffers 2003). Research on the clients of sex workers has been minimal and consists mostly of studies of HIV/STI prevalence and perceptions of risk (Gomes do Espirito Santo and Etheredge 2003; Ford, Wirawan, and Muliawan 2002; Voeten et al. 2002; Tabrizi et al. 2000; Elifson et al. 1999; Barnard, McKeganey, and Leyland 1993). Most interventions have taken place in Africa and have been directed specifically at truck drivers, migrant workers, miners, and fishing communities. However, clients as an at-risk population have been the subjects of limited public health programming because they are difficult to identify unless they are part of another high-risk community (Jackson et al. 1997; Walden, Mwangulube, and Makhumula-Nkhoma 1999; Laukamm-Josten et al. 2000; Leonard et al. 2000; Seeley and Allison 2005). Clients are also not addressed in public health research because men's sexual behavior is accepted as an inevitability, not subject to intervention or change. As Dr. Gail Pheterson (1990, 404) states, "Why does the variable 'gender' rarely appear in prostitution research? One answer is that 'sex client' is not a social status but rather an activity of (male) dominant persons who are more or less free from medical, legal, and social control." While sex workers hold a clearly articulated, marginalized social status, the other actors in sex work are often removed from investigation. Targeting of male clients recognizes the power differentials in condom negotiations, but these interventions have been small in number and most have been separate from programs directed at women. A more comprehensive approach for addressing the relationship between clients, sex workers, and condom use is necessary—including a gender analysis of different types of work that put people at risk of contracting HIV besides those who have been classified as prostitutes, and the general attitudes, norms, and behaviors of men. Not only is it important to address clients because they often determine whether condoms are used during sexual-economic exchange, but because these exchange relationships are often complicated and involve larger systems of gender inequality.

In two studies of sex work in China, which focused on the working situations in sex establishments (brothels and entertainment centers such as roadside restaurants), the authors concluded that the factors mediating women's abilities to negotiate condom use necessitated community interventions beyond the population of sex workers. The first study looked at the social organization of sex work, summarizing that sex work in China takes place in seven different forms. In order of income, beginning with the most lucrative, these categories of sex work are: "the second wife, the courtesan, the karaoke dancing girl, the massage girl, the beauty parlor girl, the streetstanding girl, and the factory girl" (Huang et al. 2004, 695–696). The researchers decided to focus their work on brothel-based women in entertainment establishments because this sex work population was the easiest to reach. One of the central principles of the study was to assess women's control over their work by determining their knowledge of health risks and the degree to which the women identified as prostitutes. The researchers also examined how the establishments were run, how sexual solicitations were made, and who set the price of sex work. In all of these areas, it was the brothel managers (two-thirds of whom were older women) who had control. They concluded that sex workers lack a collective consciousness, and health outcomes



could be improved by increasing skills in sexual practices and negotiation, building stronger identities as sex workers, working with brothel managers to allow sex workers greater control over the selection of clients and use of condoms, and by educating and training clients directly—because lack of condom use was largely the result of client preferences (Huang et al. 2004). Although an evaluation of such an intervention has not been completed, the attention to subjective and community identities, structures of power and power-holders, and cultural norms around the practice of sex work suggests a strong, nuanced understanding of the organization of sex work in this community—and, depending on the strategy for implementation, a solid foundation for a more comprehensive harm reduction project. But because gender is treated only at the community level, it still is possible that macro-level gender inequalities could limit the project's success.

A second study on hospitality women in Hainan, China, demonstrated the limitation of condom promotion and community building as a result of the fact that many of the women did not consider themselves sex workers, and the cultural context in which they worked greatly discouraged condom use. Hospitality women work in the service industry, and in addition to their official work as waitresses, they frequently exchange sexual favors for money. Most of their clients were local men, who would often purchase a longer period of sexual service from a woman, referred to as “hiring a second wife.” Women were typically hired for reproductive purposes, to bear additional children for the client, most favorably male children, in order to circumvent China's birth policies. The study found that a majority of the hospitality women intended to return home and get married, and the long-term arrangement of bearing children for clients was a strategy for testing their fertility—a highly valued asset for securing a husband. Several of the women explained that they did not want to use condoms because pregnancy would prove their fertility. When the risk of STIs was emphasized, particularly in the context of protecting fertility, the women became more engaged, but condom use still remained low. The researchers concluded, “We believe that culturally and contextually tailored, community-based interventions extending education and intervention to other influential groups such as brothel owners and clients is a critical necessity in order to address the societal vulnerability, to establish social norms, and to create an enabling environment for the women” (Liao, Schensul, and Wolffers 2003, 115). While these factors certainly play a role in increasing condom use, they do not solve the problem of “second wives” and fertility testing. To address these issues, the one-child policy and cultural value placed upon male offspring would have to change. Again, examining gender only at an individual level ignores the larger structures that shape women's reproduction, gender preferences in childbearing, and the structure of marital and extramarital relations.

### **Sex Worker Social Movements**

The model community mobilization project promoted as a best practices case study by UNAIDS is the Sonagachi Project in Calcutta, India. What started in 1992 as a narrowly conceived HIV prevention project has turned into a social movement of sex workers and women's rights organizations from all over India. The project area includes about 370 separate brothels housing approximately four



thousand sex workers. To receive the initial support from brothel owners, the project team had to emphasize that it would not disturb the existing power structure of the brothel system or try to remove women from prostitution. One of the first steps was establishing an STI clinic in the middle of the site. Peer educators were selected and trained to explain the basics of sexual health and safer sex. Beginning with a group of twelve, the most recent figures indicate that the number of peer educators has reached over two hundred, with coverage of about twenty thousand sex workers and clients (UNAIDS 2000).

What is hailed as the crucial factor in the success of this program is the level of participation of sex workers. In addition to the peer ed program, the sex workers have formed their own consumers' cooperative for providing small loans to its members, developed their own for-profit business buying condoms in bulk and marketing them to brothels, and created a union to negotiate working conditions with brothel owners and the local government. (These groups also include male and transgender sex workers.) Their main organizational body, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, now runs fourteen clinics around Calcutta, and the entire project is directed by former sex workers. The committee has provided training in basic accounting, literacy, and computer skills which contributes greatly to the project's self-sustainability. When the project began, only 1 percent of sex workers reported always using condoms; by 1998 this figure had gone up to 50.4 percent. While rates of HIV were showing dramatic increases in sex work populations in other parts of India (with over 50 percent of sex workers in Kamathipura, Mumbai, HIV positive), in 1998 only 5.5 percent were found to be seropositive<sup>4</sup> in Sonagachi (UNAIDS 2000).

The strengths of the Sonagachi Project lie in its attention to many of the fundamental needs of sex workers—not only health care and access to condoms, but increasing economic opportunity, skills training, and control over their working conditions and other aspects of their lives. The peer education program was expansive, involving large proportions of the community and avoiding the status differentials and disunity of the Mothusimpilo Project in South Africa. The other organizations built by the community as part of the project ensured that the community at large identified with and wanted to achieve the goals of reducing HIV and STI transmission. The project also engaged brothel owners, pimps, and clients in its prevention efforts. Targeting the power-holders ensured the creation of improved social and physical conditions for sex work. What began as a top-down project became a bottom-up social movement, eventually gaining support and recognition of the local government. Sonagachi is a comparative success story for interventions, though the strong identification this community has as sex workers and their willingness and ability to take over ownership and management of the project imply that it is not necessarily replicable elsewhere. Its attention to economic needs, education, training, leadership development, and self-sustainability—not just condom use—is crucial to dealing with the larger systems of inequality that affect HIV transmission. The project does not solve gender inequality, but it addresses it, and it has created a social movement that has the opportunity to make more large-scale change over time.



### **Environmental Interventions: Creating Safer Spaces**

Another trend in sex work interventions is the creation of programs to address environmental factors influencing sex work. The two primary examples involve 100 percent condom use policies for brothels in Thailand and the Dominican Republic. The program in Thailand is another example of UNAIDS best practices, and it began in 1989 after the observation that sex work establishments requiring condom use, or sex workers insisting on condom use, would often lose clients and money to those who did not (UNAIDS 2001). By mid-1992, all provinces in Thailand reported that the 100% Condom Use Programme (100% CUP) was in place. Evaluations completed in 1998 showed that most sex workers refuse to have sex without a condom, and that STI incidence has had a tenfold reduction and HIV a fivefold reduction among young Thai men between 1991 and 1993. Through the program, sex workers receive regular physical examinations and treatment for STIs; condoms are available in every hotel room and brothel; posters and stickers are displayed advocating condom use; frequent meetings are held among health workers, sex establishment owners, and sex workers; and the public health office of the province works closely with police in visiting sex establishments and encouraging the owners to cooperate (UNAIDS 2001). This program still functions at the micro-level of gender by taking power over condom use out of the hands of individual men. It also places responsibility for compliance on the female sex workers, who are then heavily regulated. While effective as a harm reduction approach, these policies do not address the fundamental issues of gender that shape sex work both inside and outside brothels.

Although still promoted as a UNAIDS best practices program, 100% CUP has been criticized by the international Network of Sex Work Projects and members of the public health field. In an article in *The Lancet*, Loff, Overs, and Longo (2003, 1982) asserted that “some developing country governments now make it compulsory for brothels to register every sex worker they employ, instruct her to use condoms, and ensure that she attends mandatory checks for sexually transmitted infections . . . [a result being that] sex workers have been taken to clinics under military or police escort.” The authors emphasize the adverse effects of this policy on the human rights of sex workers and criticize the development of programs without consultation with sex workers themselves. Ultimately they argue that 100 percent condom-use policies should not be implemented and that “enabling strategies that build social capital among sex workers, allowing them to organize and lobby for better working conditions, would seem to be a more effective approach than creating new means of abuse, especially in environments prone to corruption” (1982). Not only is the enforcement of 100% CUP questioned, but the creation of mandates without involving sex workers is understood to be a violation of human rights. While effective in reducing HIV transmission, 100 percent condom-use policies must have methods of regulating transactional sex that do not involve the police, and must garner the support of the sex workers themselves in their design and execution.

A different 100 percent condom-use program has been implemented in the Dominican Republic, but in this case, researchers combined community solidarity building with government policy making in Puerto Plata and focused exclusively



on community building in Santo Domingo (Kerrigan et al. 2006). In both locations, the solidarity and collective commitment component began first, with quarterly meetings between sex workers and establishment owners to strengthen HIV and STI preventative measures and to recruit sex workers for the other program components. Establishment owners were asked to post "100 percent condom" posters and to maintain a stock of at least one hundred condoms at all times. Sex worker peer educators and NGO staff distributed educational materials and performed interactive theater presentations to engage male clients in HIV prevention messages. At the Puerto Plata site, which had a regional government policy requiring condom use between sex workers and clients, owners of establishments were told that they would be responsible for ensuring compliance with the program activities and were subject to sanctions including notifications, fines, and closings. This was not the case for Santo Domingo, which experienced no government enforcement. The establishments in both sites were monitored on a monthly basis for the presence of posters, visible condoms, attendance of sex workers at monthly STI checks, and lack of positive STI diagnoses among the establishment's sex workers.

Reported consistent condom use with new clients in the past month increased significantly from pre-intervention to post-intervention in both sites. In the case of regular paying clients, the rate of consistent condom use only rose significantly in the site with government enforcement. As in other studies cited, enforcing condom use with regular clients is often complicated by personal relationships and the changing meaning of the sexual act that can take place over repeated encounters. If, as is suggested in this study, government regulation improves the compliance of regulars, this model holds the potential of addressing one of the more difficult areas of HIV prevention. The only significant predictor of STI prevalence at post-intervention was the level of establishment adherence to the program, and adherence increased significantly only in the government policy site. The authors of the study concluded that an integrated approach mobilizing both communities and governments merits further study (Kerrigan et al. 2006). In this project, sex workers were involved in community building before the 100 percent condom-use programs were put in place, and the regulatory and enforcement mechanisms did not involve the police and were directed at establishments and not sex workers. This method of implementation respects the rights of sex workers but still holds the other limitations of Thailand's program: while effective in harm reduction, it does not address larger social conditions or gender regimes outside of the brothel system.

### Legal Reform

An entirely different approach to sex work that has appeared only in *The Lancet* is a call for legal reform by public health practitioners. Beginning in 2000, the illegal status of sex work was discussed as an obstacle to health promotion. In their article "Prostitution, Public Health, and Human Rights Law," Loff, Gaze, and Fairley (2000) describe a study from Australia that showed the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections to be eighty times greater in illegal street prostitutes than in women working in legal brothels. Their conclusion was that the



redefinition of prostitution as legal work was necessary to ensure the rights of sex workers and that this redefinition would require a change in local, national, and international law. In 2001, Gilles Pומרol, a WHO adviser on HIV for the continent of Asia, was interviewed about his advocacy for decriminalization policies. He stated, "When sex workers are heavily penalized, implementing effective prevention programmes is extremely difficult" (Ahmad 2001).

In its focus on the conditions rather than the nature of sex work (Wolffers and van Beelen 2003), legal reform can also be described as a harm reduction approach, albeit at the local or national level as opposed to the individual level, which is where harm reduction interventions typically take place (Rekart 2006). Recognizing that sex work cannot be eradicated through criminal law, decriminalization is a systematic and widespread means of intervention. This approach legitimizes the existence of sexual labor and removes punitive government regulation. Decriminalization may also make it easier for prevention efforts directed at organized sex work taking place in brothels, but it does not fully address the conditions of men and women working in more informal networks of sexual-economic exchange, or the conditions that lead people to participate in sex work in the first place. However, the lasting implications of legal reform are not well understood. A thorough analysis of the public health implications of various national criminal/civil systems of sex work regulation would be an important contribution to the field.

