The Consequences of Culture for Public Relations: The Case of Women in the Foreign Service

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In this case study of a class-action suit against the U.S. Department of State, I focus on sex discrimination in job assignments as a way of exploring the existence and consequences of organizational culture on public relations and, more specifically, on female professionals aspiring to a managerial role. I begin with a look at women's history in the Foreign Service and continue with a discussion of its personnel system. Taken together, this historical and contemporary analysis (accomplished through a triangulation of methods that included lengthy personal interviews and examination of relevant documents) suggests that despite legal progress and a change in organizational culture, female Foreign Service officers continue to be disadvantaged. The explanation for the clash that led to their 14-year-long legal struggle lies in a strong subculture operating primarily in posts overseas. That male-dominated counterculture limited women's abilities for career advancement. I conclude that discrimination against women whose work involves communication as part of their diplomatic service also might adversely affect their constituencies, particularly in developing countries.

The District of Columbia (DC) Court of Appeals recently ruled that the U.S. State Department had discriminated against its female Foreign Service officers (FSOs) in virtually all areas of employment, including hiring, honors, and assignments. In this study, I focus on one of those areas, assignments, as a way of exploring the theoretical existence and consequences of organizational culture. More specifically, I use primary and secondary sources to go beyond the broad area of culture to look at the subcultures that may exist within the larger organizational context.

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Throughout this historical and contemporary analysis of a landmark legal case, the role of public relations in diplomacy becomes clear. Such an understanding of the central role that communication plays in relationships between countries becomes increasingly important as nations increasingly rely on negotiation rather than force to settle their differences (Vercic, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1993). The skills of conflict resolution and dialogic communication seem integral to the mediation of the inevitable global disputes.

Many FSOs bring such expertise in mediation to their work in the U.S. Department of State. Many of those FSOs today are women. Their potential for effectiveness may be limited, however, if their organizational culture limits them to a functionary role. In this study, I conclude, in fact, that a determined subculture has perpetuated the pattern of dominance and bias that once characterized the State Department's dominant culture. I demonstrate not only that organizational culture affects public relations practice dramatically, both directly and indirectly, but that the influence of culture may be more pronounced than that of official policy or law. Organizational culture, then, emerges as a limiting factor on the power of the dominant coalition or group of most senior managers to set and implement organizational policy.

This conclusion may have implications for female public relations practitioners in any organizational setting. It adds to our understanding of the status of professional women in a host of contemporary organizational contexts. Finally, it suggests that all communication professionals, female and male alike, must take cultural considerations into account in their attempts to practice two-way symmetrical public relations—an approach that hinges on the potential to change the inner workings of the organization as well as the attitudes and behaviors of its strategic publics.

Thus we see that the stakes are high—for women aspiring to professional status, for public relations practitioners committed to a dialogic model of ethical and effective communication, and for diplomats charged with developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with counterparts throughout the developed and developing world. All of their best efforts (and this country's laws and policies) can be sabotaged by a resistant organizational culture or even an intransigent subculture.

I begin with a brief recap both of women's history in the Foreign Service (FS) and of the personnel system there. This background information demonstrates that traditionally, the FS had limited women's opportunities for honors, advancement, and appropriate assignments (L. A. Grunig, 1991). This abbreviated history also shows, however, that female and minority FSOs have made significant progress in the last 20 years. Despite the progress and the organizational culture that changed along with improved personnel practices, women filed a class-action suit against the Department of State in 1976.

A clash between the dominant culture of the Washington-based FS and a strong counterculture operating in posts overseas precipitated the filing of

the suit that resulted in a 14-year-long legal struggle. I continue with an overview of the literature of culture, drawing primarily from the work of Martin and Siehl (1983). They distinguished between culture, which is integrative, and the subcultures that may coexist with it. They identified three types of subcultures: enhancing, which reinforces the dominant culture; orthogonal, which embraces both the dominant culture and a separate but unconflicting ideology of its own; and counterculture—the focus of this study.

Exploring the relation between the dominant culture and subcultures helps explain the situation of women who work in communication within the FS. This examination of the paradigm of culture is grounded in a real problem and informed by similar instances of prevailing countercultures within the youth movement and the recording industry. These analyses show that even countercultures can be either positive or negative forces within an organization. Together they help answer the central questions of this study:

- 1. Why was the lengthy and costly lawsuit necessary when the organization's culture would seem to preclude any vestiges of discrimination there?
- 2. What role did the counterculture operating in the field play in the situation for women in the FS?

The answers to these queries should have relevance for the growing number of women in the nation's work force in general and for the new female majority in public relations, in particular. I also argue that all public relations professionals, whether male or female, need to enlarge their understanding of the intricacies of organizational culture. Preliminary results (International Association of Business Communicators [IABC], 1991) of a multiyear, multicountry study sponsored by the Research Foundation of the IABC indicated that organizational culture is one of a handful of key determinants of excellence in public relations.

METHOD

A combined methodology helped to answer these research questions. It included both primary and secondary sources. The research design consisted of long interviews as well as analysis of newspaper coverage related to the lawsuit and an examination of relevant State Department periodicals and manuals. This multiplicity of methods is characteristic of feminist scholars (Fine, 1988). Feminist research typically relies on eclectic methodology because of its multidisciplinary nature (Sherwin, 1988). This triangulation may produce a new, more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena (L. A. Grunig, 1988).

