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GENDER AND CAREERS IN CITY MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: Council-manager form governments are unique, identifiable, measurable, and comparable, making them particularly good subjects and settings for empirical research. This study adds to the body of knowledge about city managers and council-manager form cities by determining why so few women are found in the ranks of city managers. Using graduates of the Kansas MPA as our sample we find that women interested in city management careers face a paradox. If they are married there is a greater probability that they will become a city manager. But, if they marry and have children they will face issues of relocation, child rearing, and parental care—all of which make it more difficult to get a city management job, not to mention doing that job.

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Introduction*

A critique of governing institutions in the United States is that they do not reflect the general population, in terms of racial makeup, socioeconomic class, or gender (see Mansbridge 1999). They are not descriptively representative. The number of women elected to office has increased overtime (Jewell and Whicker 1993) but they are still rates that are far from that found in the public. Government bureaucracy can boast its levels of descriptive representation. At multiple levels, federal, state, and local, bureaucracy's tasks require it to be diverse. The people in its ranks reflect the public's diverse set of values, racial makeup, socioeconomic backgrounds, and gender. While bureaucracy better reflects the composition of society, its higher managerial levels are still largely male (Guy 2000). Cities and counties are seen as more accessible to the various groups in society yet they face the same problems in descriptive representation as do state and federal institutions, they remain largely the domain of men. This study adds to the body of knowledge about city managers and council-manager form cities by determining why so few women are found in the ranks of city managers.

City management has always been an ideal subject for the study of the relationship between politics and administration (Nalbandian 1991, Svara 1990), the roles of appointed government officials (Nalbandian 1991) and the changing structures of government (Desantis and Mehay 1997, Frederickson 1996, Frederickson et al. 2003). Council-manager form governments are unique, identifiable, measurable, and comparable, making them particularly good subjects and settings for empirical research. To determine why there are so few female city managers we assume that the ordinary gateway to the city management profession is the receipt of a master's degree in public administration, or an equivalent graduate degree such as public

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policy or urban administration (Hansell 2000). Most graduate programs in public administration prepare people for the full range of governmental and nonprofit executive responsibilities, and not just for city management. Only a small handful of MPA programs specifically prepare people for city management careers. Among these the Edwin O. Stene Graduate Program in Public Administration at the University of Kansas is the oldest, most established and most consistent such program, being almost entirely dedicated to education for city executive leadership. Students choosing the Kansas MPA almost always do so out of an interest in city management. For this reason the Kansas MPA program is ideal for the study of city management career progress and issues of gender. Using graduates of the Kansas MPA as our survey pool we find that women interested in city management careers face a paradox. If they are married there is a greater probability that they will become a city manager. But, if they marry and have children they will face issues of relocation, child rearing, and parental care—all of which make it more difficult to get a city management job, not to mention doing that job.

Women and Government Service

Women have made great strides towards a more pronounced role in government. As both elected officials and within government agencies women are increasingly making numerical gains in government (Jewell and Whicker 1993). There is value in women's more active role in governing institutions. Descriptive representation, the idea that government officials should look like the public that they represent, allows for government to be made by individuals who have the same backgrounds as the public, which allows for the development of more representative policies. That is, women bring to their political office different priorities, performing more constituent service than men and different policy preferences (Richardson and Cooper 2003:1).

Women, while making gains, are far from being descriptively represented in governing institutions. Bureaucracy has the capacity to reflect the demographic characteristics of the public it serves (Sowa and Seldon 2003:700), but the numbers of women continue to lack in the most senior levels of government management (Guy 1993; Kelly et al. 1991). The following section reviews past research and what we know about women at the higher levels of bureaucracy. A combination of self-selection, agency structure, and tradition/gender stereotypes have kept women out from the upper levels of government management.