### **Continuing Challenges: Understanding Gender in Informal Sex Work**

Multiple studies have recognized the different levels and degrees of sex work, including transactional sex involving people who do not identify as sex workers. However, all of the best practices for HIV prevention and sex work focus primarily on establishment-based/red-light-district forms of prostitution. The field of public health has yet to develop strategies for intervention in more difficult-to-reach populations although research of this sort goes back to the mid-1990s with Barbara de Zalduondo and Jean Maximus Bernard's work in Haiti. Examining consensual sexual relationships, de Zalduondo and Bernard (1995) describes a dominant cultural construction in which male economic inputs should be exchanged for female sexual access in both conjugal and extramarital relations. "Women's sex is explicitly perceived to have economic exchange value—to be 'her assets' . . . Any woman who has sex with a man without requiring or being offered tangible benefits in return, is considered inconsequential, frivolous, disreputable, stupid, or deviantly sensual/lascivious" (166–167). With sexual-economic exchange as the basis of most sexual relationships, interventions directed at "sex work" are clearly confounded. De Zalduondo and Bernard conclude that "to alter sexual behavior is to alter a system that includes not only sex, but the division of labor, the family and kinship, the economic system, the class structure, health beliefs, religion and ethics—the interrelated set of conditions upon conditions which prompt and constrain the wishes and actions of individuals as they cope with a particular social and economic environment" (178). Unfortunately, many studies on informal sex work have not addressed these issues.



In a 2004 study from South Africa, 21.1 percent of women in prenatal care reported having sex with nonprimary partners in exchange for material goods or money. Few of the women participating in transactional sex identified as sex workers, and the most frequent form of sexual relationship was ongoing, not “once-off” sex for money. The researchers also found that transactional sex was associated with being HIV positive, even after controlling for number of partners. They hypothesized that the male clients who participate in transactional sex may be at increased risk of HIV because of the number and nature of their sexual relationships. Additionally they suggested that the material need of women makes transactional sex more dangerous (Dunkle et al. 2004).

An earlier study on sex work, also in South Africa, supports the later hypothesis. This study looked at “survival sex” for both men and women, one of the only studies to examine the binary genders at the same time. The researchers describe sex work in their study site as a strategy for surviving poverty, thereby calling it survival sex. Survival sex includes all forms of trade from one-time, paid interactions to long-term relationships. Many of the men and women did not identify as sex workers, and often the categories of relationships were blurred. They found that male sex workers were more fluid in the location of their work (sex work among men was much less institutionalized), and many men only practiced sex work occasionally. Men were also often the focus of police enforcement because of the “gay sex” stigma. Male sex work also was not well paid—in fact, women working in brothels consistently made more money. For both men and women, more commercialized, formalized sex work was the safest in terms of consistent condom use (Preston-Whyte et al. 2000).

Research on interventions for male sex workers lags far behind that of female sex workers, possibly due to the more informal organization of its practice or because male sex work has not been thought of as a social problem in the same manner as female sex work. The most recent study from the *American Journal of Public Health* in November 2004 focused on individual behavior, particularly “sex trading” and drug use among men (Newman, Rhodes, and Weiss 2004). The study also asked specific questions about sexual orientation and found that men engaged in sex trading were less likely to self-identify as gay, contrary to the findings of earlier studies (including Modan and Goldschmidt 1992; Elifson, Boles, and Sweat 1993; Elifson et al. 1993). Homelessness was identified with an almost twofold increase in the odds of sex trading, as was injection drug use, crack use, and childhood maltreatment. The large number of homeless men and the amount of sex trading by men who were nongay identified supported the researchers’ “economic hypothesis that these men may be responding to a market for male sex workers among men” (Newman, Rhodes, and Weiss 2004, 2001). Even if there is an expanding market for male sex workers, there has been no analysis of why certain men increasingly view their sexuality as a resource. Male sex workers were also discussed as a bridge population, “an important epidemiological link between the broader MSM [men who have sex with men] and heterosexual communities” (Newman, Rhodes, and Weiss 2004, 2001). Here the problem of male sex work is linked to the spread of HIV from gay communities into heterosexual ones, similar to early ideas of female sex workers bringing disease into families, but different



from constructions of female sex work as a symptom of gender inequality. A major limitation of the study is that there was no analysis of masculinity in either the sex work or client population. It is difficult to understand sex work in this community without this analysis.

A more informative study published in the *Journal of Biosocial Science* in 2006 critiques the core groups theory (similar to the bridge population theory) of HIV transmission in male sex work and focuses specifically on mapping out the sexual networks of several men, including both their commercial and non-commercial partners. The researcher found no evidence demonstrating that male sex workers were more likely to acquire or transmit HIV in the course of commercial sex, and she also found that men reported having unprotected sex in a variety of contexts. The type of sexual relationship did not appear to have an influence on the type of sex practiced and if condoms were used. She concluded that "there is no evidence to suggest that men who are not sex workers play less of a role in the transmission of HIV" (Parker 2006, 117). Infrequent use of condoms in commercial sex for this population was justified because unprotected sex was more lucrative, but unprotected sex also happened in sex with boyfriends, girlfriends, casual contacts, and noncommercial anonymous encounters. The researcher found this latter phenomenon more difficult to explain, but stated that "a recurring theme was the desire for intimacy, openness and love" (125). The men she interviewed also did not identify as sex workers, in part because they were selling sex for "short-term" financial gain and because they were part of a social scene where being paid for sex was a symbol of desirability. One informant in the study stated "you have really made it if you can find someone who is willing to spend money buying your body," particularly because noncommercial sex was also widely available in this subculture (128). The central finding here is that targeting male sex workers only addresses a small portion of a much wider social and sexual network. Desire and intimacy may also play a more important role in the spread of HIV than financial need in certain communities.

Presenting a case study of sexual-economic exchange outside of economic necessity, Holly Wardlow's (2004) research among the Huli in Papua New Guinea suggests that certain populations of women have motivations for sex work beyond financial need. Critiquing other studies on sex work for not looking at local constructions of gender and sexuality and not grounding their research in the lives, experiences, definitions, and perspectives of people in sex work, Wardlow demonstrates that Huli "passenger women" work out of anger and resistance to cultural norms and gendered structures of resources and power. According to the Huli practice of bridewealth, women's sexuality belongs to her kin. As a form of retaliation and protest, passenger women sell their sex for their own individual benefit, thereby repudiating kin obligations. As opposed to Western constructions of meaning surrounding sex work, Wardlow states that "passenger women's exchange of sex for money is not perceived as the crude sale of something that should not be sold. Rather, it is seen as a kind of theft and as the selfish consumption of a resource that rightfully belongs to a woman's kin" (1028). Many of the women interviewed in Wardlow's study claimed that they became sex workers not out of economic necessity, but out of anger at their husbands and



family. In this context, Wardlow believes that sexual-economic exchange cannot be considered “work.”

Another interesting finding in Wardlow's research is the Huli belief in gender pollution and how this cultural construction shapes the purchasing of sex. Whereas women in other cultural contexts are typically considered the objects of desire, among the Huli, men have this role. Wardlow states that the “commodity logic of prostitution” is only beginning to take hold.

Men often scoff, “Do these passenger women think their ‘things’ [i.e., vaginas] are ‘good things,’ so that they have just cause for expecting money?” . . . and so passenger women's expectations that men should provide money for access to them strikes many men as transgressive and nonsensical (Wardlow 2004).

Wardlow argues that Huli men are buying sex from passenger women as a means of asserting a modern masculinity, a derivative of the changing political economy in Papua New Guinea. Her research presents a direct challenge to most other research on sex work—systems of gender, power, and economy are often assumed in prostitution, but a closer analysis of different contexts can prove otherwise.

HIV interventions among passenger women will look dramatically different from brothel interventions in the Dominican Republic. For passenger women, sex takes place outside of organized establishments, often happening in the bush alongside roads. Creating safe spaces for passenger women is one of the primary challenges, as is locating passenger women in the first place. However, because of their use of prostitution as a form of resistance, a community-building model of intervention may be successful. Organizing a collective of passenger women and creating a Sonagachi-type project is one possible approach, but addressing the system of bridewealth and gendered economic inequalities also is necessary.

### **Implications for Policy and Programs**

Public health researchers and programmers have been most effective in analyzing the sex work culture and subjective identities of individual women in individual establishments, but have only begun looking at more macro-level structures and gender regimes shaping sex work. The interventions that have been the most successful in reducing HIV transmission have taken place exclusively within the most organized forms of sex work, in brothels and red light districts. Although researchers realized early on that sexual-economic exchange has many informal manifestations that may put people at even greater risk than formal sex work, the field has been slow to address the problems of these communities.

There are also many gaps in research that need to be addressed. To begin, sexual labor is different for male, female, and transgender sex workers, and these three populations have not been studied and compared in detail. Second, there has been limited analysis of changing economic structures and how these changes are shaping patterns of sexual-economic exchange. Globalization and economic policy are clearly associated with sex work and need to be examined for how they affect men and women's sexual labor. Additionally, different legal and regulatory frameworks need to be examined and compared from a public health perspective



to determine the impact on the rights and health of sex workers. Next, informal sex work needs much more study. Many of these relationships also involve intimacy and/or long-term partnerships that reduce the likelihood of condom use. In this context, the unidirectionality of desire in sex work may not hold true. And, as in the case of Huli passenger women, sex work may also be a form of resistance for some populations involved in sexual-economic exchange, a finding that should be explored further in other communities. Finally, cultural constructs of masculinity should be studied in more detail, both in clients of sex workers and in men who trade sex for gain. Limited work had been done on sexuality as a resource for men and how changing constructions of masculinity shape the selling and purchasing of sex.

While public health research in sex work and HIV prevention has improved drastically, the field has failed to follow the recommendations of de Zaluondo and Bernard (1995, 178) for changing sexual behavior by altering the “conditions which prompt and constrain the wishes and actions of individuals as they cope with a particular social and economic environment.” The line between commercial and noncommercial relationships is blurry, and addressing HIV in this context requires structural change. The rights and health of women in formal sex work need to be promoted, but the issues of gender, economic, and political inequality also affect many more people involved in informal sex work. The field of public health must adapt to these challenges by creating new strategies and exploring areas that may seem outside the traditional scope of the field.

To address the overriding, fundamental causes of gendered HIV risk in sex work, programmers and policy makers need to look beyond traditional models of behavior change interventions and examine the health implications of economic development and globalization. A cross-sector approach that tackles the connections between disparities in wealth, weak education systems, peoples’ searches for livelihoods and economic stability, the movement of people to find work, fragile health systems, and the ensuing problems of increased morbidity and mortality will be more efficacious. Innovative, community-based projects are crucial for carrying out work in and representing the needs of oppressed and stigmatized communities, but more coordinated work must happen at the national level.

To accomplish this end, I offer several recommendations. First, governments must be willing to address sexual-economic exchange from a health and rights perspective and be able to create an enabling policy environment. The dominant policy approach of institutions such as the UN and the U.S. government are clearly incorrect and harmful in their implementation. Sex work must be given a high priority and not be relegated to a peripheral position in the growing focus on HIV/AIDS in women and girls. Gender also should be part of the analysis of these institutions and not be treated as a separate or marginal concern. In the Beijing Platform for Action, it is stated that “governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively” (United Nations 1995). National policies and programs must mainstream gender into HIV prevention and work



across ministerial portfolios, involving ministries of health, education, women's affairs, development, transportation, and justice. Interministerial work can address girls' access to education, gender and sexuality education curricula, migration, HIV transmission along transportation routes and in particular industries, criminalization vs. harm reduction approaches to HIV prevention in sex work, and women's economic empowerment. Second, changing social norms and symbols around gender and sexuality will require creative approaches to social marketing, public education, and grassroots organizing. Third, more formal relationships and forums between governments and NGOs, researchers, and other civil society groups should be established for grassroots work to have clearer channels for input into national policy. Involving community-based groups and people doing work on the ground in policy discussions will act as oversight to make sure government policies respect the rights and needs of its citizens while also bringing necessary information into policy making and fostering leadership development at a local level. Because of the diversity and uniqueness of each sex work community, it is important to invest time and energy in their inclusion in the development of programs and policies, so that when interventions are brought to scale, they don't ignore the specificity of different populations. Fourth, for researchers and institutions carrying out projects, it is crucial to involve government representatives beginning in the planning stages of programming. Communicating research goals and programs at the early stages increases governmental buy-in, creates mechanisms for data sharing, and makes the translation from research into policy quicker and more coordinated. There are many successful pilot projects that are not brought to scale because these systems are not in place. It is crucial that in all these endeavors, gender regimes must be a primary category of analysis, otherwise any proposed solutions to HIV transmission will fall unacceptably short.

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### *Endnotes*

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<sup>2</sup> R. W. Connell's (1987, 120) theory of gender states that “we cannot understand the place of gender in social process by drawing a line around a set of ‘gender institutions.’ Gender relations are present in *all* types of institutions,” and these relationships are called “gender regimes.” Although sex work does not take place exclusively within formal institutions, the construct of gender regimes is helpful for analyzing the gender relations of a particular practice. Additionally, Connell describes a gendered theory of social structure based on the organization and division of labor, power, and cathexis—the latter term defined as object-choice, desire, and desirability. This framework is useful in analyzing sexual-economic exchange because it provides concrete structures involved in the practice of sex work to be examined by researchers in the field.