Lengthy personal interviews with the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Personnel, Office of Policy and Coordination employee most involved with

the case, T. Whitman (personal communication, August 7, 1989; September 11, 1989), provided data unavailable from published sources. The long interview is a qualitative data-gathering method perhaps best described by McCracken (1988). It seemed ideally suited to this project, in which I sought to explore in part why policy does not work (Marshall, 1985, 1988). It is also most appropriate when investigating the informal and structured links and processes in organizations (Marshall, 1985, 1988).

The long interview uses an open-ended protocol of predetermined questions. This preparedness maximizes the value of time spent with the interviewee (McCracken, 1988). It allows for an individual, trusting relationship with that participant. The structure of the process also leads to efficient analysis of the data while preserving the inherent flexibility and spontaneity characteristic of qualitative research.

Secondary sources for background information on the lawsuit came primarily from lengthy newspaper accounts (Gamarekian, 1989; Havemann, 1989, 1990a, 1990b) and articles in the insiders' Foreign Service Journal (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1989). According to Whitman, the news and journal accounts are accurate; indeed, no discrepancies could be found in the facts described in all these sources.

Insight into the Department's personnel policies came primarily from analyzing its *Personnel Narrative* (1985). Previous feminist research in public relations (L. A. Grunig, 1991) has explored the treatment of women and minorities within those policies. Historical information that helped place the current lawsuit in context came largely from State Department periodicals.

Analysis of data from both secondary and primary sources began with a cataloging of the relationships that should be investigated. (The review of literature that follows helped suggest those relationships.) It continued with a review of the lengthy transcripts of interview notes—looking primarily for patterns in the interviewee's responses that would help answer the research questions. I juxtaposed those themes with insights gleaned from detailed analysis of the newspaper documentation and State Department publications. Taken together, these data led to a rich understanding of the role of female FS workers in communication.

HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S SITUATION IN THE FS

Although women have been employed by the State Department since 1800, their situation there has been characterized by discrimination throughout its history. Not until 1918, for example, did women manage to progress from technical to managerial roles. Beginning with part-time employment in such capacities as preparing "taste," or the silk ribbon used for affixing the Department's seal to official documents, women moved only gradually into full-time positions of responsibility such as Margaret Hanna's, chief of the

Department's new Correspondence Bureau in 1918. Not until 3 years later were women allowed to take the Diplomatic Service examination.

Only in the early 1970s did the Department actually change its personnel policies based on the principle that women and minorities in the FS would be treated identically to their male colleagues. This timing was not coincidental. The beginning of cultural change within the FS coincided with a heightened sensitivity to what legal scholars called "gender-based justice" throughout the country (Kirp, Yudof, & Franks, 1986). Policy questions about women, at that time, can be attributed to feminism as a mainstream political movement. Part of this gender gap, of course, related to the discovery that women tended to disagree with men not only about policies that affect them directly (such as parental leave and abortion rights) but on matters of foreign policy.

The Foreign Service Act of 1980, which updated the personnel principles first enunciated in the Rogers Act of 1924 and revised in the Foreign Service Act of 1946, has tried to accommodate what it called "the evolution of American society in intervening years" (Personnel Narrative, 1985, p. 8). Sensitive to the influx of women and minorities into the FS, it prohibits racial and sexual discrimination (Section 105), establishes a recruiting effort aimed at minorities and women (Section 105), requires an annual Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) report to Congress that includes affirmative action plans (Section 105) and requires that a substantial number of women and minorities be appointed to selection boards (Section 602).

Throughout the last 24 years, in fact, the Department of State has been taking affirmative action to implement the Act and to abolish sexual and racial discrimination in an effort to increase the number of female and minority employees, chiefly through:

- 1. Stepping up efforts to recruit women and minorities.
- 2. Reviewing placement examinations for objectivity and relevancy for entry-level positions.
- 3. Eliminating, in some cases, the written exam.
- 4. Granting lateral entry rather than relying exclusively on a bottomentry system.
- 5. Allowing married women to remain in the FS.
- Reinstating women who had left because of the restriction against married women FSOs.
- 7. Accommodating tandem spouses in overseas assignments.
- 8. Considering EEO principles as a factor in performance appraisals.
- 9. Appointing more women and minorities to selection boards.³

¹For a more comprehensive history of women in the State Department, see "Women Make Their Mark in Diplomacy" (1989).

²See, for example, Carden (1974) and Freeman (1975).

³For a detailed description of the State Department's personnel policies, see *Personnel Narrative* (1985). For an analysis of the treatment of women and minorities within those policies, see L. A. Grunig (1991).

During those same 2 decades of affirmative action, the Department also has tried to enhance the position of women and minorities in the FS. To this end, it has:

- 1. Instituted a midlevel hiring program to increase the pool of women and minorities qualified for senior positions.
- 2. Enforced the same protocols for women and minorities as for White men abroad, despite any negative reaction from the host mission.
- 3. Publicized job vacancies well in advance.
- Protected employees' rights and reduced subjectivity in reviews by selection boards.

THE LAWSUIT

Despite these efforts at increasing both the representation and status of women and minorities, the outcome of the 1976 Palmer v. Baker case was dramatic evidence of the Department's failure to do so. Although the percentage of women in the FS doubled between 1975 and 1984, from 9% to 18%, most officers remain concentrated in the junior level and midlevel. By 1989, only 6% of the senior FSOs were women.