Issues of gender in city management are part of the broader subject of gender and careers in public service, the matter to which we now turn. Previous research has demonstrated that there tends to be homogeneity within professions (Mani, 1997; Bullard and Wright, 1993). In her analysis of Senior Executive Service (SES) personnel in the federal government, Mani found that there are similarities between SES members' knowledge, abilities, skills, and leadership styles suggesting that those who were dissimilar were less often found in the executive ranks. Put another way, she found that status as a member of the SES turns more on shared understandings and assumptions about knowledge, abilities, skills, and leadership style more than on gender, race, or ethnicity. Among state executives, females and males come to resemble one another in terms of education, types of graduate degrees, hours worked per week, and salary levels; thus, there is less variation between males and females in the same profession (Bullard and Wright 1993). The homogeneity in the ranks of the SES and among state executives mirrors the corporate sector trends. Kantor (1997) contends that "the point is this: the women we saw were sometimes very different from each other and sometimes not very different from men as leaders" (302). To Kantor, "individual differences are more striking than sex differences" (302).

There is also a structural explanation for the lack of women in the Senior Executive Service. Since males make the decisions about the qualification standards and leadership styles acceptable for SES members, the lack of women in the executive ranks might be explained by this bias (Mani 1997). Women may experience gender discrimination as they attempt to move into the ranks of the SES because women were not part of initial rule making. The advancement of women within the executive ranks in state governments was due to an expansion of government agencies. Some women became executives due to new agency creation and were thus able to circumvent the glass ceiling that had kept women out of upper management in older more traditional state agencies. Access to new agencies, appointments by governors, and interagency mobility account for women's success in becoming agency directors. Although there are now more women in state executive ranks, they are there because they have circumvented the glass ceiling rather than having shattered it (Bullard and Wright 1993).

The Progressive period is crucially important to the field of public administration. Men were able to define the standards of professional administration. Stivers (1995, 2000) suggests that gender stereotyping was at least partly responsible for a split in male and female executive roles in government. Using historical evidence, she offers that during the Progressive Era women lobbied for an enlargement of government through the institutionalization of services to improve the lives of the poor. Men, on the other hand, advocated better administrative methods. Such gender differences are indicative of the stereotypes of the time. Women were expected to be moral, self-sacrificing, dutiful, and domestic, while men were worldly, aggressive, and self-interested (Stivers 1995:524). Reform women were more likely than men to advocate bigger government in order to supply services to those in need while male progressives emphasized more scientific and businesslike administrative processes (1995:527). The result was "bureau

men” and “settlement women.” The inevitable consequences of the “settlement women” hypothesis is that women often devote more time towards emotional labor, work that that includes caring, negotiating, empathizing, smoothing troubled relationships, and working behind the scenes to enable cooperation (Guy and Newman 2004). This work is often invisible, unnoticed, and uncompensated—explaining why women often tend to make much less than men even in the ranks of the neutrally competent civil service (Guy and Newman 2004).

The council-manager form of government is uniquely a product of the Progressive Era and is closely associated with stamping out political bossism and patronage and the introduction of merit systems and management efficiency to the city. At the time, city functions such as police, fire, public works, parks and recreation were primarily male and did not open to women until the 1960s or later. Social service agencies in county government and school districts were, on the other hand, primarily female, particularly at the line level. Though the progressive era and even today the local government version of the “bureau men and settlement women” thesis appears to be the male domination of administration in cities, and the greater presence of women in school districts and county social services.

In her analysis of female city managers, Main (1988) found that city council members tend to wonder aloud whether women can be “tough enough,” “decisive,” “aggressive enough,” or sufficiently “task oriented” to be city managers (1988:44). She found that female city managers are no more likely than men to appoint female assistant city managers or department heads. Female city managers tend to have strong family and professional support systems. Finally, the vast majority of female city managers have had strong mentoring relationships which helped them become city managers. In a comparison between male and female city managers, Fox and Schumann (2000) found that when compared to males, females tended to be more likely

to view community relations as an important part of the job. Women were also “more likely to include citizen input in their decision-making practices than men did” (2000:618). Men were more than women to describe themselves as entrepreneurs (2000:618). Fox and Schumann (2000) illustrate how “women and men do in fact bring different voices to city management” (618).

City management is unique among public service executive positions because managers are appointed by city councils. Women are approximately 20% of all city council members, but nearer to 25% of city council members in council-manager form government (Bledsoe 1993). The definitive study of American city councils found women enter city council races less for the sake of politics, they are less inclined to use their council position as a political stepping stone, are less likely to be defeated for reelection, and put more effort into their council work. What we do not know is whether or not female city council members are more inclined than their male counterparts to appoint female city managers (Bledsoe 1993).