<sup>3</sup> Joan Wallach Scott's theory of gender is a helpful complement to Connell's (1987) framework because it examines the interrelation of individual subjects with social organization. Scott (1988, 66) states that “gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power,” and it involves four interrelated elements: culturally available symbols; normative concepts; politics and social institutions; and subjective identity. Whereas Connell gives concrete examples of social and political structures, Scott draws attention to the role of cultural symbols, social norms, and individuals' identities as crucial factors in the functioning of gender. These elements play a role in how sex work is seen culturally, socially, and by people involved in its practice.

<sup>4</sup> Seropositive means showing a significant level of serum antibodies, in this case HIV antibodies.



# DESIGNING GENDER-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING: GANG REDUCTION STRATEGIES FOR FEMALES

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According to the 1998 National Gang Survey by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP 2000, 17), females constitute 8 percent of the youth gang population but "estimates of the proportions of female representation vary widely . . . [because] law enforcement tend to minimize females gang membership." One researcher suggests that female gang involvement is underestimated by law enforcement due to the lower rates of criminality by females (Curry 1998). Although rates of criminality are lower among females than males, recent trends in female criminality are troubling. Over the past decade, the rates of criminality among adult and juvenile females have increased while male rates have decreased. According to the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program, there has been a 12.3 percent increase in female arrests while male arrests have decreased by 6.7 percent from 1994 to 2003. During that same period, aggravated assault arrests for females increased by 14 percent while male arrests for aggravated assault decreased by 17.3 percent. From 1994 to 2003, arrests for drug abuse violations by females also increased by 34.8 percent while male arrests increased by 19.9 percent. From 1990 to 2000, the total number of women in the correctional system increased by over 81 percent while the number of men increased by 45 percent (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003). Clearly these substantial increases in the number of adult and juvenile females in the criminal justice system indicate a need for the evaluation and revision of existing programs to address these trends.

In 1998, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) published *Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming*, which concluded that there were significant gender variations in the development patterns and needs of female youth that were not reflected in the current juvenile justice system. The OJJDP publication is stating what seems obvious: programs that do not capture gender differences may result in services that inadequately or



ineffectively address the needs of females. When it comes to gang reduction programming, ensuring that females' needs are appropriately addressed is particularly essential because female gang involvement may have a multigenerational and long-term impact on families and communities. Gang reduction programs should therefore be gender-specific—that is, designed to capture the differences between male and female gang involvement by informing the collection of data, training of personnel, and design and delivery of services that contribute to a reduction in female gang activity.

### **Making the Case for Gender-Specific Programming: Multigenerational and Long-Term Impact of Female Gang Involvement**

One of the most important factors to consider about females involved with gangs is that most of them experience “multiple marginality” because they suffer discrimination due not only to their limited economic and social opportunities but also to their gender, ethnicity, and race (Vigil 1988, 9). Joan Moore (1991, 137–138) further adds that “gangs as youth groups develop among socially marginal adolescents for whom school and family do not work [so] agencies of street socialization take on increased importance.” In her study of female gangs in two Missouri cities, St. Louis and Columbus, Jody Miller (2001) concluded that female gang members reinforce gender inequalities in order to earn a certain degree of respect and authority within the gendered hierarchy of gangs. Female gang members seek to prevent or minimize their sexual exploitation within the gang by proving their physical and emotional toughness. This gender bargaining is apparent in the double standard that exists for females who are “sexed into gangs” as opposed to females who are “jumped into gangs.”<sup>1</sup>

“Maturing” or transitioning out of gangs can be a difficult process for females because there are social and economic pressures that serve as barriers to exiting gang life. According to prominent researchers, social and economic policies “may have far-reaching implications for girls’ ability to ‘mature out’ of adolescent gangs” (Chesney-Lind and Hagedorn 1999, 156). In addition to the obvious obstacles that limit a female gang member from acquiring legitimate employment, welfare reforms have reduced the amount and time of eligibility for public assistance. With limited or no opportunities for social and economic mobility or assistance, it is extremely difficult for females to transition into non-gang environments if the gang functions as a surrogate family and a means for generating income, even if it requires partaking in illegal activities (Moore and Hagedorn 2001). Given all of the obstacles faced by single mothers, gangs may be a “substitute institution” that supplants a traditional family structure and support system (Quicker 1999, 56). The social and emotional benefits for gang membership are especially appealing to young women who exhibit “a strong need for safety, belongingness, and companionship” (Messerschmidt 1999, 120). Even if motherhood compels a female to scale back her gang activities, she may continue her affiliation if gang membership fulfills a need for a sense of family and a support network.

Policy makers have been particularly influenced by the possibility that gang involvement might have a “more long-term impact on the lives of female gang



members and a more serious impact on the lives of their children (and perhaps consequently their community and society) than gang involvement by males” (Curry 1999, 133). Numerous studies indicate that female criminality including gang involvement has a long-term impact on communities and a multigenerational effect within families. Researchers for the National Institute of Corrections found that 72 percent of the women under community supervision and 70 percent of women in jail were mothers of minor children (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003, 7). In addition, the majority of female gang members and those involved with gang members are young, single mothers. In their interviews with Los Angeles-based gang members between 1986 and 1987, Joan Moore and John Hagedorn (1999) found that 50 percent of female gang members with children were raising their children alone while only 2 percent of male gang members were doing the same.<sup>2</sup> Children are also at greater risk of being involved in gangs if they are reared by a parent who continues to be a gang member or is gang affiliated, thus contributing to a cycle of gang membership within families.

Gendered structural and economic factors may limit a young woman’s ability to transition out of gang life. For example, young and adult females who get involved with gangs are far more likely than boys to come from troubled family backgrounds, and gangs often serve as a refuge or escape from unstable home environments (Moore and Hagedorn 1999). In a study of Mexican American gangs in Los Angeles, researchers found that 29 percent of female gang members experienced sexual abuse at home (Moore and Hagedorn 2001). The irony is that while gangs can offer young women social and emotional benefits, they also expose females to different types of victimization and dangers including sexual assault, criminal activities, and imprisonment. Unfortunately, there often are inadequate human and social services available that address these psychological, social, and economic needs. These factors contribute to the inability or unwillingness of many females to transition out of gang life, which can have a significant impact on the lives of their children and families.

Community and social-based programs for gang reduction cannot ignore this multigenerational and long-term impact of female gang involvement on society, and the multiple marginality faced by women and girls involved with gangs. They must be informed by the social context in which the motivations, development patterns, and behavior of females are embedded. Gender-specific programming—including the documentation, training of personnel, and service design and delivery that reflect the risk and protective factors shaping female gang involvement—is an effective tool for ensuring that gender differences in gang involvement are captured in gang reduction policy and services.

### **Designing Gender-Specific Programming**

The underlying policy rationale for many gang intervention programs is that community-based organizations are ideally poised to directly provide social and human services to at-risk youth and gang members. This is because they have established relationships in the communities where they operate. The programs are designed to address the gang problem through community mobilization, social intervention, and collaboration with law enforcement agencies. City governments,



such as that of Los Angeles, administer such programs by providing contracts to nonprofit and community-based organizations that provide social and human services to individuals who wish to transition out of gang life. These intervention programs are not intended to be a long-term resource for their clients but rather a bridge activity that moves motivated individuals out of gangs and into employment, education, or training and/or a long-term program. They include activities like conflict management, counseling on self-development, job readiness training, educational and employment referrals, and post-placement case management. Contractors are required to document their activities in various ways—monthly progress reports, tracking the number of gang-affiliated individuals contacted, number of programs offered to clients, and attendees at programmed events.

Gender differences have rarely been considered in the selection, evaluation, or compliance mandates of contractors providing gang intervention and prevention services. Prior to 2005, for example, Los Angeles never mandated or evaluated whether contractors provided gender-specific training to its employees or gender-specific services to its clients. Without the appropriate gender data on reports or compliance requirements for gender-specific programming, Los Angeles policy makers could not understand the depth and scope of the female gang problem in Los Angeles or assess whether its gang intervention services served the needs of or appealed to females.

To address this problem, programs should be revised to include gender-specific documentation, services, and training. Specifically, program administrators should implement the following policy changes: (1) require that contractors track the number of female gang members served by their program, (2) design programming based on the risk and protective factors of females involved with gangs, (3) train counselors in female gang involvement, and (4) develop guidelines for gender-specific programming and service delivery.

Many gang intervention contractors offer a variety of self-development programs for their clients. The topics addressed in these programs should appeal to both females and males, and reflect gender differences in development patterns, motivations, and behavior. Counseling services, for instance, must encompass issues of parenting, gynecological care, gender identity, self-esteem, and abuse. The need for sexual abuse counseling is one of the most glaring traits shared by most female gang members. In a study of female gangs in Ohio, two-thirds reported that they had been sexually assaulted before they joined the gang and “other acts of violence were more likely to occur after they joined the gang” (Miller 2001, 152). Information and referrals provided to transitioning gang members must also include female health issues like contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy.

Employment and vocational opportunities should appeal to females as well as males. Male clients are provided direct occupational preparation, but females do not necessarily receive the same quality of service. Gender parity in services requires that the contractor be able and willing to counsel the female about those historical barriers to career entry and help her overcome them. If direct career counseling is not possible for a specific career, the contractor should be able to



refer the female client to a work source center that can provide direct career preparation in alternative careers. In the end, it is not the specific occupation that matters but the quality of the career preparation and counseling that the transitioning female receives.

Most importantly, programs should provide gender-specific training for gang intervention personnel. In their study of gender-responsive strategies for female offenders, Barbara Bloom and her colleagues found that it was essential for rehabilitation programs to be designed to deal with specific women's issues including substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, pregnancy and parenting, relationships, and gender bias (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003). Gang intervention personnel who understand the gender differences in motivations, development patterns, and behavior between women and men involved with gangs will be more likely to provide or refer female clients to appropriate transition services. Outreach workers and case managers will be more effective and persuasive if they understand that female gang members often join gangs to escape abusive home environments and that motherhood is often cited as the primary motivation for women to mature out of gang life.

Unlike men who cite the fear of death and imprisonment as the primary reasons for leaving a gang, females cite marriage and motherhood (Moore and Hagedorn 2001). Convincing gang members with children that their physical safety and well-being, and that of their children, will be better served outside of gang life might be more resonant to females than their male counterparts. Outreach workers must be able to identify opportune moments for approaching women and girls in gangs, and understand the barriers that they face in leaving a gang. Only by understanding the obstacles encountered by transitioning females can outreach workers provide or refer clients to the appropriate services and long-term assistance programs.

Gang intervention case managers are responsible for counseling and tracking the progress of individuals who are in the process of exiting gang life. Gender-specific training is essential to case management because motivated gang members must be provided with or referred to the appropriate services that will facilitate their transition into non-gang life and keep them out of gang activities. There must be an understanding on the part of case managers that male and female gang members may need different support services because the physical, social, and economic obstacles to maturing out may vary according to gender, race, class, and ethnicity. Case managers should look to direct their female clients towards mentoring programs or services that offer exposure to female role models like apprenticeships.

### **Policy Recommendations for Gender-Specific Programming**

By neglecting to identify, recognize and capture the gender-specific needs of the gang population in its programming, Los Angeles policy makers initially failed to realize that decreasing female gang involvement could serve as a long-term gang reduction strategy. However, there are still several public policy areas that have not incorporated gender-specific programming. To ensure that publicly funded



programs are capturing the gender-specific needs of the population, it is vital that policy makers implement the following three recommendations.

First, publicly funded agencies must assess and determine the gender-specific needs of the targeted audience. It is an important first step to identify how gender intersects with race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors to shape the needs of the population. Next, policy makers must evaluate the extent to which the design and delivery of public services capture gender variations in the developmental, psychological, social, educational, and cultural characteristics of the population. The assessment should be based on the number of females served and on the quality of service delivered to women or girls. Lastly, policies that do not capture the gender-specific needs of the targeted population must incorporate gender-specific data collection, training of personnel, and services into the design and implementation of their programs. This three-pronged approach encapsulates both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of gender-specific programming.

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<sup>1</sup> “Sexing into gangs” involves engaging in sexual activity with at least one gang member as a rite of initiation, whereas “jumping into gangs” involves some form of physical challenge, such as being beaten by other gang members as a rite of initiation.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately no current data about Los Angeles gang members and their children exists. This reflects the general problem of the lack of data about female gang members.