Several witnesses in the case, which first came to trial in 1985, agreed that the Department had been discriminatory but that it had made adequate progress over time. One witness for the defense, Rozanne L. Ridgway, pointed to "many important instances of discrimination" in her career yet she testified that she saw no pattern of organized and conscious discrimination (cited in Gamarekian, 1989).⁵

However, 5 weeks of testimony from statistical experts established that the preponderance of men in prestigious jobs could not occur by chance but must have resulted from discrimination. Experts also testified that in the previous 11 years, nine women out of 586 assignments had been appointed deputy chiefs of missions (DCMs)—which could happen randomly once in 2,500 times.

Another area of job placement, "cones," was involved. Cones are the four major areas of employment within the FS. They include the political, the economic, the consular, and the administrative. Women in the political cone, or job track, were assigned to the consular cone so much more frequently than men that the odds of its happening were one in 100 million.

Still, in May 1985, a DC Federal District judge ruled against the plaintiffs—Alison Palmer and 600 of her female colleagues in the FS. Then, after

⁴Recent statistics show that 25% of today's 4,000 FSOs are women (Havemann, 1990a). Black representation is 6%, up from 3% in 1985 (Eagleburger, 1990).

⁵Ridgway retired in June 1989 as one of the Department's highest-ranking women. She had served as assistant secretary for European and Canadian affairs.

a successful appeal to a panel of judges in 1987, the case was sent back to DC's District Court. There, the chief judge found what he called a "definite pattern of discrimination in all of the areas charged except one, promotion" (Aubrey E. Robinson Jr., cited in Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 22).

When the parties involved failed to settle on remedies by January 1989, Judge Robinson Jr. issued a remedial order for corrective action by the Department of State. Perhaps surprisingly, the plaintiffs filed notice of appeal. They challenged the 1987 ruling of no discrimination, claiming a reversible error. More predictably, the State Department also planned to appeal parts of the court order—arguing not with the basic findings of discrimination in hiring, "stretch" (jobs above one's personal rank) and DCM assignments, performance evaluation reports, and superior honor awards between 1976 and 1985, but for scaling back the remedies.

After lengthy negotiations, however, both sides agreed to a tentative settlement in May 1990. The agreement, signed by Judge Robinson Jr., will be monitored by the court for several years. During that time, the women may ask outside experts to evaluate the Department's practices if it assigns men to more prestigious jobs than women 5% more often.

In the end, then, after 14 years of exhausting and expensive litigation, about 600 women were entitled to court-ordered relief when the case was settled. After Departmental review of the universe of 601 claimants and of individual claims filed, the total number of women whose claims have been deemed valid equals 150, or about one fourth of the members of the class action.

Several dozen of those women are being reassigned to more responsible positions—stretch assignments. As retired FSO Palmer put it, "Women who were damaged in the late '70s may be getting assignments now that they should have had then" (Havemann, 1990a, p. A2).

Within months after the resolution of the case, several job transfers already had been granted. Presumably, some of those positions encompassed communication responsibilities in missions overseas. More specif-

⁶Although this study focuses on discrimination in job assignments, rather than in promotion, the two are related. As Chief Judge Patricia M. Wald said when the U.S. Court of Appeals reopened the case in May 1990, women may have been disadvantaged in promotions because they had been discriminated against in assignments over the years. The court noted that service in less prestigious or demanding jobs, such as the deputy chief of mission slot, might hurt women's ability to show how well they would perform better jobs (Havemann, 1990b).

⁷Palmer paid about \$150,000 of her own money. The court awarded legal fees of \$1.7 million to Palmer's attorneys in the firm Terris, Edgecombe, Hecker and Wayne. By fall 1989, \$300,000 had been paid. The rest is the subject of further litigation.

⁸For a thorough understanding of all the reasons why only one fourth of the women initially deemed eligible for redress actually filed claims, see L. A. Grunig (1991).

However, according to an attorney for the plaintiffs, "One unfortunate aspect is that so much time has passed that some of the women who suffered the worst discrimination can no longer get any relief" (Wagner, cited in Gamarekian, 1989, p. B5).

¹⁰Of course, the relation between communication and diplomacy is problematic; that relation will be explored in a later portion of this article.

ically, six women with 10 years or more of service when each of them unsuccessfully sought a DCM post would get such a job or "an equally attractive other assignment at her option" (Havemann, 1990a, p. A2).

The important position of DCM seems to have eluded women disproportionately. In a statement that speaks to the culture of the missions, Ridgway explained that many ambassadors do not want a woman in the No. 2 spot in the embassy. She further contended that the Department does nothing to help keep qualified women prominent in the pool for when that kind of post opens up (Gamarekian, 1989). As a result, women hold only 9 of the 135 DCM positions even though 320 have enough rank to compete for such jobs.

Job assignment remains a problematic aspect of the Department's affirmative-action efforts. Until 1975, assignment panels routinely were constituted to place both specialists in communication and generalists with the four major areas of employment, or cones. The system, which the Department considered effective in principle (*Personnel Narrative*, 1985, pp. 49–50), resulted in complaints that officers abroad—in particular—found it difficult to compete for new positions because they were unaware of vacancies.