Prior work has demonstrated that upper level managers have more in common as managers than they have differences in terms of gender (Bullard and Wright 1993, Kantor 1996). Women articulate different sets of priorities, which sometimes works to their detriment (Guy and Newman 2004). With the exception of Stivers’ (1995, 2000) we know very little about the factors that determine whether or not an individual will become a city manager. What we do know is that gender matters. Main’s (1988) and Bledsoe’s (1993) findings allow us to hypothesize that women are less likely to be city managers, but why are there so few female city managers? What keeps women from becoming city managers? Research regarding the prevalence of a glass ceiling¹ has indicated that women received just as many promotions as men

¹ The glass ceiling refers to the subtle barriers that block women and minorities from higher level management positions.

but experienced lower salary increases, fewer managerial promotions, and lower hierarchical levels as compared to men (Anthony, Perrewe, and Kacmar 1996:143-144). While our data is limited in its ability to measure glass ceiling effects, we will explore the extent to which geographic mobility influences whether or not one will be a city manager (Markham 1983). We posit that reluctance to relocate will decrease the probability that one would be a city manager. Finally, we examine the role of family and its impact on the respondent's career. Past research has demonstrated that women are more likely to move for the advancement of their spouse's career, this ultimately has a harmful effect on women's employment status (Boyle et al. 2001). Thus we expect to find that respondents with families are less likely to be city managers.

Data and Methods

To test the hypotheses posed earlier, we use a two pronged approach and two sets of data. First, to find the effects of gender and marriage on the probability of being a city manager we use data of all 311 graduates of the University of Kansas MPA program, a program with a reputation of placing its students in city management positions. With the first analysis we find that when compared to males females are less likely to become city managers. Additionally we find that those who are married increase their likelihood of being city managers. The initial analysis is followed by the analysis of survey data that was mailed to all 311 graduates of the University of Kansas MPA program, which include the classes of 1980 through 1999. The latter data allow us to flesh out the reasons for why women are less likely to be city managers and further explore the role of marriage.

Our initial data includes all 311 graduates of the University of Kansas MPA program, who were preparing for local government careers, from the program's graduating classes

beginning in 1980 and ending in 1998. The 1980-1998 MPA local government graduates include 115 women and 196 men. Of all the graduates, 65 (n=311) have served as city managers. Of those who have served as city managers 58 were male and 7 were female. Put another way, just 10.8% of all KUCIMATs² who become city managers were female. Female KUCIMATS are city managers at about the same rate as female city managers generally, 12% (Hansell 2000). The sample comprised of 160 married individuals. Of those who have served as city managers, 79.7% are married, males and females at about the same rate.

Table 1
Initial Sample Descriptive Statistics

	Male (n=196)	Female (n=115)
Served as City Manager	30%	6%
Married	59%	56%
Married City Managers (n=68)	81%	71%

From the statistics presented in Table 1 we find that males are disproportionately underrepresented in city manager positions, not at all descriptively representative. Of all the females represented in the sample, only 7 of 115 have served as city managers, confirming our hypothesis that females are less likely to serve as city managers than are males.

Table 2
Likelihood Estimates of Becoming a City Manager

Variable	Estimate
Female	-1.9(.432)*
Married	1.4(.362)*
Constant	-1.7(.315)*
N = 278	Chi Square = 41.19

*p<.01 or better; Standard errors in parentheses ().

² A KUCIMAT is an alumnus of the University of Kansas MPA program in the city management track. The KUCIMATs are an alumni organization of these graduates. KUCIMAT means Kansas University City Managers and Trainees.

When we use a simple logistic regression (logit) model to find the probabilities that one would be a city manager (see Table 2) we find that females are less likely to be city managers but also find that being married increases the likelihood that one would be a city manager. These findings are contrary to our hypothesis; marriage seems to be a necessary ingredient in becoming a city manager. That is, when compared to their single counterparts married KUCIMATs are more likely to be city managers. From this initial analysis, we can generalize that an individual's gender is an important factor in determining the probability that someone will become a city manager. Second, those that are married do disproportionately well in the city manager job market.