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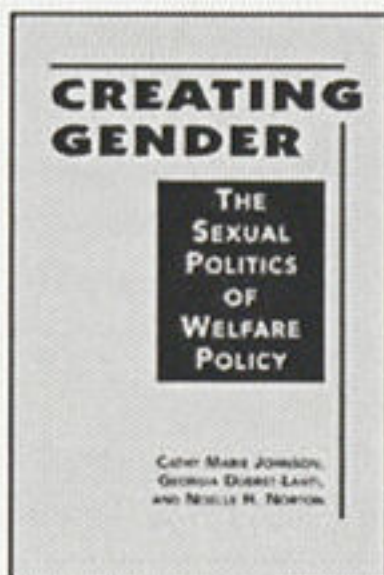
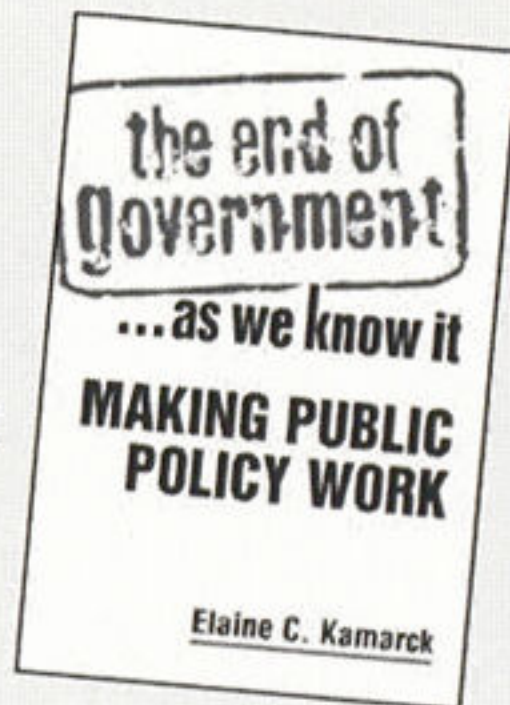
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# PROMOTING BREAST-FEEDING THROUGH SOCIAL CHANGE

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While breast-feeding is more common in the United States today than it was twenty-five years ago, the United States continues to have one of the lowest breast-feeding rates in the developed world (DHHS 2004b). Specifically, the United States has a poor rate of sustained breast-feeding and exclusive breast-feeding, that is, the infant only receives human milk. Most mothers will stop breast-feeding or introduce infant formula, water, or other food earlier than recommended.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that infants should be exclusively breast-fed for the first six months and receive some breast milk for the first year (AAP 2005). Afterward, breast-feeding should continue for as long as both the mother and child desire. The U.S. government also promotes breast-feeding and has established goals for breast-feeding initiation and sustained breast-feeding. As part of the Healthy People 2010 initiative, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) established the following goals: 75 percent of women will initiate breast-feeding, and 50 percent will continue breast-feeding for six months (DHHS 2000). These goals and recommendations represent the government's support for breast-feeding. Despite these encouraging messages, the decision to breast-feed is challenging due to social influences (e.g., norms) and structures (e.g., employment policies).

Government agencies have implemented various education and advertisement campaigns to increase rates of breast-feeding. These goals have not been met, in part due to the limited attention given to understanding women's perceptions of breast-feeding in the current social climate. Psychological factors, social norms, laws, and employment practices all affect breast-feeding choices. Efforts to increase breast-feeding should include enacting legislation to protect and promote breast-feeding in the workplace. In addition, education and awareness campaigns need to be altered to address the current social norms against breast-feeding.



### **Breast-feeding Has Direct Benefits for Mothers, Infants, and Society**

There are multiple maternal, infant, and societal benefits of breast-feeding as compared to formula. Maternal benefits include reduced rates of postpartum depression, reduced maternal bleeding after delivery, and faster return to pre-pregnancy weight. Infant benefits include reduced rates of infectious diseases, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, diabetes, asthma, obesity, and mortality. Additionally, breast-fed infants have fewer illnesses, which reduce health care expenses and insurance premiums. Breast-feeding also produces less environmental waste than the production and use of infant formula. Business productivity can also benefit from breast-feeding because mothers who breast-feed miss fewer days of work to care for sick infants than mothers of formula-fed infants (AAP 2005).

### **Existing Advertising and Education Campaigns**

In attempts to increase breast-feeding, governmental agencies have sent women messages designed to persuade them to breast-feed. According to the FDA's official and publicly available magazine (*U.S. FDA Consumer Magazine*), the best choice for most children is breast milk. The FDA information considers formula an acceptable, though inferior, source of nutrition for infants. Breast-feeding is described as providing infants with health, digestive, psychological, intellectual, and dental benefits that formula-fed babies do not experience. The FDA also emphasizes breast-feeding's contraceptive, physical, and economic benefits for the mother (Williams and Stehlin).

Not all campaigns use positive argumentation to convey their message, but rather rely on fear appeals to encourage action. In 2004, the DHHS and the Ad Council began a national campaign with the slogan "Babies were born to be breastfed." The messages compare the health risks of infant formula to riding a mechanical bull or logrolling while pregnant. The first goal of the public service announcements was to encourage breast-feeding by clearly indicating the negative consequences of not breast-feeding. The second goal was to give women the confidence needed to breast-feed (DHHS 2004b).

For further encouragement, the DHHS also created an educational breast-feeding pamphlet entitled "An Easy Guide to Breastfeeding" that describes the benefits of breast-feeding as well as socially acceptable solutions to breast-feeding problems. One page contains suggestions for how to avoid the embarrassment of public breast-feeding. For instance, women are encouraged to plan outings around feeding times and to use public restrooms or fitting rooms for breast-feeding. The guide also contains answers to common questions and provides tips for initiating breast-feeding, extending maternity leave, and returning to work.

Through these educational programs and media advertisements, the government sends positive messages about breast-feeding. As a result, the general public has largely adopted positive attitudes about breast-feeding and has knowledge about the breast-feeding recommendations of the AAP (2005). In fact, a majority of those polled in an DHHS study believe that breast-feeding is better for infants than formula (DHHS 2005).



Although there is increasing support for breast-feeding in general, there is much less support for public breast-feeding. In a recent study involving more than thirty-five hundred adults, only 43 percent agreed that women should be allowed to breast-feed in public and only 28 percent believed it was appropriate to portray a woman breast-feeding on television (Li et al. 2004). Men have become more accepting of witnessing a mother breast-feeding her infant in public than they were prior to the advertising and educational campaign instituted by the DHHS in 2004. Interestingly, men are even more accepting of public breast-feeding than women (DHHS 2005).

These findings suggest that educational and media campaigns may not be effective without greater social and political support of breast-feeding. Educating mothers and helping them to think positively about breast-feeding may lead to increased breast-feeding initiation. However, once women begin encountering social and employment barriers to breast-feeding, their rates of breast-feeding revert to the same lower rates as those who have not had additional education and positive attitudes (AAP 2005; Chatterji and Brooks-Gunn 2004).

### **Mothers Face Many Obstacles to Breast-feeding**

Despite the education and advertising campaigns, there are many social influences in the United States that support infant formula use and discourage *exclusive* breast-feeding. For example, most parents receive infant formula samples in the mail, at the hospital, and from their obstetricians (GAO 2006). Considering this high level of promotion of infant formula, mothers could reasonably assume that bottle-feeding is the norm. In addition, the media sometimes sends negative messages about breast-feeding (Harmon 2005; Van Esterik 2004). There have been many highly publicized cases of mothers being arrested or fined, being asked to leave an area or relocate to a restroom, or being fired from their jobs because of their need to express milk or publicly feed their infants (Gardner 2002; Goodman 2003; Whelan 2005). Such cases can and eventually will discourage women from breast-feeding. Likely as a result of these social influences, mothers (and the public) are uncomfortable with public breast-feeding; it has been described as embarrassing to observe and perform (Hannon et al. 2000).

Although breast-feeding initiation, positive attitudes, and knowledge of breast-feeding have increased in recent years, the primary goal of increased rates of exclusive breast-feeding set by the AAP (2005) has not been reached. An evaluation of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) breast-feeding education program found mixed results. The program increased breast-feeding initiation but had no impact on breast-feeding duration (Chatterji and Brooks-Gunn 2004). Thus, women may have had good intentions to breast-feed but were unable to sustain breast-feeding when confronted with obstacles (e.g., work, embarrassment, and social norms against breast-feeding).

The obstacles to breast-feeding for working mothers are even greater, and the majority of women with infants work. In 2004, 54 percent of women with infants under the age of one participated in the workforce (Department of Labor 2005).



Working mothers must balance the role expectations of both employee and mother. If the infant and mother can make regular contact throughout the day, exclusive breast-feeding can be possible. However, most mothers' work duties require them to be away from their infants for extended periods of time; in the mothers' absence, their infants must be nourished with bottles of either expressed breast milk or infant formula. The expression of breast milk requires that the mother have the time and space to pump her breasts several times a day, which often is either incompatible with her job or considered inappropriate. Many employers are unable or unwilling to take steps to remove these barriers that make it difficult to breast-feed (Shealy et al. 2005).

Current policies designed to remove some of the obstacles to breast-feeding are not sufficient. Many pieces of federal legislation—including the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, Civil Rights Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act—could be interpreted so as to protect breast-feeding mothers and their infants; however, few state or federal courts choose to use these acts to protect breast-feeding mothers (Gardner 2002; Goodman 2003; Petersen and Boller 2003; Whelan 2005). On the other hand, several states have passed various laws that protect breast-feeding mothers from being arrested for indecent exposure and allow mothers to breast-feed in public spaces. Some states have gone even further and exempt breast-feeding women from jury duty; others encourage or even require employers to accommodate breast-feeding mothers. This trend, however, is not wide spread; there are still numerous states without such laws and policies (Baldwin, Harvey, and Vance 2007).

### **Strategies for Increasing Rates of Exclusive Breast-feeding**

#### Focus Advertising and Educational Campaigns on Broader Societal Acceptance

Advertising and educational campaigns should be based on social psychological research and be directed toward the general population, not just mothers. Instead of showing images of pregnant women engaged in dangerous activities (DHHS 2004b), women should be shown breast-feeding their infants in public places like malls. The women in the messages could inform the public that the infant needs to be fed often and that they should be accepting of breast-feeding mothers. The media can promote perceptions of breast-feeding as a normal and acceptable public behavior by including more instances of women breast-feeding their infants in television programs and advertisements. Messages like these would ease the embarrassment that leads many women to introduce infant formula (Stewart-Knox, Gardiner, and Wright 2003).

Campaigns can also capitalize on research that indicates that younger and less experienced individuals are influenced more easily than older individuals (see Petty and Wegener 1998 for a review). Early education may be a simple and effective way to promote positive attitudes about breast-feeding. Educational programs could be implemented for school-age children that would promote breast-feeding as a normal practice that is not embarrassing to witness or perform in public. Such education would encourage young people to be accepting of breast-feeding for their own children and others' children. These measures do little



to address immediate issues but could help future generations. For instance, when these children are in the workforce, they may be more willing to accommodate breast-feeding mothers.

Next, the advertisements comparing the use of infant formula to dangerous activities such as bull riding during pregnancy should be eliminated. These messages could actually damage the reputation of the DHHS, who sponsors the ads. Viewers may perceive the message to be so extreme that they ultimately view DHHS as less credible. These messages may give confidence to mothers who are already planning to breast-feed and have the social and material support necessary to breast-feed. But they are also likely to produce guilt or fear in mothers who are not as fortunate. These mothers are more likely to reject the message. Thus, the ads are probably not very effective in changing the behavior of the women they are targeting.

### Support Mothers by Teaching them How to Breast-Feed and How to Deal with Social Barriers

Although the government campaigns focus on the naturalness and positive benefits of breast-feeding, they fail to acknowledge that breast-feeding is an act that requires effort to learn. These messages increase positive public attitudes toward breast-feeding without offering mothers suggestions about how to work around negative social influences that make breast-feeding difficult. Educational campaigns can help mothers to be more prepared to deal with the multiple social barriers to breast-feeding as well as the many challenges they will encounter while actually learning to breast-feed.

In general, advertisements could include messages with breast-feeding women addressing and encouraging the general public to be open to and accepting of breast-feeding mothers and their infants. The messages would also inform mothers that public breast-feeding is not illegal and takes time to learn. Women can also be told that with some planning they can still do many of their job-related and public activities. Such advertisements and education could help to break the cycle that leads many women to believe and behave as if breast-feeding in public and the workplace is unacceptable.

### Change Employment Policies for Breast-Feeding Mothers to be More Accommodating

Exclusive breast-feeding is extremely difficult for employed mothers. Two-thirds of women who are employed full time return to work within six months of the birth of their infant (Department of Labor 2005). Of the full-time employed women who initiate breast-feeding, only 10 percent are still breast-feeding at six months (Shealy et al. 2005). There are several things that can be done to encourage employers to support exclusive breast-feeding.

First, education programs should make employers aware of the economic benefits of breast-feeding, including lower absentee rates and reduced health care costs, and encourage businesses to implement breast-feeding-friendly policies in the workplace (AAP 2005; Berger, Hill, and Waldfogel 2005). Second, employers should take steps to encourage breast-feeding. Some involve simple changes, such



as allotting space and time to allow women to either breast-feed or express their milk (Shealy et al. 2005). Additional changes such as flexible and part-time schedules, extended maternity leave, and job sharing are more difficult to implement but should also be encouraged. Workplace policies that are supportive of breast-feeding may help working women initiate breast-feeding at higher rates and breast-feed longer because they will be able to plan breast-feeding while working.

Lastly, educational efforts should make employers aware of the problems associated with not implementing breast-feeding-friendly policies. For example, women with greater financial freedom may exit full-time employment to continue breast-feeding their infants. Many of these women are professionals and therefore finding and training suitable replacements may actually be more costly to employers than the implementation of supportive breast-feeding policies (Cardenas and Major 2005). Financial and legislative incentives (e.g., tax breaks and policies protecting breast-feeding women in the workplace) also can encourage employers to implement changes to assist their employees who choose to breast-feed.

#### Institute Additional Legal Protections for Breast-Feeding

Other than a few federal efforts protecting breast-feeding in federal buildings, no federal legislation allowing breast-feeding or encouraging workplace changes to facilitate breast-feeding have been passed (Baldwin and Friedman). Unfortunately, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act Amendments of 2005 (introduced in the House of Representatives) were not passed. The purpose of this bill was to protect women who breast-feed and express breast milk from employment discrimination. The bill proposed "amend[ing] the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include breast-feeding" by adding the phrase "including lactation" after the word "childbirth." It also sought to amend the tax code to provide financial incentives to employers who support breast-feeding.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act Amendments of 2005 need to be reintroduced and approved during the 110th congress. The protections proposed in this bill would help more women exclusively breast-feed longer. Tax breaks would encourage employers to support breast-feeding, and regulations would require businesses to allow a woman to breast-feed or express her breast milk at work. Research on the effects of such legislation (as well as the effects of other policy recommendations) is needed.