A revised system resulted. After consultation with the American Foreign Service Association (the employees' bargaining agent), an open-assignments system was instituted. Now, vacancies are announced in advance to all personnel, who bid on desired positions at their transfer time.

This new procedure, according to the Department, has increased somewhat the authority of the central personnel system. Only with key positions must the Department's regional and functional bureaus concur with the personnel office on candidates' qualifications and bureau preferences. Now, ostensively, every FSO has the opportunity to compete for vacancies, helped by assignment and career development officers trying to match the best-qualified person to each position (Personnel Narrative, 1985).

Still, as of December 1989, 41% of the men in the FS were political officers and 16.2% were consular officers. By contrast, 22.9% of the women in the FS held political positions, whereas 36.9% held consular positions. As a result of the lawsuit, however, 14 women were allowed to move out of the less prestigious consular, administrative, and economic cones, or job tracks, into the political cone. Other groups of women received permanent cone transfers or priority "out-of-cone" assignments. Also, several dozen women were entitled to stretch assignments. I (In the past, disproportionately few women received stretch assignments and disproportionately many received downstretches—those jobs below one's personal rank.)

One central question of this study, then, becomes, Why the need for such extensive legal remedy to overcome discrimination within an organization

¹¹Each eligible woman may receive no more than two such special assignments, regardless of how many instances of discrimination she claims.

whose culture—as defined and operationalized by its administrators and reflected in its stated policies—seems to preclude any such sexism?

According to one of the original plaintiffs in Palmer v. Baker, "a subtle subculture [italics added]" was at work that pigeon-holed women into technical, administrative jobs rather than the economic and political realms¹² (Garrison, cited in Gamarekian, 1989, p. B5). At this point, then, it becomes necessary to take a brief look at the culture of the State Department as it relates to the treatment of women and, next, to take a somewhat longer and more theoretical look at the concepts of culture and subculture.

Cultural considerations are not the only variables that affect the situation for women in the FS, of course. Structural considerations undoubtedly play a significant role as well. However, much recent work investigating the relation between organizational structure and public relations (e.g., Schneider, 1985) has suggested the power-control perspective as a more appropriate lens than the structural imperative for viewing many organizational processes (J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1989). Organizational culture is largely determined by the organization's power elite. This group of senior managers, alternatively referred to as the "dominant coalition," control the organization through their policy decisions.

CULTURE AND SUBCULTURE IN THE FS

Since the affirmative-action era of the 1970s, the Department's administration had tried to ensure women's being considered for senior roles, such as ambassadorships and policy positions at the deputy assistant secretary level and above (L. A. Grunig, 1991). The seminal statement came as early as the Department's 1970 Policy on the Assignment of Women and Minority Personnel. It specified that "assignments to all positions, ... domestic and overseas, are made without consideration of the race, color, religion, sex, or national origin of the employee concerned" (70 CA-5901, cited in *Personnel Narrative*, 1985, p. 72).

More specifically, between 1977 and 1981, secretaries Vance, Muskie, and Haig urged their assistant secretaries to consider women and minorities for the critical role of DCM. When he took office in 1982, Secretary Schultz emphasized his commitment to the Department's ongoing EEO efforts. In a statement issued in 1985, he reaffirmed his personal commitment to affirmative action. Written that same year, the Department's *Personnel Narrative* (1985) devoted an entire section to "Efforts to Improve the Status of Women."

More recently, according to T. Whitman (personal communication, September 11, 1989), both the Bush administration in general and Secretary of State Baker in particular were keen on avoiding any "black marks" against

¹²The latter are considered fast-track positions that can lead to policy-making roles.

them in terms of treatment of women and minorities. Baker made it clear within days of taking office that his Department needs to improve in this area—not only because of the law but because it is the right thing to do (Eagleburger, 1990). As a result, Whitman said, the men "out there in the field" had added impetus to listen to the court order.

However, members of a subculture that adhered to the former notion of male dominance continued to discriminate against women eligible for assignment or reassignment. They managed to subvert the dominant culture of the State Department when they sat on selection boards. Eagleburger (1990) described what has come to be called the "glass ceiling" effect that continued to inhibit women and minorities within the FS:

As minorities have discovered in the corporate world and elsewhere, it is one thing to get in the door and quite another to climb the ladder of success. It is a commonly held view that minorities and women seldom have been placed on a career fast-track, that they have not received choice assignments in choice locations, and that they have found entry into the senior-most ranks of the service especially difficult. (p. 2)

So, Eagleburger (1990) acknowledged the need to do more. Speaking before the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, he began by reiterating what he called Bush's "firm commitment" to equal employment opportunity for all. He explained that all of the government's foreign affairs agencies must set an example by "fully representing the diversity and the pluralistic nature of our society and the practical relevance of our ideals" (p. 1). Operationally, he said, this means attracting and retaining greater minority participation in the work force.

The Department of State, Eagleburger (1990) contended, has a special obligation to reflect the nation's heterogeneity and to exemplify the country's commitment to advancement on the basis of merit. He explained his reasoning as follows:

Overseas, we are the United States of America—from ambassadors to vice consuls, to secretaries and communicators—it is through us that foreigners the world over form their impressions about Americans and American society. We have no choice but to put our best foot forward. (p. 1)

Eagleburger (1990) went on to characterize the culture of the Department in the past as "Eastern Establishment, a clubby adjunct of the Ivy League" (p. 1). That culture was largely inhospitable to women, according to statements offered even by witnesses for the defense during the class-action suit.