Demonstrating that gender explains the difference between the rate of males and female becoming city managers, even when controlling for several other possible explanations does not, however, tell us *why* males become city managers at a much greater rate than females. We seek to determine the unique influence of city councils in the selection of city managers because, unlike most other executive positions available to women, the position of city manager is a distinctly political choice by city councils.

To find the factors and flesh out the findings of the logit analysis we developed a questionnaire based on earlier research on gender and public service success (Hale and Kelly 1989). The questionnaire was mailed to all of the 311 graduates in the prior analysis. We had a response rate of 49.5% (n=154). Of those who responded, 33.8% are female (n=52). Respondents to the survey include a large representation of city managers. Of the 63 city managers among the 154 respondents, 17.5% (N=11) are female.³ The overrepresentation of city managers in the sample is almost certainly due to selection bias associated with the unique

³ We had a slightly larger of representation of female managers in this sample. We assume that this was due to the 2 year lapse between the collection of the first set of data (1999) and the second survey data set (2000). Within this period we posit that several KUCIMATS were appointed to their first manager position.

emphasis on city management in the University of Kansas MPA program. Graduates, who have stayed close to local government, and particularly city managers, were more likely to respond to the questionnaire than were graduates no longer in local government. Even with this selection bias, the survey sample is generally representative of the initial sample.

Our first finding has to do with being single. Of the initial data, the rate of being single is about the national average, 50%. But, of the University of Kansas MPA graduates who have become city managers, the rate of being single is only 28% and male and female city managers are almost exactly the same. This notable finding appears to have less to do with gender and a lot to do with what appears to be the propensity of those who become city managers to be less often divorcees or never to have married when compared with those in the cohort who have not become city managers. This finding indicates that support systems associated with marriage, personal stability assumptions associated with marriage, and the propensity of city councils to be inclined to select married as opposed to single candidates explains why married males and females are more likely than their single counterparts to become city managers. We return to these findings later.

Even at the outset females were somewhat less inclined to careers in city management. When asked: "When I enrolled in the KU MPA program I wanted a career in local government" 89% of males and 80% of females agreed or strongly agreed. Then when asked: "Through time, my interest in local government administration has declined," 21% of males and 29% of females agreed or strongly agreed. From the outset and then through time, the commitment of men to local government administration was somewhat greater than women. A non-city manager female respondent wrote this rather typical response:

"...women in this profession tend to make choices to pursue local government careers at positions lower than city manager. This does not necessarily decrease their commitment to local government on their own feelings of success and accomplishment."

Another typical female response was:

"I decided not to go into local government administration because it seemed that to move up you are required to move every 3 to 5 years and that does not gel with my personal goals."

Finally a female respondent indicated an interest in the non-profit sector and wrote:

"I believe the true cutting edge of local administration is the non-profit sector. The city management field has become stagnant."

When asked "if my progress toward a local government administration position has been held back because of my gender," 22% of the females but only 2% of the males agreed or strongly agreed. Here are some typical responses by female respondents.

"Although I have never applied for the top administrative position, I have been told by my city council that they might consider me a candidate when I was a little older. I think the gender issue factors into their attitude as well."

"I believe the combination of gender and age is a difficult burden to overcome. There are many men my age and younger who are city managers. Being young and female is a disadvantage."

"Local Government is still the domain of the good old boys."

Some male respondents agree:

"I see a major obstacle to women in the profession. Male city council members fail to view women as professionals."

"I believe there is still bias toward men for city manager positions, but not as great as 5 years ago. But, there is a bias in favor of females for assistant city manager positions."

"Young females have a more difficult time being accepted and recognized as professionally competent than do their male counterparts."

But other males disagreed:

"I see no bias in local government administration."

"My personal experience shows that there is to be little hesitancy on the part of city councils to hire female city managers."

Among the females who are or have been city managers the observations are rather different.

"Overall I do not perceive any advantage or disadvantage for women in local government."

But the most telling difference between males and females has to do with choice. When asked: "My progress toward a local government administration position has been held back by my own choice," 37% of males but 52% of females agreed or strongly agreed. Reasons for these choices and particularly the choice made by women are many and varied.