#### Fund Research to Evaluate Breast-Feeding Initiatives

Exclusive breast-feeding rates are far below the government's goals (DHHS 2000). However, an analysis of breast-feeding research funding concluded that only 3.9 percent of all funding was directed toward research directly related to increasing breast-feeding initiation and duration (Brown, Bair, and Meier 2003). Conversely, 10.2 percent of breast-feeding research funding was granted for researching ways to improve the components of infant formula and pharmaceuticals. Research addressing direct and indirect ways of increasing breast-feeding



initiation and duration should be funded and conducted in specific areas, so that campaigns and measures addressing these problems can be most effective.

First, additional research should be conducted to examine public responses to witnessing a mother breast-feeding her infant in various situations. Although, such research would need to be conducted with real mothers and infants engaged in public breast-feeding, the time and expense would prove valuable. Such research could either dispel or confirm maternal expectancies of negative perceptions and reactions to public breast-feeding. This research would allow policy makers to know whether public or maternal perceptions need to be focused on.

Second, additional research needs to be conducted with women who are engaged in full-time employment situations that are not supportive of breast-feeding but who continue to exclusively breast-feed their infants for at least six months. These mothers would be able to offer fundamental insight about how to support other mothers who choose to breast-feed while working. Mothers who are able to overcome unfavorable social normative and employment situations likely engage in social or psychological processes that help them to continue breast-feeding. Identifying these processes would help educators replicate them in other women.

Third, research should be routinely conducted with women to find out why they introduced formula. This research could easily be conducted with the help of pediatricians and WIC employees. The findings from this line of research could aid in the development of programs and campaigns to target and ameliorate specific issues that prevent sustained breast-feeding.

Lastly, program evaluation needs to focus on how advertisements and educational campaigns are being interpreted by women. For instance, individual characteristics may affect the message's influence. Although doctors and the AAP may be seen as authority figures, women may actually be more influenced by messages delivered by "real mothers" who have faced similar challenges. Similarly, message characteristics may decrease the effectiveness of the program. For instance, if extreme messages are rejected by most women, they are likely not effective. Thus, it is important to evaluate messages in order to determine their effectiveness.

Implementing science-based programs would be beneficial to mothers, infants, families, and society because they would likely extend the period of time infants are breast-fed exclusively. Specifically, social norms and employment policies need to be altered to facilitate breast-feeding. Although it might be tedious and time consuming to change social norms about public breast-feeding, adequate public and workplace regulations could help. Initially it may take financial incentives for most employers to make accommodations for breast-feeding mothers, but these changes are necessary to encourage breast-feeding. Awareness campaigns need to focus on altering social norms of infant nourishment practices. Additional, altered education and advertisement campaigns could target the general public and increase their accepting of breast-feeding in public. These measures could lead to an increase in maternal, infant, and societal benefits from breast-feeding.



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## ALL THE KING'S FEMINISTS: SAUDI ARABIAN WOMEN IN ELECTED OFFICE FOR THE FIRST TIME

*An Interview With Lama Abdulaziz Al-Sulaiman and Nashwa Abdulhadi Taher, Saudi Arabia's First Women Elected to Office, and Basmah Mosleh Omair, General Manager of the Khadijah Bint Khouwalid Women's Center*

*On the last day in November 2005, Lama Abdulaziz Al-Sulaiman and Nashwa Abdulhadi Taher were the first women to be elected to an office in Saudi Arabia. They were two of the candidates from the Lejeddah Party, which swept the elections for the board of directors for the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Lama Abdulaziz Al-Sulaiman is one of the first female board members of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and the president of the Khadijah Bint Khouwalid Center, the women's business center housed within the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce. Nashwa Abdulhadi Taher is one of the first female board members of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Basmah Mosleh Omair is the general manager of the Khadijah Bint Khouwalid Center.*

*Elizabeth Scharpf, a candidate for a master in public administration/international development degree at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a master in business administration at the Harvard Business School, interviewed the three women in January 2007 in Jeddah, a cosmopolitan city on the western coast of Saudi Arabia that has served as the gateway to the holy Mecca for thousands of years.*

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### **WPJH**

Congratulations on your winning election! Can you please tell me how this came about?

### **Taher**

Women had a lot of obstacles and a lot of problems facing us in our business world. So basically we gathered together and we presented ourselves as one group to Prince Abdul Majid [governor of Mecca, Saudi Arabia]. We tried to describe our obstacles with potential solutions.

This meeting was done through a committee that Prince Abdul Majid had formed previously, called the Social and Economic Committee, which had men and women together, as a think tank. We presented our problems as a business community, and immediately after this meeting, he ordered the formation of a committee of eighteen business ladies and we started working together.

Three years after this, the women's business center was established—the Khadijah Bint Khouwalid Center. Khadijah Bint Khouwalid was the first wife of the Prophet Mohammed. She was a very successful merchant and also a devoted mother and wife. She's our role model, and we really look up to her as a successful lady.



**Al-Sulaiman**

It was the king who issued a royal decree to introduce women into the elections for the Chamber of Commerce everywhere in Saudi Arabia, not just in this region. But female candidates first appeared here [in the Jeddah region], and I must say that we had no idea what elections were all about.

I decided that there should be a campaign, even though we didn't really know what should be done in that campaign. We decided to address the younger crowd, which is the universities and the girls at the universities, in the colleges and private schools here. And we decided to promote an awareness program about elections, about the development of women, and about facts. Just to give those girls maybe a bit of hope that the future looks bright.

We did that over a couple of weeks, and then it was time for the elections. We were actually quite surprised when we won. We assumed they were thinking, "Okay, it's the beginning of change, and we'll just have the women in the election this time. And they may not win in the beginning, but the next time they'll be able to win."

I think our winning created quite a commotion. We weren't even expecting such a commotion because we were not expecting to win. So we've had to be introduced to everything that has to do with public office life, and we took something like a crash course before we came into the chamber. So now we are the two elected women and the government appointed two others.

We thought to reach out to these young girls to raise awareness, as I said, that things are looking bright and that elections are here, and that they should start getting ready for the next elections; this is a new generation. But we also know these girls have a lot of . . .

**Taher**

Influence.

**Al-Sulaiman**

Influence on their fathers. [laughter] Most of their fathers are businessmen. Yes, so we attend to both issues.

**Taher**

And also we reached out to the wives of the businessmen, so that they would have a good influence on their husbands. And they really did their job.

**WPJH**

And what types of issues were important for the election?

**Al-Sulaiman**

We basically just moved in with the same goals and objectives as the whole [Lejeddah] group, one of which was to support women and establish opportunities for them. [Other goals include developing Jeddah's economic environment, supporting small establishments, reviewing and facilitating government procedures, supporting businesswomen, supporting Saudization, supporting the chamber's initiatives nationally and internationally, and developing the chamber administratively and technically.]



**Taher**

You know, we started the campaign by publicizing statistics to show how important it is for women to be part of the development of the country. So we highlighted some numbers, just to “shock” the people. For example, women are 50 percent of the population. About 65 percent of the university graduates are women. Only 3 percent of them are working, and about 27 percent are on unemployment. Women are a \$15 billion investment opportunity [based on cumulative savings, according to the Saudi monetary agency].

**WPJH**

Why did they choose you? What did you bring to the table?

**Taher**

I brought my experience and vast network, as I am a member of many different committees. Even before the center had been established, I was a member of the Small Business Development Center. So they started getting accustomed to having women around. That's why the society here in Jeddah was ready for women to participate in the chamber's leadership, to make the decision that women are supposed to be in the board room.

**Omair**

Yes, we just went in. We had great support from the men. It's not like no one knew the women. The women are social activists—they're very active within society and other nongovernment organizations, so they had a good reputation. So the men wanted to bring those ladies to the board because they knew they would add value to it. That's why they were selected by the men to join.

But in other regions in the country, as the elections went on, the men did not support the women. The key to success here in Jeddah was the supportive men giving women a chance, and then being selective in the type of woman that they invited to join their group.

**WPJH**

There is a common thread that I've been hearing from the people that we've been meeting, and that is that change has to come gradually. Can you please explain why this is so?

**Omair**

I believe that as an American you understand it the most. In the U.S., every state moves at its own pace. I've noticed that laws are different in each state, and things are accepted in some states and not accepted in others. And we have a lot of similarities to that. Each region moves at its own pace, and this is what Saudis mean by gradual. Jeddah is a pioneer—some things happen here that might not happen in other regions. But the opposite could be true—other regions might start something that is not accepted here.

**Al-Sulaiman**

But it's like doing things on a trial basis; people wait and see. Individuals don't usually like change.



**Omar**

Yes, they resist. But that's worldwide. And change has to come from within. And here, it's coming from within each region separately.

**WPJH**

You say change must come from within, but at the same time, the royal decree set the change in motion from the outside, not from within.

**Al-Sulaiman**

Yes, there are rules of how things should be. And I guess that's true everywhere in the world. Maybe in some countries they can lobby for change and have marches, etc. But with us, it's slightly different. I think the king knows of what is happening, and we are heard. And after we were heard, the royal decree was issued.

**Omar**

And after the decree was issued, people moved at a different pace. Some people resisted it. When a royal decree is issued, it covers the entire kingdom. But the king, for example, knew the elections could only be pursued here because the society here was ready to move forward. In other places, even though the decree was there, the society was not ready so it didn't move forward. That shows that change occurs from within each region itself as well.

**WPJH**

What are the big issues for Jeddah and Saudi Arabia today?

**Al-Sulaiman**

When we first came to the Khadijah Bint Khouwalid Center, the women's business center in the Chamber of Commerce, the center was mostly oriented towards training businesswomen. We had courses like the International Labor Organization course, "How to Start Your Own Business," which sought to encourage more entrepreneurship and teach women how to start their own business.

Later on, we founded lots of training centers in Jeddah that have high standards of training and offer all different levels of training. Once we started so many centers, we decided this was no longer what we needed to be doing, and we created a new vision.

**Omar**

We asked ourselves, How could we empower a woman and truly let her move forward, and give her the opportunity and the freedom to choose whatever direction she would like to pursue?

And in order to do that, we had to understand what obstacles she's facing that are hindering her progress. As a result, we created a department that is called Government Files.

This department examines the regulations and laws in each ministry that has to deal with women and determines how they are really hindering women—the aspects of the regulations that are halting women's progress. We write letters to the ministers, we meet with them, and we tell them, "This law is having this effect on



women. And this is what's hindering the progress of the development of the nation, economically, socially."

Essentially, we are a lobbying center for women's rights. We are not pursuing a specific, let's say, field or a specific sector in business. We want to remove all obstacles and leave all options open to women. If a woman wants to work, the opportunity's there; if she wants to stay at home and raise her children, she can. We just want to provide equal opportunity for her.

**Al-Sulaiman**

As members of the board of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce, we discuss the issues addressed by the Khadijah Bint Khouwalid Center, the women's business center. We find the ways to actually reach out to even higher decision makers, to discuss the problems further with them.

**Omair**

And so compared to the other chambers of commerce, we are progressing. Women are not even allowed to cross the street in the other part of the city. The fact that the women's center itself and our budget are within the chamber, that we have equal staff and equal pay—this is a big improvement.

One of the changes that happened over the last year is that the center now offers services to all women, not just businesswomen [who are chamber members] who come to the center to do their work. Some of the more conservative people don't like this. But now, it's open. It's a service center for everyone.

**WPJH**

Has your pioneering had any spillovers into other areas of Saudi society?

**Al-Sulaiman**

Yes, in engineering, real estate, architecture.

**Omair**

Architecture used to be a purely male-dominated field. And if you wanted to progress as a businesswoman, you'd have to have a powerful male guardian somewhere pushing for your rights. Now there is a woman on the architecture "committee" and that is a success.

You know, now she'll have more weight for getting on some type of board. So this is why it's exciting that they're now members.

**Taher**

We want to support women in other sectors with ideas and networking and having this connection between all of us. We are a successful center, and we can teach them how to go about making improvements and what things work.

**Al-Sulaiman**

We just exchanged ideas with women in eastern Saudi and they're already moving forward on an idea—microfinance funds for women. We really are trying very hard for everybody to understand that we want everyone to work together. Because at the end of the day, their problems are very similar; they're just at different levels in terms of what they've reached.



I've been to Jordan with the World Bank, and I was struck to find that the problems in many regions are very similar. But the level of the problem and the way you reach solutions may be different.

**WPJH**

What do you see as the biggest challenges going forward for the center, the chamber, and women as a whole?

**Omar**

Regulations. I think everyone has to start there. If you study women's movements anywhere in the world, they all start with regulations. You have to change them in a way that gives women equal opportunity. And of course, here the regulations have to go along with Islamic rights. But with Islamic rights, it's the way it's being interpreted that must be addressed.

Islamic rights actually give women more rights than any legislation in the world. It's just that the legislation is being interpreted extremely and is hindering the progress of women. If it was interpreted moderately, then we would have all the rights that we would need. So it's about women's awareness about their own rights in Islam and about their own regulations.

A lot of regulations, a lot of legislation is just paper, written on and put somewhere on a shelf, and no one really knows how you implement it. It's there; it looks great. But when it comes down to implementation within each ministry, there's no training in how to go about it. So sometimes it's about not just passing legislation but changing the implementation process of it. And to do that, you need to make the customers aware on the other end, so they demand it. Because once you have an aware customer, then they will demand that service.