¹³According to Eagleburger (1990), shortly after his appointment Baker reviewed the State Department's management style and procedures to ensure sensitivity to equal employment opportunity principles.

¹⁴Kirp, Yudof, and Franks (1986) reminded us that "at all its levels and in all its branches, government is linked with gender" (p. 1). However, only in the last decade, they contended, has the country become attentive to this dimension of policy.

Ridgway, for example, remarked at her retirement ceremony in 1989 that the American ambassador in Buenos Aires had barred her from attending a stag luncheon to honor the American fishing delegation, of which she was a member. She also recalled that the rotation system for junior officers in Manila stopped on her arrival there as a junior officer (cited in Gamarekian, 1989). Eagleburger (1990) subsequently called for a "new breed" of FSO, presumably one who would be welcomed by the changing culture of the Service.

Understanding the dynamics of culture in any organization is, as Smircich (1983) put it, "an idea whose time has come" (p. 339). Theorists have embraced the concept as a key determinant of organizational process (Smircich & Calas, 1987). Sriramesh, J. E. Grunig, and Buffington (1992) considered culture a construct that reduces ambiguity and facilitates interaction in social settings. Culture may reduce ambiguity within organizations, but the concept—when broadly stated—is subject to semantic confusion.

Understanding organizational culture is further complicated by the fact that hundreds of definitions have been posited.¹⁵ It has been described alternatively as the "rules of the game," "the ropes" a newcomer must learn, "shared understanding," "core values," "basic assumptions and beliefs," "climate," "style," "how we do things around here," the organization's "philosophy," a "clan," and many, many more.¹⁶

Sriramesh et al. (1992) distilled these descriptors into the following consensus: "[O]rganizational culture consists of the sum total of shared values, symbols, meanings, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that organize and integrate a group of people who work together" (p. 591). Within this umbrella definition, the work of Schein (1981) is particularly valuable. He envisioned three levels of culture—levels that encompass many other, more disparate definitions. These levels are basic assumptions, values or ideology, and artifacts.¹⁷

Martin and Siehl (1983) added a fourth dimension, critical to the work of scholars in public relations: management practices, such as training, performance appraisals, and hiring. Their theorizing is consistent with that of what Smith and Tayeb (1988) would consider the micro researchers—those who study the work group or human resources of an organization.¹⁸ Scholars such

¹⁵For a most comprehensive and scholarly discussion of the semantic history of the terms culture and subculture, see Hebdige (1979).

¹⁶For a comprehensive look at each of these descriptors, and for their sources, see Sriramesh, J. E. Grunig, and Buffington (1992).

¹⁷Artifacts characterize what Buono, Bowditch, and Lewis (1985) called "objective culture." They consist of observable phenomena such as executive perks, office furnishings, and work space.

¹⁸The approach of the micro researchers is culture specific, as opposed to that of the macro researchers who propose a culture-free thesis. According to Tayeb (1988), scholars writing since the seminal work of Hickson, Hinings, McMillan, and Schwitter in 1974 have argued that the link between organizational structure and the organization's environment is stable across societies. Tayeb (1988) criticized this approach by pointing out that because the studies of researchers such as Haire, Ghiselli, and Porter (1966), Hickson et al. (1974), Hofstede (1980), and Shenoy (1981) looked only for similarities, they found similarities and ignored any discrepancies that might differentiate organizational cultures within a given society.

as Sinha (1981) and Misumi (1985) have analyzed the relationship between superiors and subordinates by focusing on the constructs of leadership and participation—key variables in this analysis of the FS.

Yet another relevant theory in this elaboration of organizational culture comes from Creedon's (1993) critique of systems theory. Her feminist analysis of this unifying paradigm in public relations argued that gender privilege in the organizational system is preserved via the *infrasystem*, which she defined as "the foundation of institutional values or norms that determine an organization's response to changes in its environment" (p. 160). She further argued that the infrasystem typically is male-defined and that it circumscribes much organizational behavior—regardless of any programs of equal opportunity, equity, or symmetrical communication that may exist to the contrary.

In the popular, rather than scholarly, literature the notion of "shared values" occupies a pivotal place in the Peters and Waterman (1982) schema for organizational culture. What happens, though, when diverse members of an organization fail to share the values that would characterize it—in the view of the organization's top management? Answering this query also speaks to the second question of this study: What role did the counterculture operating in the field play in the situation for women in the FS?

As Martin and Siehl (1983) explained, organizational culture is such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that it comprises both culture and subculture. Typically, of course, the organization is characterized by one dominant culture. Many subcultures may coexist. Martin and Siehl further distinguished between culture, which is integrative, and the subcultures that may divide when they prevail within it.²⁰

Tichy (1982) likened the organization to a strategic rope woven of three strands: technical, political, and cultural. The cultural strand is woven of many substrands, or subcultures. Tichy urged strategic managers to work toward harmony among any subcultures to ward off threats from a turbulent environment (one that may include, as in this instance, litigation).

Like culture, the notion of subcultures is complex. As Martin and Siehl (1983) explained, organizational cultures are not monolithic phenomena. Instead, they are composed of "various interlocking, nested, sometimes conflicting subcultures" (p. 53). They identified three distinct types of subcultures. Enhancing subcultures reinforce the dominant culture. They actually advocate loyalty to the predominant core values. Orthogonal subcultures, deferring to the core values, embrace both the dominant culture and a separate but unconflicting ideology of their own.