The first is a willingness to relocate. Fully 90% of males have relocated to further their career whereas only 35% of females have relocated for that purpose. On the other hand, 35% of

females have relocated to further their husband's careers whereas only 7% of males have relocated to further their wife's career. The female respondents put it this way:

“My fiancé moved to accept a job and I made the decision to move with him”

Another wrote:

“Having a spouse with a career that is potentially damaged by frequent moves and desire to spend time with my family has influenced my career decisions.”

And another:

“It is extremely difficult for women who have spouses unwilling to relocate.”

The second choice issue has to do with issues of family and children. Female respondents are more inclined than males respondents to regard the following family and child issues as important or very important and to have interfered in their career development: the health of children, the health of parents, bearing children, the care of children, and household maintenance.

Females use these words to describe family choices:

“My spouse experienced serious health problems--I couldn't afford to work 60 to 70 hours a week and care for a seriously ill spouse.”

“Family illness prompted me to want to stay in Iowa.”

“While my career is very important to me, and I spend a lot of time working for my organization, my husband and children are extremely important to me as well. My biggest challenge is to achieve a balance.”

"I decided not to go into local government administration because it seemed that to move up, you are required to relocate every 3 to 5 years and that lifestyle did not gel with my personal goals of being a mom."

"I have seen two situations in which females reporting directly to the city managers left after taking maternity leave and having children."

Finally a female in explaining why she has not pursued a city management position referred to:

"...the death of my parents. My family is a lot more important than my career at this stage of my life."

These findings match the findings of earlier research on gender differences in the public sector generally (Hale 1986, Hale and Kelly 1989). The desire of women to become city managers appears to often be trumped by family choices and circumstances. To some extent this confirms our hypothesis, marriage and family often get in the way of career advancement; although one should that this does not seem to be the case for male respondents.

In addition to the levels of comparative male and female inclinations to become city managers at the outset, the strength of their inclinations through time, and the career choices made by prospective city managers, we found work setting circumstances to be influential. These circumstances include issues of supervisions and mentoring, issues of sexual harassment, and issues of gender discriminations.

Hale (1992) found the benefits of the mentoring relationship to have contributed to the success of female state level public administrators. Our survey showed that females at the local level believe that having a mentor is important to their success. One of our female respondents wrote:

“The commitment of the city manager to mentor and develop young professionals, especially women, in order to prepare us for a career as a manager [has influenced my career].”

Another found that such professional relationships are not enough to ensure professional success.

“A mentor is always positive but we should not assume it must be the same gender or that you cannot succeed without one because you can. Maintain a network, women need to work harder, be smarter, and prove themselves.”

While yet another found that other professional female administrators are the greatest assets to female new comers but also proposes the importance of females to network with their male colleagues.

“One of the greatest aids to female managers is other female managers, particularly if one is new to an area. Women are more likely to reach out. Women also need to network with male colleagues. Activities such as golf or other social activities can help one get into the club.”

Some females feel that their progress has been stymied by supervisors’ biased attitude.

While some male respondents felt that their supervisors have not supported their career aspirations, more females felt that they have lost a career opportunity due to a supervisor’s biased attitude.

“The manager was fired and the new manager is more of a ‘good old boy’ and does not extend the same values. It all depends on who you work for.”

Virtually all respondents indicated that the KUCIMAT network and support system has been influential in their careers. One male respondent wrote:

"A KUCIMAT directed me to graduate school and gave me my first job."

Another wrote:

"My University of Kansas MPA is a very important asset in my city management career."

A female wrote:

"I have had great mentors who provided very positive mentoring relationships...it has opened opportunities that I have been able to build upon"

Women in our survey experienced gender discrimination at a rate of 19.2% compared to men at 3.9%, and they resigned or were fired because of gender discriminations at a rate of 9.6% versus 2% for men. One female wrote:

"I have seen women get fired for some behavior that is acceptable for men."

Another wrote:

"No doubt the city management profession is still male dominated. Many women still face a glass ceiling when it comes to being hired as a city manager. However, times are slowly changing but women will still have to work harder and smarter to be appointed."

And another:

"It is hard to determine why I did not get the city manager job, whether it was gender or age. I do think the men on the council may have considered the fact that I was young and would probably have children. I think they weighed that into their decision but never said that."