**WPJH**

How do you reach your "customers," the women?

**Omar**

We try to get the information out to them. Society here is not used to going and searching for information. Ladies here got so used to the fact that the brother will do something, or the male guardian will do it, that they're not used to coming down and actually getting the help. And if they do, they want you to do it from beginning to end. So what we're trying to tell them is, we'll give you the information and guide you, but we won't do the work for you; we'll be there to support you. So there is a kind of a shift in thinking.

**Taher**

The municipality has agreed to have a representative from the women's center in their office. In addition, the Ministry of Commerce is just behind this building. And they have a small office or a small section for the ladies. And we have a representative from the chamber in the section for the ladies to help them, just in case they ask questions about the chamber and also to recruit the businesswomen to be members in the chamber.



**Omar**

We place ads in the newspapers and we send our information to all the chamber members. We have a Web site as well. We've also expanded our target; it's not just existing businesswomen, but working women too. It is the entrepreneurs and it is society in general.

We say "society in general" because we feel that is our social responsibility. We feel that as a center, we have a social responsibility to society. And so I look at women as a whole. We look at her from the economic point of view, from the social point of view, from the health point of view. So at the center we give sessions about breast cancer awareness—we want to do a big awareness campaign about it. We have a campaign about diabetes and pregnancy too.

So we try to kind of be the "NGO for females," in general. How do you balance between your career and your family? Things like that. It's not just how do you invest in the stock market, but it's also how do you become a well-rounded female, and from all aspects. We are doing more than what we need to because we are the only NGO here. And so as an NGO and as a center that serves women, it's an opportunity for us to serve them in a bigger way. Until there are other NGOs that are available, or until we feel that women's awareness has increased, we will stick to this course.

Now we are targeting the new generation, because the population in Saudi has just been booming. Seventy-five percent of our new targets are below the age of twenty-five, and many of them will probably be our next entrepreneurs. So we want to target them from the universities and try to help them to become well aware of their rights, early on, and to make good, educated decisions.

**WPJH**

What does Saudi Arabia look like in twenty years? How do you envision women's role within the society?

**Taher**

I understand exactly what Saudi Arabia is going through. And I'm very happy that it has started including women's issues in its debate. I can see that what we are trying to do now is set standards and make it easier for the new generation.

**Omar**

I think in twenty years, with our new generation, they're going to be demanding a much faster pace and change. And I think they're going to get it, and actually that they will get a lot of their rights. And especially with the entry into the WTO and other things like that, I think the young generation is just more aware. Maybe the older generation is less conservative and less resistant to change. But now in this global world, I think the younger generations are the ones that are really going to demand the change.

Right now in fact Saudi is moving faster than it actually looks like it is to the outside world. We feel it from within, and although it might seem to the outside, "Oh, okay, so a woman on the board of directors, big deal. How could that improve things?" But to be part of the center, I can tell you the process of things



and how fast they go because we have board members that are female—it's amazing.

And the way that you can connect with the outside world and male decision makers, it has a great impact. So just looking at it from the outside, it might seem very micro, but it's really making a big difference.

**WPJH**

What you would say to people that might be feeling like they're facing the same challenges that you might have faced, as women?

**Al-Sulaiman**

I don't know if it's the same challenges anywhere in the world. I sincerely believe in the differences in cultures. I think that globalization cannot happen unless we focus on the diversity of these cultures. And I do believe that every culture has to find the right regulations to suit it. We can't bring in regulations and traditions from other countries just because of globalization and try to implement the same things everywhere in the world just because it seems to work in one country.

There has to be more creativity in different countries. And using that creativity, they can come up with laws that are well adapted to that country. So I can't tell others my experience so that they can use it elsewhere; all I can say is that one should just be more open-minded. And as Basmah always tells me, "Think outside the box!" [laughter] So think outside the box, but adapt things to your own culture.

**Omar**

But to be honest, just going back to women's issues in general—let's forget Saudi Arabia, in specific—women all around the world face the same challenges: equal opportunity to men, proving themselves in any work or field that they go into, having to fight to prove themselves, etc. And at the end, what do you want? You want a good career with equal opportunity, a healthy family, and education for your children. You know, that is what all women all around the world want.

Now each one is a different case and each one has different challenges within her culture. But in the end, we all want the same thing. And if we study history, you'll find that each movement kind of resembles the other.

**WPJH**

Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

**Taher**

I just wanted to say one last thing. I'm sure you have a question in mind about Islamic rights for women. Islam has given women all kinds of rights since the birth of Islam. And politically, economically, and socially, she has those rights. As Basmah said before, it's just the implementation of those rights. But they are there, and this is a big support for us, as an Islamic country.

There are a lot of examples in history about Islamic women who have been working since Prophet Mohammed. It's just a matter of the way those laws are understood and interpreted, and then how they are implemented. It's going to take



a little bit of time, because we are talking about culture and we are talking about Islam. There is a very thin line between them. What we're trying to do is just to be very clever in how we combine those together to get to where we want. It's a history that we are very proud of, and now is the time to bring this history back.

**Omar**

I want to follow that up by talking about the driving situation here for women because it has to do with Islamic rights. Right now, women do not drive in Saudi Arabia. Women used to ride camels, as that was the mode of transportation, and now we have cars. The king even said to Barbara Walters on 20/20 that "religion does not prevent women from driving. It is a cultural thing that we have to solve from within." Again, it's one of those issues. But definitely, Islam gave us the rights.

**Al-Sulaiman**

It's a big burden, financially. It cannot continue. And with the increase of inflation and all the prices, not every family is going to be able to afford to have a driver.

**Omar**

And it's preventing some women from actually going out and getting employment, because you need transportation. The minimum wage here is about 1,500 riyals, and a driver gets paid 1,500 riyals. So there goes her salary, so why would she go out and get employment? And I think that's where the chamber will come in because there's an economic need there now.

**WPJH**

So why has this custom been held onto, and what's the process of change?

**Omar**

The more awareness there is of the economic factors, let's just say, the more they will demand for it. But when you only have 3 percent of women working, the demand is still low. And they have culturally arranged it, in the sense that they will run their errands at night when their husbands come home. You know, they have not been in the economic world; they're not working women.

So you have to get awareness out—and this is what we have to do, basing arguments on facts—that Islamic rights gave us the right to ride the camel and it's the same thing; we have to get that relationship going. We have female brain surgeons, we now have female board members, and we have female decision makers. So why hold onto this custom? It doesn't make sense, it's all culture. Someone has to keep pushing it. And one day it will happen, it cannot stay like this.

**Al-Sulaiman**

It'll happen first in Jeddah, then gradually across the country. It will not stay like this.

It has already been discussed. In the past two years, people have started to talk about whatever they want in the newspapers—the newspapers are actually open. So you have pros and the cons; it's a good time for a debate.



**Omar**

Things will change. Just three years ago, it was a big deal that the women would actually use the same entrance to the chamber as men. Now there are women all over the place, and you see them mixing in.

**Al-Sulaiman**

When you meet the Saudis, you have to also understand their mentality, you have to take this into consideration. Even though now it's opening up, people don't like to open up—even the very open ones. It's just the way the culture is here.

**Omar**

The media does not really have that much weight in Saudi, so this society is not used to working with the media, number one. After September 11, the media all of a sudden discovered the rest of the world. Prior to September 11, they didn't even know what was happening in other regions in the world.

So after September 11, everybody discovered each other, but at the wrong time, with the wrong circumstances. And now we're trying to fix Saudi's image, but it's a little bit too late. So you have to work doubly as hard. Nobody would talk about it because we're secretive, and nobody thought they should talk about it.

But after September 11, people started realizing, we're not like that! Well, you know what? The United States and other countries don't know that because nobody's ever been talking here. So now let's bring people in, let them see what's the culture is about.

And we have a story to tell. Saudi society in general never thought that they had a story to tell. They're just normal people, going by their day-to-day, following their religion, taking care of their children. [Now they say,] "I want to tell my story, we're not all terrorists. No, we're just regular families." And that is where the urge to talk about it came from.

**Taher**

I look at it from another point of view. I feel that I'm serving my country, that I'm doing something for my country, that I'm playing a part. So I'm doing it. I don't want to make a big splash about it now because it will be apparent later on with the end results. Then maybe you can talk about it. Now, I'm trying just to solve whatever I can with focus.



## NEGOTIATING WOMEN, DESIGNING THE TABLE

*An Interview With Deborah M. Kolb and Carol Frohlinger, Authors of Her Place at the Table: A Woman's Guide to Negotiating Five Key Challenges to Leadership Success (Jossey-Bass 2004)*

*Deborah M. Kolb and Carol Frohlinger are both leaders in the field of negotiation and the particular challenges it presents for women. Kolb and Frohlinger have authored numerous books on the subject, including The Shadow Negotiation: How Women Can Master the Hidden Agendas That Determine Bargaining Success, which was named by Harvard Business Review as one of the ten best books of 2000.*

*Deborah M. Kolb was formerly the executive director of the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School and is currently Deloitte Ellen Gabriel professor for women and leadership at the Simmons School of Management.*

*Carol Frohlinger is a professional negotiations consultant, providing training and strategic advice to organizations including American Express and Citigroup.*

*Katie Connolly, a master in public policy candidate at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, interviewed Kolb and Frohlinger at the Massachusetts Conference for Women in December 2006.*

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### **WPJH**

How did the idea for the book come about?

### **Kolb**

The idea for this book came from the kinds of executive coaching that both of us do. I was especially doing that with executive programs at Simmons, but we both do this kind of work.

One of the things that we found in this coaching was that a lot of organizations are interested in moving women into leadership, but I call it "Nike"—I'll put you in there, just do it! They don't give them the support or the resources or the legitimacy that they need. And they failed. A lot of women failed for those reasons. So we wanted to write a book about negotiations tactics. This is a book about what are some of the kinds of things you need to negotiate to succeed in those roles.

All leaders get tested. Women get tested in particular kinds of ways.

### **Frohlinger**

We had an interesting process in terms of doing focus groups and deep interviews. We actually spent a couple of days in a room, four or five days, looking at all these stories and extrapolating a framework. And the chapters fell out of that.



**Kolb**

I sent a broadcast to all my former students and the university sent a broadcast to M.B.A. and executive students, and I asked them if they had taken on a leadership role in the last three years and if they had particular challenges they wanted to talk about. That became a big database. It was diverse. People came from all over the place—different positions and different industries. We had about two hundred interviews. That helped us come up with the five categories.

**WPJH**

Out of all those interviews, are there any particular stories that stand out to you?

**Kolb**

The book, in each of these five challenges, has stories about these people and how they set themselves up for failure. We wanted to expose traps, so the book has a lot of stories about people not doing so well. And then we have stories of people who did do well.

Each of the chapters is anchored by a case of a woman who has done well. The first chapter is about a woman who is taking on a new role and how she drills deep. She's been burned a number of times, so she wants to make sure that this one is gonna work. So it's a great story about what she asks for, in terms of understanding culture, about how she works out a relationship with the guy who's going to be her boss. So I think there are lots of really wonderful stories in the book.

**Frohlinger**

I think this is probably one of my favorites. It's about a woman who was given a really wonderful opportunity to do a really big international job. It required a tremendous amount of travel. She was really delighted with the opportunity, but the challenge was that she had two teenaged children and she really felt that she needed to be home more than the job would allow.

**Kolb**

And one other piece to this as well is that she thought if she turned this down, then there wouldn't be another opportunity.

**Frohlinger**

And so rather than see her choice as yes or no, which is one of the big learnings of the book, she looked at how she could reframe and negotiate in a different way. She proposed that two of the people who worked for her would do most of the day-to-day international travel and that she would parachute in as necessary, in special circumstances, and that is what ended up happening.

So when you think about it, it was a win for her, a win for the company because they had her in this role, and a win for the people who worked for her because they had the opportunity to have exposure that they never would have had before, and a win for the clients because she was a great fit for the role.

**WPJH**

My reaction to that story is that it requires a creative employer to allow the space to do that sort of thing.



**Kolb**

Well, they really wanted her in this role. So she was in a pretty good position to think about what would make her say yes. She was creative in how she thought about it, and was good at how she sold it, which I think is also important.

**WPJH**

That last piece, the framing challenge, is often a difficult step.

**Kolb**

Yes, you get stuck in a particular mindset.

**WPJH**

In what ways do you think women in particular can use framing to help themselves succeed?

**Kolb**

Since we did the book, we also did a survey at the Simmons Competitive Leaders Conference. We asked people in that survey about things that they had negotiated in new roles and leadership positions—things that track the book, like title, responsibility, etc. It turned out that 53 percent of the women in the sample had what we called a “high proclivity” to negotiate. And those women had higher performance reviews than those who didn’t; they were more likely to have been offered leadership development opportunities; they were more satisfied with their work and less likely to report that they were going to leave.

So what we found is that for women in organizations, if you can frame in a way that it is a win for you and a win for the organization, if you can frame in a way that is not so self centered, then it becomes much easier for women to ask for what they need.

**WPJH**

Do you think that differs for men?

**Kolb**

I think that there are differential expectations—stereotypes—that operate for men and women. It is much easier for men to ask for things that are self promoting and individualistic. It is expected of them. For women, they suffer some backlash.

So this seems to be a way that they can ask—because it’s about getting what I need, but also that it is good for the organization. I think it is much more likely that women need to do that because they understand that they are going to suffer backlash.