¹⁹I gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the anonymous reviewer who pointed out that the discriminatory counterculture described in this article sounds "hauntingly like the infrasystem."

²⁰The comparable distinction applied to societal culture is with "subsystems" (Kaplan & Manners, 1972).

Countercultures, the focus of this study, tend to be divisive. They pose a direct challenge to the core values of the dominant culture because their values run contrary to the significant values that predominate. Martin and Siehl (1983) called such a situation an uneasy symbiosis. However, they acknowledged some useful functions of countercultures as well, such as making clear the rationale between appropriate and inappropriate behavior and providing a safe haven for developing innovative ideas.

The recent lawsuit against the State Department provides a valuable illustration of the negative effects possible when a subculture develops within a strongly centralized institution. According to Martin and Siehl (1983), countercultures are most likely to emerge within a centralized organization with a charismatic leader—such as the State Department, with its Secretary of State—that has permitted significant decentralization in a few of its operations—such as the process for selecting DCMs.

In this case, both formal leadership of the Department (the Secretary of State) and the bureaucrats who carried out his directives articulated a culture of equity toward women. They did so in the two main ways Wilkins (1983) identified as appropriate for top management's asserting its vision of culture on the organization: through personal behavior, exemplified in what they say and what actions they encourage, and through the formal systems they create, such as evaluation programs and hiring procedures. However, Martin and Siehl (1983), the experts on subculture, contended that culture is not so responsive to managerial attempts at control as many other theorists believe.

Gregory (1983) reminded us, also, that top management alone does not create organizational culture; members occupying different levels of the hierarchy contribute to subcultures. Then, too, scholars have shown that a national, regional, or local culture can affect organizational culture because employees are enculturated outside the organization as well as inside (Sriramesh et al., 1992). Finally, we know that changing any culture (or subculture) is extremely difficult.

Within the few significant instances of decentralized decision making in the FS, however, a subculture or counterculture that adhered to the former ideology of male dominance continued to discriminate against women eligible for desirable assignments. The effects of the discriminatory counterculture within the FS can be seen most pronouncedly in the case of the position of deputy chief of mission. T. Whitman (personal communication, September 11, 1989) believed this helps explain the reluctance of some eligible women to claim discrimination in assignment to a DCM position. One criterion for success in the job is that the DCM get along with the ambassador—most of whom are men in their 50s who, according to Whitman, are political appointees who do not think much of FSOs to begin with. Whitman said claimants may understand that ambassadors would be especially resentful of being forced to work one-on-one with women as a result of the suit.

Thus, we come to understand that being a DCM is prestigious but that it makes one vulnerable. Many fail at the job. T. Whitman (personal communi-

cation, September 11, 1989) called the DCM slot "the point at which many people go from being good people to poor managers." Unsuccessful performance as a DCM means not only that the FSO has little chance of being promoted but may, in fact, result in being selected out of the FS. For a successful career in the FS, an FSO not only must hold such a position but excel at it.

Shortly after settlement of the lawsuit, the Department initiated 1-month, crash DCM training courses—mandatory for all. The procedure also was designed to increase departmental control over how both ambassadors and DCMs are selected. Previously, the ambassador selected his or her DCM—typically from a list of career FSOs only suggested by the Department.

Thus women who might have been in a position to affect how communication was accomplished both within the FS and with the organizations and countries it deals with were thwarted. Here, then, we see the importance of understanding culture. Tichy (1982) considered organizational culture to be the most intricate and elusive yet most pervasive influence on the organization's effectiveness. Smircich (1983) agreed that managing corporate culture is a key to managing any effective organization.²²

Tichy (1982) was most impressed with the influence of culture when managing change within organizations. Changing the culture to keep pace with or accommodate other change, of course, is difficult. Tunstall (1983), who studied the regrouping inherent in the divestiture of AT&T, considered changing corporate culture the most difficult task facing management. Recall that the Foreign Service Act of 1980 was designed to accommodate the changing nature of the contemporary work force. Women and minorities represent a significant, strategic constituency—both internally and abroad. Koprowski (1983), in particular, argued for evaluating organizational culture because of an important, contemporary challenge facing management: the changing role of women in the labor force. ²³

Again, though, the threat of countercultures to undermine this aspect of organizational culture—whether it be called a philosophy, ideology, or value of equal opportunity—is apparent. Tichy (1982) warned that as the separation of strands weakens a rope, so the clash of subcultures threatens organizational effectiveness.

Subcultures, especially if they run counter to the primary culture, may be dangerously tenacious—as the State Department discovered throughout the years of the *Palmer v. Baker* suit. Wilkins (1983) explained that adherents of

²¹Ambassadors are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The new plan was aimed at making ambassadorial selections earlier than had been done, allowing more time to fit the ambassador with his or her DCM on a case-by-case basis.

²²Some scholars, of course, question the viability of "managing culture." In fact, Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm (1985) said that purists would consider the notion of changing or managing culture both asinine and unethical.

²³Two other key challenges, according to Koprowski (1983), are the success of Japanese managerial philosophy and the managerial role of hero.

a subculture, as a minority group, feel they must assert their differences with the majority. They operate in a mutual protection society, defending their members from being overwhelmed.