Finally a woman wrote:

"I think gender may have been a factor to why a promotion was delayed in a former position. It also was a factor I believe in why when offered a department head position it was almost done with an attitude of resignation rather than support. I would have been better off quitting."

Problems regarding sexual harassment are more common for females than for males. Our survey indicates that more females than males experienced requests for sexual favors from work colleagues, unwelcome sexual advances, and offensive verbal behavior such as jokes and snide comments. This is consistent with others who have found that women in substantially higher proportions than men experience all forms of sexual harassment (Hale and Kelly 1989, Kelly and Stambaugh 1992).

A man wrote:

"I experienced retaliation for supporting a female with a sexual harassment complaint."

And another wrote:

"I investigated a sexual harassment case and took termination action against the harasser. It was a defining point in my career. I lost my job along with all of the female complaints. The case is being heard by the California Supreme Court this year."

Among all public leadership careers, city management is somewhat unique because city managers are appointed by city councils. Bledsoe's (1993) data indicate that city councils are more male than female (1993, 46-48). City manager appointments tend to balance experience, education, the fit of the personality to local circumstances, and acceptance by a majority of those elected by the people. Although it would seldom be openly said, city council members could oppose candidates merely on the basis of gender. While gender bias happens in a merit system, it runs strongly counter to the civil service ethos. Among council members, there is no such ethos and there may not be a shared belief in merit and against gender discrimination.

Here is how our respondents see it; a female respondent wrote:

"I was replaced by a man who was paid more but less experienced and incompetent."

"It is hard to determine why I did not get the city manager job, whether it was gender or age. I do think the men on the council may have considered the fact that I was young and would probably have children. I think they weighed that decisions but never said it."

"I have been fortunate to receive interviews for almost all positions I have applied for in the last 10 years. In every instance a white male got the job."

"During my first manager position, public works director, my manager was fired at the time the council changed at election. It was a nasty, hateful proceeding."

"The city council took a leap of faith on me, hiring me at age of 25 for the city manager positions. I fell this has propelled me 6 to 7 years ahead of schedule. I will always be grateful for their willingness to take a chance on someone so young."

"In small communities male council members tend to be more gender discriminatory, as are the female council members than their peers in bigger cities."

"Although I have never applied for the top administrative position, I have been told by my council that they might consider me as a candidate when I was a little older, and I think gender factored into their attitude as well."

To this point we have interpreted the survey findings as simple differences in percentages and have added several representative narrative answers to our questions written by our respondents. In summary, the explanations for the decidedly smaller number of female as

compared to male city managers, much smaller than the number of females in the full University of Kansas MPA program cohort, would suggest the following:

1. At the outset and through time females are somewhat less inclined toward city management careers.
2. Females, at a higher rate than males, tended to regard their gender as having held back their city management aspirations. Male respondents are more divided on this issue-- some seeing gender as having held women back, others disagreeing.
3. The greater reluctance of females to relocate is thought by them to have held back their city management aspirations.
4. A greater concern for family and children are thought by females to have held back their city management potential.
5. Male and female respondents in about equal numbers regard supervisor relations, mentoring and alumni networks as significant to career progress.
6. Women experience sexual harassment and gender discrimination at a higher rate than men.
7. Women, at a higher rate than men, tend to regard city councils as favoring men.
8. Women who are married are more likely than single women to become city managers and the same is true for men.

Based on the initial analysis and the survey respondents, we generalize as follows: First, females are more likely to pursue a career outside of local government than are males. Second, the role of mentors and of supervisors is mixed in that many females feel that a mentor is necessary to be successful in city management, others have seen that their careers are at the mercy of biased supervisors. Third, family responsibilities affect the career decisions of females

more than males. However, married males and females are more likely to become city managers. Fourth, females encounter or perceive a hostile work environment more frequently than males. Fifth, successful males are more mobile and more likely to put their careers before their spouse's thus giving them more opportunities. Our analysis demonstrated that a much greater percentage of females regard their careers as secondary to their spouses which explains their comparatively lower probability of becoming city managers. Finally, and most important, gender all by itself is significant in the careers of females preparing to be city managers. Gender is a significant factor in determining the probability that a female University of Kansas MPA graduate will become a city manager.