**Frohlinger**

I think it’s important for women to understand that that backlash does exist, because I think that otherwise it can be very lonely and it can feel like a personal deficiency. Rather than “this is just the way things are,” you need to be aware of that, so let’s figure out a way around it.

I do a lot of work with law firms. One of the things I am very optimistic about is that over 50 percent of graduate law students are women and they go into law



firms at that rate. What we don't see is them reaching the partnership level at the same rate. But we are starting to see a business case. It is very expensive when people turn over.

**Kolb**

Negotiation is so critical. One of the gender issues is that often the roles themselves are gender stereotyped. In one organization I know, the way you move into leadership is if you are great rainmakers. And women weren't great rainmakers. Not because they couldn't sell, but because they didn't have the connections and connections are important.

So as a woman negotiator, who says great rainmakers make great leaders? They probably don't—it's quite an individualistic skill. So understanding that, great negotiating is "let's look at the skill set that we really want in leadership." And I think that when you help women think about negotiation and give them some skills, then they can go in and negotiate about those kinds of things. They can create opportunities for themselves, not just wait for ones to come to them, because we know that opportunities don't necessarily just come to them. It's often up to women to create those opportunities, and I think negotiation is a great way to do that. That is why it's so popular. It's a way to create opportunities, and then when you are in the role, a way to create conditions to allow you to succeed in that role.

**WPJH**

How do you think that women can bring negotiation skills into their day-to-day working lives and incorporate a negotiation mindset and framework in a more personal sense?

**Kolb**

They should read our books! One of the things that we teach is that it really is about negotiation being an everyday activity. Sitting across the table is negotiation with a capital N; you know you are doing it. Like when you are buying a car. It's distributive and single issue and all those sorts of things. We talk about negotiation as being with a little n—it's the kind of things you do every day.

For women it's about negotiating for the jobs you want and the things that will help you succeed—the support, the mentoring that you want. It is really redefining what it is you are negotiating about. And I think that is a real revelation for people.

Another thing I think is so key about it is that it is really empowering. It helps women see that they have choices in the workplace. When you have a negotiation skill set, you recognize that you have choices. You can do things. I think that is huge. We teach all levels of women, from juniors to very senior executives, and that is the thing they come away with—that they have choices. I can make things happen for myself. It's about a different way of presenting negotiations than how people typically do it.

**Frohlinger**

It's much broader. I teach people to think, any time you are asked to do anything, is there an opportunity to negotiate here? It's not just yes or no; it's yes and here is



what I will need, or here is how we can work this out. It's a different kind of thinking.

**WPJH**

A lot of the lessons from the book seem to be primarily applicable to women in the corporate world. How would you translate some of the lessons in the book for women operating in less corporate or less traditional environments?

**Kolb**

I have done a lot of work with women internationally, in NGOs. And I am amazed—I think you have to be kind of humble when you do these things—because they are U.S. ideas. I think that things like “getting to yes” don't travel so well. But this stuff really resonates because it's empowering. These ideas travel well because it's about yourself. They are very much about incorporating cultural differences; they do incorporate different ways of thinking about organizations. I think they are about how women see themselves. People have differential access to power and influence and that makes a difference.

**Frohlinger**

I think *Her Place at the Table* is really located much more in the corporate world, but if you go back to *Everyday Negotiation* and its prior incarnation *The Shadow Negotiation*, what I think is really useful for people, whether they are in their own businesses or whatever, is to really think about and pay attention to the interpersonal relationship. I think that the standard stump is that if they do preparation, they prepare for the substance of a negotiation and they neglect the interpersonal to their own peril.

**Kolb**

There is a lot of openness in the framework. It not just Pareto optimality.

**WPJH**

What aspects of women's leadership do you think are scrutinized more than men's?

**Frohlinger**

In the introduction to the book we identify four tests. It's amazing to me—if you asked me when I started my career if these things would still be operative today, I would have said no, but they are.

The double bind test, for example. If you are assertive, you could be viewed as aggressive and then, you know, a word that starts with a B. On the other side, if you are collaborative, you can be viewed as weak and wimpy. So women have to navigate in that narrow space.

The right stuff test, which is really about commitment—if we really invest in this woman and move her up through the leadership chain, will she do something insane like have a baby, take some time off?

The token test—did she get the job just because she is a woman?

And the fit test, which is the point we talked about earlier, which is that roles tend to be gendered. If you are given an opportunity to, for example, lead a profit and loss section, how will you fit?



This is where people tend to look when they are looking for the next generation of leadership, they don't often look in HR or marketing.

**Kolb**

I also think that how one is set up in a leadership role makes a huge difference. An example is Anne Mulcahy. When she was made CEO of Xerox, on the cover of *Fortune* magazine she was named the "accidental CEO." And this is a woman who had spent her whole career at Xerox. She had worked in sales; she had been the chief of staff to a previous CEO. A really star woman. And so I think one of the key things is what we call the strategic introduction: what is the rationale for a woman in this role, and is she set up in such a way that people recognize that she has the support of key leadership and that people are watching her back? I think those things are really important for a woman, especially if she is a little idiosyncratic in terms of background or perhaps unlikely for that role. Legitimacy is not assumed.

**Frohlinger**

And I would add that this strategic introduction is in everyone's best interest. It's not something that if discussed would be withheld because it's not in anyone's interest to withhold it. The question is recognizing that these things are important, especially to women, and therefore that it needs to be done, and hopefully sooner rather than later.

**WPJH**

The balancing of work and family life is often thought of as a particular challenge for women. How often did this come up in your interviews? Do you have any solutions or suggestions for work-life balance?

**Kolb**

In this book we didn't do that much with it. In *The Shadow Negotiation* we have some wonderful examples of people negotiating to make work-life integration work. And why is negotiation critical, and why is it critical for women? Because it's critical to making different work arrangements work. It's a question of trying to find ways to make them work. I think that is an area women really need to pay attention to.

So there is a lot of work on these "on ramps" and "off ramps." When you take time off, what are you negotiating? When you go back, what are you negotiating? And sometimes it's difficult when you come back because things have changed. So now, some organizations are staying in touch with alumni.

This is still a real challenge because it is still seen as a women's issue. But that is again where negotiation is important in terms of how you can make it work. Figuring out trials and pilots. Breaking the problem down into pieces.

But I think that there are organizations that are seeing this as a real problem. Retention is an issue. Turnover is costly.

**Frohlinger**

I think the good news is with regard to the generational stuff. The research that you see coming out about Gen Y is that it's not just a women's issue anymore. Men



are increasingly saying this is not a good way to live. I think work-life balance will become more mainstream as that occurs.

***WPJH***

In the book you talk about how women should capitalize on their superior relationship building skills. Can you comment on that and how you see women being able to use this skill for their own benefit?

**Kolb**

I think there is a preliminary piece of that. A lot of women don't know how to use that skill, and not all women have good relationship-building skills, by the way. I think the feminine idea is that women do, but lots of people don't.

But you can't use relationship skills unless you think you are in a position to negotiate. You have to feel that you are well positioned and that you can be creative in order to use that relationship skill. Sometimes I think you get into this capitulation situation where accommodation gets confused [with negotiation], and people expect you to do the accommodating.

It's situational sometimes but you can really use relationship skills to reframe. For example, the work and personal life issue. I am trying to negotiate with my boss about my work and personal life and how I want to have some flexibility. If we can really talk about that, we can start to recognize that maybe we can run our whole week differently, in ways that use people's expertise in different ways. I think that can happen if things get relational. But relational is not just accommodation. You need to have some backbone behind it as well.

**Frohlinger**

Making people happy at your own expense is terribly problematic because people get to the point where they are so frustrated that they just walk away. And that doesn't solve the problem for you or your employer, so you really do have to pay attention to whether you are getting what you need out of this, as well as whether the other people are getting what they need.

***WPJH***

I think that one of the challenges is getting women to a place where they feel empowered enough to even buy into the negotiation framework.

**Kolb**

I think once they get exposed to it, and see that it is not confrontational and it's not aggressive and it's not win/lose, then I think they really open up. But I think there is some unfreezing you have to do about people's assumptions about what negotiation is. It's a real change in how you think about what it is that negotiation is, and once you get people over that hurdle, then they can see that it's not confrontational. Confrontation is really the thing.

***WPJH***

As a public policy student and writing for a journal about policy, a lot of this work is individualized. It relies on a certain amount of savvy on behalf of the individual. Personally I would like to see more social responsibility, or a policy or



institutional response to these things. How do you see that fitting in with your philosophy?

**Kolb**

I often tell my students that the first women that wanted to do work on family issues were on their own. Over time, women negotiated on their own, and now there are policies about flexibility in the workplace. I think those kind of things can happen, and people can come together to propose things, but it isn't just policy because the problem with policy is that it exists on the books.

But if you take advantage of the policy, and everybody knows that if you take advantage of the policy and then your work gets killed, then no one is going to use the policy. So it is really trying to find ways to make changes to work practices and work cultures that make it possible to do that. And I think that women can come together and do that by having coalition groups that come together and question things. Looking at ways they can make things work, where there is a precedent for some things.

It's interesting. When there was an earthquake and it took out some of the Santa Monica freeway, and after September 11, people made arrangements to work from home. And it turns out that it is possible. It interesting that it takes something like that.

**Frohlinger**

I think that organizations can do a lot with the frozen middle. People at the top understand why all of this is important. People at a grassroots level really understand.

The frozen middle is people who are caught like a deer in the headlights and they are not sure why they should change. Change is painful. Companies can really help people in this frozen middle. I think Debbie is absolutely right—you can have all the policies you want and if an individual boss is not amenable, then you are not going to be using those policies. So you have to help those people in the middle understand how they will be benefited by these policies and people actually using them. Help them figure out that it is not easy in some cases to manage the workload when people are doing flexible things.



THE BASICS OF NEGOTIATING SUCCESS:  
AN IMPRECISE GUIDE FOR WOMEN

DEBORAH M. KOLB, JUDITH WILLIAMS, AND  
CAROL FROHLINGER'S

*HER PLACE AT THE TABLE: A WOMAN'S GUIDE  
TO NEGOTIATING FIVE KEY CHALLENGES  
TO LEADERSHIP SUCCESS*

(JOSSEY-BASS 2004)

*Reviewed by Fiona Greig*

*Fiona Greig is a doctoral candidate in public policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Her interests include behavioral decision making, negotiation, and gender. She is a fellow at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School as well as at the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University.*

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*Her Place at the Table* by Deborah M. Kolb, Judith Williams, and Carol Frohlinger offers a practical guide for how women can achieve leadership success. Drawing on interviews with over one hundred female leaders in different sectors of the economy, it outlines five major challenges that female leaders most often face: gaining intelligence for informed decisions, mobilizing backers, garnering resources, negotiating buy-in, and making a difference. For each challenge, the authors identify the most common traps women fall into and then offer strategic moves women can take to overcome the challenge.

The main shortcoming of this book is its methodology: it is impossible to identify what challenges and tests are specific to women's leadership if only women are interviewed. Some of the interviewees' insights may hold for men and women alike and others may be specific to women, but the interviewees themselves are not good judges of this distinction. They have never been men in leadership positions, and given that many women in leadership positions are still "token" females, the interviewees may be prone to assume that the challenges they face are gender related when they are not (Kramer 1998).

Part of being an effective female leader is knowing when the adversity you are facing is due to your leadership performance and when it is due to your gender. The value of a book like *Her Place at the Table* is precisely that: to help women not only manage, but also distinguish between these two types of adversity. Otherwise readers are at risk of assuming the book is mostly about the challenges associated with being a female leader, an assumption that would only exacerbate the token paranoia the reader might already have. At the end of the day, the book



describes the key issues faced by women, regardless of whether they are also faced by men.

The authors' advice covers the basics of exploring interests, identifying best alternatives to negotiated agreements, reframing issues, negotiating relationships, and building coalitions. However, students of negotiation and leadership will recognize that these five challenges and the strategies they offer to combat these challenges are applicable to any leader, male or female.

Not surprisingly, *Her Place at the Table* thus does quite a good job of offering advice on how to manage these adversities but a mediocre job at identifying the adversities specific to women. The authors do introduce the book by enumerating several tests a female leader typically must pass in order to be successful that her male colleagues tend to bypass: the token test of whether she landed the job only because she is a woman, the double bind test of whether she "can be both leader and woman" (6), the fitness test of whether she has the right qualifications and experience, and the right stuff test of whether she has what it takes to be a leader in this job. Regrettably, the rest of the book is about how to overcome five challenges that do not appear to be gender specific. The reader is left to discern for herself between the challenges that are added obstacles for women to navigate.

Here is my read on it. First, in the section on mobilizing backers, the authors emphasize the importance of negotiating for support from top management (e.g., a strong introduction) but note the specific peril women face of being judged as "high maintenance" if they appeal for such backing from top management. The authors offer concrete strategies to enlist support from top to bottom, such as influencing top management's expectations by setting realistic targets and defining conditions under which management may need to step in and reiterate its endorsement of the leader.

Second, in the chapter on negotiating buy-in, the authors write about the misleading characterization of the "female advantage" when it comes to fostering an open dialogue and developing relationships with people who will come on board with your agenda. In fact women who exhibit a feminine—i.e., participatory and relational—style of leadership are often perceived as too nice. The authors write, "To convert a change agenda into a shared agenda, women must often navigate in this uneasy territory between what is expected of a leader and what is expected of a woman" (152). The authors describe ways to achieve the delicate balancing act of, on the one hand, relying on relational skills to learn about their team members' concerns and difficulties while, on the other hand, making bold moves that establish their credibility and authority as a leader. For example, the authors recommend that leaders go on a "listening tour" but then actively engage in providing solutions to the problems and issues raised on the listening tour.