Hebdige (1979) called this mindset on the part of the subculture "grim determination" (p. 18) not to bring disapproval on itself but to detach itself from the taken-for-granted norms. He cited Mepham's 1972 lecture on science and philosophy for the explanation: The identity of the subculture and the distinction between the subculture and the prevailing system are so deeply embedded in discourse and in thought that any theoretical challenge to them can be "quite startling" (pp. 90-91). What seems to have been overwhelmed in this case, rather than the counterculture with its vestiges of sexism within the FS, are the opportunities for women to be assigned to jobs commensurate with their abilities and their ambitions.

Normatively, however, the presence of subcultures could be beneficial to an organization and to most of its employees. Active subcultures would seem to characterize organizational cultures considered more participatory than authoritarian. (Participatory, rather than authoritarian, culture correlates with excellence in public relations [IABC, 1991].) Some countercultures may help introduce innovation into the formalized, centralized organization (Martin & Siehl, 1983). Even the subcultures characterized as counter to the dominant culture that have been studied have been shown to contribute to the ultimate success of the organization and, perhaps more importantly, to the righteous members of those countercultures.

For example, Lont's (1984) dissertation describes a heroic instance of subcultural resistance to dominant cultural values. Those values of what Lont called the parent culture of the recording industry attempted to co-opt, to commoditize, to adapt, and to commercialize a women's recording company, Redwood Records. In essence, Redwood refused to water down its message for broader, mass appeal. It even developed a nonprofit organization, Cultural Work Inc., that is dedicated to subcultural change. Lont's critical analysis concluded that the case of Redwood Records invalidates the conventional wisdom that subcultures are doomed to adapt or to fail.

In a similar analysis, Hebdige (1979) began his study of subculture by citing Genet's (1967) Thief's Journal, wherein Genet explored the meaning of revolt on the part of gays subordinated to the dominant culture of the police department. Like Genet, he was interested in subculture as an expression of refusal to knuckle under to those who would dismiss or denounce its members. He went on to study additional instances of subcultures among youth: the debut of punks in London in 1976, followed by teddy boys, beats, Rastas, reggae enthusiasts, hipsters, skinheads, and mods.

²⁴For an understanding of the continuum between these two extremes, see Ernest (1985), Kanter (1983), Schein (1985), and Wallach (1983).

Hebdige (1979) concluded that such subcultures represent "noise," or "interference in the orderly sequence" (p. 90). However, he called his reading of these groups sympathetic because, in his view, any study of subcultural style draws us "back towards the real world, to reunite us with 'the people'" (p. 140). More recently, Graebner (1990) concluded in his study of the zoot-suit riots of 1943 that fashion expresses a youth "folk" subculture that may challenge the hegemony of the dominant culture.

These cases analyzed by Graebner, Hebdige, and Lont illustrate, on a more theoretical level, a popular and favorable conception of subculture. Vos Savant (1990) answered the question, "What is the difference between a 'subculture' and a bunch of weirdos?" with, "Weirdos are the ones you don't like" (p. 10).

The implication, of course, is that you do like members of the subculture—at least in this society, where the story of little David battling the dominant Goliath resonates for most of us. Women have been marginalized within society at large and within the workplace in particular. Perhaps the story of the weak resisting the strong, the oppressed standing up to the oppressors, resonates for them even more than for men. As a result, our initial inclination—as women—may be to celebrate the existence of subcultures because they bespeak diversity.

Even the countercultures may be preferred, in principle, to the alternative of a monolithic, dominant culture that would homogenize the values, the ideology, the philosophy, and the operations of the organization. Hebdige (1979) pointed out the imperatives of class, in particular, in determining culture. He explained: "Some groups have more say, more opportunity to make the rules, to organize meaning, while others are less favourably placed, have less power to produce and impose their definitions of the world on the world" (p. 14). He argued that subcultures, in particular, provide necessary resistance to hegemony on the part of the powerful.

However, this analysis of the realities of personnel practices in the FS suggests that countercultures may in fact work against the empowerment of all employees there. The next section of this study concentrates on those employees who work in communication.

COMMUNICATION, CULTURE, AND WOMEN IN THE FS

Little research has been done on FSOs whose work involves communication. However, an analysis of the FS personnel system (L. A. Grunig, 1991) contributes the following understanding of the relations among communication, culture, and gender there.

About half of all FS employees are specialists; the other half are generalists. The work of all generalists encompasses communication (T. Whitman,

personal communication, September 11, 1989)—largely through such diplomatic functions as representation of official American views to foreign governments and negotiation with those foreign entities. Generalists are assigned to one of four broad occupational groups or tracks, called *cones*—administrative, consular, economic, or political. Administrative officers are most directly responsible for communication and information systems. Consular officers work most closely with members of the public. Economic officers are the liaisons between the FS and other U.S. agencies. They also gather, write, and report on economic data.

Political officers communicate official U.S. views on political issues to foreign officials; they negotiate agreements with them; and they maintain ties with political and labor leaders, other diplomats, and other opinion leaders in the host country. In Washington, they perform similar functions with other governmental agencies and foreign embassies.

Specialists in the FS have narrower careers than these generalists. A second important distinction between the two is that specialists in communication, unlike the generalists, serve more as technicians than as managers. Although the State Department's Personnel Narrative (1985) emphasizes that different categories of personnel—both specialist and generalist and all four cones within the designation of generalist—are not intended to convey differences of status, the lawsuit established otherwise. Testimony showed that personnel in the consular and political cones may attain the same rank and salary, yet the former may stamp visas while the latter make policy.