Discussion and Conclusions

Because women were 37% of the Kansas MPA cohort from 1980 to 1998, in a perfectly gender balanced world one would expect 37% of those among this cohort who become city managers to be women. But, only 9.5% of female Kansas MPA's are or have been city managers, compared to 29% of men. Put another way, 3 out of 10 male Kansas MPAs have become city managers compared with 1 out of 10 females.

We began by asking why. What explains the differences between those Kansas MPA graduates who become city managers and those who do not? Although to some it may seem obvious, many of the circumstances and reasons associated with gender and city management careers are similar to gender and careers generally. Female city managers, like female corporate and other managers tend to be rather like their male counterparts. And, mentoring, networks, experience with sexual harassment, and the nature of supervision all appear to influence females

seeking city management careers in about the same way it influences aspiring female executives generally (Kantor 1997).

Our findings regarding marital status are very different than the findings of studies of top female executives in state government (Hale and Kelly 1989, Bullard and Wright 1993), in corporations (Kantor 1997), and in the Federal Senior Executive Service (Mani 1997). In each of these cases female top executives are more often single than male top executives. The unique manner in which city managers are appointed probably accounts for the difference. It appears that city council members strongly prefer married city managers, male or female. So, a woman deciding to forgo marriage and family enhances her chances for a top executive appointment in most settings, except for city management. But, married women with children who wish to become city managers are faced with the enormous challenge of balancing family life and professional aspirations. The evidence indicates that in the case of city management, women tend to decide in favor of family life.

Relocation is critically important to city management careers because it is nearly impossible to become a city manager without relocating. Women balancing home and family commitment with career aspirations are less inclined to relocate and therefore less likely to become city managers. When this finding is matched with the tendency of women to subordinate their careers to their husbands, there is a formidable barrier to a city management career.

Women interested in city management careers face this paradox. If they are married there is a greater probability that they will become a city manager. But, if they marry and have children they will face issues of relocation, child rearing, and parental care—all of which make it more difficult to get a city management job, not to mention doing that job.

Among all of the challenges faced by females wishing to be city managers, the most complicated and least understood is the behavior of city councils as they make their choices. The findings from this research indicate that councils tend to favor males, even councils with greater percentage of female members. Female respondents to our survey tend to believe that city councils are more inclined to selecting men. But, we have only their opinion. It would be possible, as a subject of future research, to select a group of cities that have, in the last 12 months, selected new city managers and to determine whether there were female finalist, how the interviews went, how individual council members evaluated the finalist (anonymously) and what factors influenced their final choice.

Our findings are remarkably parallel to studies of school superintendents. Women make up about 12 percent of the superintendents in the roughly 14,000 US school districts, although women comprise about 75% of schoolteachers (Bell and Chase 1993). Women are 90% of elementary teachers and 41% of elementary principals (Logan 1999). Junior, middle and high school principals are 16% female. The principalship is the ordinary stepping stone to a district superintendency but elementary school principals seldom become superintendents and because a relatively low percentage of junior, middle and high school principals are female, the gateway to a superintendency is greatly narrowed for women.

School districts, like cities, have elected boards and the research indicate that the same factors which account for the low percentage of female city managers also explain the very similar percentages of female school superintendents (Bell and Chase 1993). Issues of mobility, female subordination of career goals to their spouses, mentoring, and school board and city council gender assumptions appear to operate in essentially the same way in school districts and city government settings.

Our evidence indicates that women become department heads and assistant city managers by working up the hierarchy in a single jurisdiction. But without relocating, they cannot, except in unusual cases, become city managers. So, women tend to “hit the ceiling.” As we have shown earlier, women tend to subordinate their career to their husbands. Women are far more likely to be influenced by issues associated with parents, children and health issues than are men. And, women are far less often willing to relocate to further their own careers. All of these forces, along with female impressions that city councils favor men, come together to explain why there are so few female city managers. But, based on our survey, it appears that women tend to stay in local government administration and to generally have satisfying careers in city administration although much less often than men as a city manager. Therefore, in city management careers, it appears to be “management men and assistant women.”

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