Third, in the final section on making a difference, the authors speak of the double bind women face in claiming credit and making their contributions visible. This has been widely documented in the social psychology literature (e.g., Rudman 1998; Wade 2001), but the authors provide extremely useful tips on how women (and men) can make their contributions highly visible without having to toot their own horns. These include playing on a visible field (e.g., a company division that is already visible), showing accomplishments in a currency or metric



that others already recognize and value, and drawing attention by attracting talented people.

However, this is not a complete list. The book overlooks one of the major obstacles specific to women: negotiation. One of the most common recommendations the authors make throughout the book is to negotiate. But this advice takes for granted that negotiation is something women do with ease. In fact women have a hard time negotiating. In their recent book *Women Don't Ask*, Babcock and Laschever (2003) document that women have a lower propensity than men to negotiate on behalf of themselves. This is particularly the case in ambiguous situations where the norms of when to negotiate and what to negotiate for are unclear—situations that are very common in leadership positions (Bowles, Babcock, and McGinn 2005).

Moreover, negotiation cannot be taken for granted as a strategy for women because it turns out that negotiation has added perils for women: women who negotiate are often perceived more negatively than men who do the same (Bowles, Babcock, and Lai 2005). Thus what is actually needed is not a book telling women to negotiate, but rather a book on how women can negotiate without risking the backlash. The good news is that Linda Babcock and Sarah Laschever are responding to that need as we speak with their second, forthcoming book, *Asking for It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What They Really Want*.

Despite not directly identifying the obstacles to negotiation women face, *Her Place at the Table* still manages to offer some helpful advice on how to negotiate by informing readers of the conditions necessary for leadership success that they might not have realized they can negotiate for. These include an understanding of why one was chosen for the job, a strong endorsement from top management upon assuming the leadership position, backing for one's agenda, and sufficient resources to implement the agenda.

In each chapter the authors describe strategic moves for how to achieve those conditions by recounting success stories from the one hundred women they interviewed. The book ends up being chock full of these vignettes and anecdotes. As such it is better suited for the more seasoned woman who has her own experiences to which these stories can speak. For this audience as well as those who never (or long ago) received formal training in leadership and negotiation, *Her Place at the Table* has some advice that might save the day. For the rest, it is a verbose summary of common leadership traps, albeit peppered with some rather practical and insightful solutions.

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# A FEMINI-STORY: THE JOURNEY FROM THE WONDER YEARS

## *I WAS A TEENAGE FEMINIST*

DIRECTED, COPRODUCED, AND FILMED BY THERESE SHECHTER  
(TRIXIE FILMS 2005)

*Reviewed by Aditi Saxton*

*Aditi Saxton is a writer living in New York City. She has never had any qualms about calling herself a feminist.*

Therese Shechter's documentary, *I Was a Teenage Feminist*, is a personal questing pilgrimage to the defaced shrine of feminism. The movement as idolized in its most powerful, 1970s manifestation—liberated, outspoken, and ubiquitous—is Shechter's starting point. As an adolescent, Shechter strongly identified with feminism, but as she approaches her fortieth birthday, she professes disenchantment with the promise that feminism once held and has now seemingly betrayed. Positioning herself near the stiletto heel of an oversized Victoria's Secret billboard Shechter wonders why she now feels increasingly marginalized and hapless, in contrast to her confident and empowered teenage feminist self.

In an unrivaled casting coup, Shechter gives the central role in her documentary to the "other F-word" and pulls together a supporting cast studded with such luminaries as Gloria Steinem and Letty Cottin Pogrebin; promising new kids on the block like Jennifer Baumgardner, coauthor of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*; as well as relative unknowns who put in strong appearances, such as Vinnie D'Angelo who leads a lonely crusade to demystify menstruation; and a guest appearance by the Radical Cheerleaders performing high kicks to such rousing cheers as, "Get psyched! Get pissed! Shake your booty, and raise your fist!" Instead of simply letting feminism shine in its starring part, Shechter commits to exploring the devolvement of that strong 1970s brand of feminism and understanding its latest avatar.

Shechter attributes her early identification with feminism to a children's television program called *Free to Be . . . You and Me*, coproduced by Letty Cottin Pogrebin. In her early conversations with Pogrebin, however, Shechter indulges in a whine about how she cried angry tears upon revisiting the soundtrack for the program because "everything was not okay," as had been promised. This is the first indication that Shechter's journey is not going to be as illuminating as could be hoped. Her rather endearing assumption seems to be that the bright and shiny future portrayed by uplifting children's television programming would stay true to its real-life counterpart. This naïveté, though, is the only apology that can be made for Shechter's own betrayal of a film whose premise has such potential.



The question she set out to ask is important: What did happen to the feminist movement? Was economic, social, and political equality simply relegated to the unattainable? For that is the dictionary definition of feminism, as repeated by Shechter—and who, she asks, could object to that? Having realized its ultimate goal of raising awareness and gaining hard-won rights, did the wind just go out of its sails? Were the benefits left to achieve deemed too marginal to be worthy of agitation? Did it go under the radar as a covert operation, best accomplished under conditions of fight and flight?

Jennifer Pozner, feminist media critic, is the only one who voices and counters this growing perplexity, diagnosing a virulent strain of FFDS—False Feminist Death Syndrome—where the recurring symptom is the media's predictions or announcements of the death of feminism. Claims are rife that feminism is no longer relevant, has alienated the women it represents, does not promote the causes that women truly care about, or—perhaps the most pernicious—that the last bastion of prejudice has fallen and, as Pozner says, “Women's rights are secured. We've won everything. We have equity in everything, and sexism is as long gone as June Cleaver.” The pointed irony seems lost on Shechter, who cuts Pozner's impassioned speech to Pogrebin extolling the ground feminism did gain, and the abundance of role models that young girls can currently choose from. Yet even Pogrebin, who at sixty-two can be forgiven for trying to look on her life's work as positive and productive, does issue a caution about not resting on past laurels. Her statement “if you don't protect it everyday, it slips away” is especially prophetic in light of the current balance of power in the U.S. Supreme Court and the political push to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. So despite Pozner's affirmation, feminism, though alive, ceased to really kick and suffered a loss of momentum and of confidence.

And an accompanying loss of face. When did feminism acquire its negative associations? The perception is present and finds voice in the touristy Times Square neighborhood of New York. In street interviews in which people are asked to respond to the word *feminism*, we hear “lesbians,” “angry, militant women,” and “lesbians” again, with no ambiguity that the word is meant as a slur. At a panel discussion that Shechter attends, even Gloria Steinem acknowledges this prevalent image issue: “It walks, it breathes [clawing monster gesture here], it's a feminist.”

Shechter's own interjections are a bit of a bah! in the rah-rah strides her movie is taking. That she insists on interspersing scenes of herself standing beside supermodels on oversized billboards or looking confused in rushing crowds can be overlooked. Her amateur status means we must bypass her penchant to narrate in a little voice that ends each sentence as a question. However, that her notions of feminism seem to have been cryogenically preserved and are as adolescent as they were at the time of their formation is not as forgivable. Her concerns stem from her personal distance and isolation from the societal systems of wife, mother, glamour-puss. But while searching for solidarity, and even finding it in the unexpected quarters of the GLBT community, she fails to extend the sorority further. Animated cues inserted in the film tell us that women's salaries have proportionally declined on the dollar in the past decade relative to men's. Additional fun facts remind us that the equal rights amendment is yet to be



ratified. Yet Shechter cannot bring herself to add it up—her steps towards self awareness involve calling herself a feminist without an inward cringe at the imagined public denouncement of “lesbian.” She is very far from acknowledging a real, expressed, societal bias.

At the panel with Steinem, we are subjected to superimposed pencil sketches showing Shechter submerged in a beaker of water, as tantalizing snatches of the discussion are drowned in her voiceover. But by claiming a sense of growing confusion, the impression Shechter conveys is, *These are not my issues; I don't see how they affect me and I don't understand them.* Later she complains to Letty Pogrebin that the panel made her feel that if she wasn't a queer woman of color on assistance, she did not rate among this set of women. And that the whole experience made her want to run to the nearest Pottery Barn. Wait, take women's lib three steps back with you.

However, it is equally unfair to dismiss Shechter as it is for her to classify the participants at the panel as young, third-wave feminists and implicitly shun them. As Pogrebin and Baumgardner emphasize, the movement is not about exclusivity and has the scope to encompass and even embrace much dissonance within its own factions. Shechter herself takes positively gargantuan steps in reclaiming her dormant feminism at her family's Passover dinner. Shaking off her previously questioning, faltering stance, she conducts readings that ask for a revisionist understanding of the Bible and celebrate women. She is met with passive resistance that soon turns into very vocal contempt. Instead of yielding to this censure she resolves to repeat the process each year—an incredible progression for a woman who hesitated to speak of her work when out on a date.

Shechter's natural ebullience finds wonderful expression at the historic March for Women's Lives in Washington D.C. Even as she voices her own ambivalent feelings toward abortion, Shechter is supporting and reaffirming the central notions of feminism: agency and choice. As women from across the country rally around, speaking passionately about access to education, health care and day care options, contraception, and the inalienable right to control their own bodies, Shechter finds her own voice. She gravitates toward an anti-choice protester, a woman who speaks passionately against contraception and abortion, even in context of rape. Clad in the mantle of feminism, the young woman insists that women should have all rights, except for this basic one. The elastic boundaries of feminism can extend to include even this protester, but Shechter decides that this definition of feminism finds no coincidence with her own. In making this decision, she circumscribes her place in the spectrum of feminism and rediscovers the self-assurance that she was nostalgic for.

The supposed basis of the documentary bifurcated at the very beginning—between her wonder years and now, Shechter's feminism that wandered or feminism that went astray. As a personal biopic the documentary succeeds; it is a heartening coming of age story, even if our protagonist crossed the threshold to adulthood some time ago. However, as an investigation into the meandering progression of feminism, it fails entirely, with Shechter posing the insurmountable obstacle. Her focus shifts from the “F-word” and an expansive view of a generational shift to one that is extremely personal. Her introspective eye does not



wear a rose-tinted monocle and she is able to recognize her limitations, but her initial set-up beleaguers the film. As we wait for her to push the envelope, she is content to grope the walls of her own box and viewers are abandoned in cinematic limbo to sift through an array of perspectives she presents but does not examine. It is a disappointing downgrade for a film that could have been compelling to settle for sweet.



# PROFILE FROM THE FIELD

VASUNDHARA RAJE  
CHIEF MINISTER OF RAJASTHAN, INDIA

*Profiled by Kim Mance*

*Kim Mance leads communications and administration for the Washington, D.C., Secretariat of the Council of Women World Leaders, a network of current and former presidents and prime ministers. President Mary Robinson of Ireland (1990–97) is chair of the council, and Madeleine K. Albright is chair of its ministerial initiative.*

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Home to more than 58 million citizens, Rajasthan, India's largest geographic state, has Vasundhara Raje at its helm. A democratically elected leader of royal ancestry, Raje is a well-educated and vastly popular political figure in a country grappling with the significant disparities between the political, professional, and educational opportunities available to men and women.

Raje became involved in politics when elected to the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly in 1985. From 1989 onward, she was re-elected for four consecutive terms to serve in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament. In 2003, Raje was unanimously elected leader of her party and two days later was sworn in as the first woman chief minister of the state.

As chief minister of Rajasthan, she represents a state that is characterized by a history of feudalism, a desert climate, and a substantial gender gap in its literacy rates. Significant obstacles to educating females in Rajasthan include a cultural norm of valuing women less than men, parents' reluctance to invest in schooling for girls, a low number of female teachers, child marriage, and an exceptionally high drop-out rate.

Raje, having earned degrees in economics and political science, looked squarely at these issues and became a catalyst for change. She and her administration then took a hands-on approach to promoting education. They traveled to twenty-two thousand remote Rajasthan villages, literally taking these communities by the hand to inform them of the benefits of education. This effort led to the enrollment of 1.1 million children in school. Raje developed partnerships with the private sector to secure funding and support for overhauling Rajasthan's education system. Employing creative methods such as these, she formalized and spearheaded an education initiative to strengthen and expand the state's reform. The Rajasthan Education Initiative aims at not only providing basic education for the children of Rajasthan, but making them competitive on a global level. Initiative goals include a 100 percent rate of enrollment and completion of primary education by the year 2010, and a similar increase in enrollment and completion of secondary education by 2020.



The initiative provides free textbooks to all students in grades one through twelve, as well as health checkups, a midday meal program, and scholarships for the poor and disabled. Further innovations for keeping girls, and students in general, in school were to reserve 30 percent of teaching posts for women, facilitate capacity building of teachers for gender sensitization, engaging parents and the community in school programs, and residential bridge courses for drop-out children. A progressive strategy for providing incentives to stay in school, the initiative has a program to reward students with a scooter or cycle for accomplishing goals of longevity and achievement. Not only a motivation for staying in school, this creates the positive externality of added safety for children, particularly girls, while traveling to school, and an easier mode of transport to and from learning centers.

Since the initiative's inception, female literacy rates have doubled, gender disparity in the population of enrolled students has dropped, and girls are in the top academic rankings. Vasundhara Raje's leadership, dedication, and sincerity have brought her to serve at the highest levels of government in her country and have greatly benefited citizens of Rajasthan and development of the state. Her efforts have not only been effective, they serve as an inspirational model to leaders around the world, men and women alike.











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