One key personnel expert in the Department of State predicted that it will be 5 to 20 years before the FS becomes a truly equitable workplace for its female FSOs (T. Whitman, personal communication, September 11, 1989). He further expected that at that point, women would practice a different kind of communication in precisely the way the literature (J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1989) suggests: more two-way, interactive, and adaptive and less persuasive and domineering. Accomplishing all of this seems to hinge on transcending the constraints of the divisive counterculture that may have relegated women to routine tasks in relatively insignificant positions.

Diplomatic communication, in particular, offers the opportunity for women to practice what J. E. Grunig and L. A. Grunig (1989) considered both the most effective and most ethical type of communication: the two-way symmetrical, or balanced and cooperative method. Of course, diplomacy need not be symmetrical and reciprocal. In the experience of Tran (1987), a veteran diplomat and scholar of both communication and diplomacy, diplomats always try to convey to the publics of the country where they are stationed an image of their own country and that government's stability, tranquility, and accord.

So conceived, diplomacy is more characterized by its persuasive intent. In this model, the organization's goal is control or domination, and communication contributes through advocacy of the organization's position. Strength-

ening the organization's position may take the form of image creation or image enhancement.²⁵

Symmetrical communication, on the other hand, values mutual understanding to a greater degree. Communicators embracing this approach serve more as mediators than as advocates. L. A. Grunig (1991) argued that negotiating with foreign governments or economic interests could be approached either from a manipulative stance or from a cooperative, adaptive stance.

Whether conducted in a symmetrical or asymmetrical way, diplomacy is most certainly a communication function. Public relations scholars Signitzer and Coombs (1992) did the most to explore this relation between communication and diplomacy. They explained that traditional diplomacy is giving way to a more public diplomacy, or the consideration of public opinion in conducting foreign affairs. J. E. Grunig (1993) concluded from their analysis and his own work on international affairs that "the field of public diplomacy consists essentially of the application of public relations to strategic relationships of organizations with international publics" (p. 143).

A decade earlier, Sobowale (1983) was contending that diplomacy is primarily a communicative act. In fact, most discussions of diplomacy refer to duties or activities that are communicative in nature. Harmon's (1971) classic guide to diplomacy, for example, describes such processes as acting as spokesperson, cultivating friendship and understanding through contacts, exchanging views and conversation (informal or official), and preparing information about the country and interpreting that information in an attempt to clarify the policies and predispositions of government leaders, organized groups, and the more general public.

Any one of these roles within the rubric of diplomatic communication would be advantageous both for female FSOs and for their constituencies abroad. A growing body of literature²⁶ suggests that women would practice a more cooperative, negotiational style of organizational communication than would men if women saw themselves in a managerial—rather than technical—role.²⁷

Lerche and Said (1979) characterized diplomacy as a process wherein communication from one government feeds directly into the decision-making apparatus of another. That process, according to the British diplomat McDermott (1973), is managerial in nature:

²⁵According to Cohen (1986), however, "A key element in the success of a foreign policy is whether the policymaker's image of the world is accurate, because if there is a disparity between his [sic] image and the reality there is a strong possibility that the policy will end in failure" (p. 21).

²⁶For a synthesis of much of this literature, see L. A. Grunig (1991).

²⁷For a description of these roles and their gender-based implications, see Broom and Dozier (1985).

The diplomat's duty today and tomorrow is much more like that of a manager (ambassador), submanager or member of the staff of a gigantic international corporation, except that he [sic] is not in the business for personal profit.... His [sic] first duty is to observe, report, and comment accurately on the sphere of foreign affairs entrusted to him [sic]. (p. 40)

In managerial positions, with responsibility for diplomatic functions that emphasize communication between the United States and its foreign constituencies, women should have the greatest opportunity to further their own careers and the goals of their organization. Thus the study concludes with a brief discussion of what it will take to accomplish all of this.

CONCLUSIONS

Leadership of the State Department and top-level managers within the FS have espoused all the right stances about women who work there. They have put all of the structures in place to eliminate discrimination. They have devised procedures to maintain those structures. Through the creation and communication of this new culture, both in subjective terms such as values and in objective terms such as the artifacts of awards and promotions, women should have equal opportunities to attain important positions such as DCM. For at least 5 years, the court will be watching to see that this happens.

If the heretofore powerful counterculture remains unresponsive to the dominant culture and the remedial court order, then I would conclude that it engages in what Kristeva (1981) called a struggle against archaisms or the putting into operation what is acknowledged to be right in principle. Of course, the principle of equal opportunity in the case explored here goes beyond "right" to legally mandated. The very question of job discrimination is archaic in the sense that, as Bernard (1971) put it nearly 2 decades ago, it "is by now old-hat and can be relegated to the more conventional reform-oriented women's organizations" (p. 236).

What is needed, instead, is a more revolutionary challenge to the subtle forces not of law or administrative directive but of subcultural holdouts. Organizational theorists have come to realize that the study of culture may resolve conceptual and practical problems that other lines of inquiry could not (Gregory, 1983).

Consistent with this line of reasoning, this analysis of female FSOs has demonstrated that a grimly determined counterculture—whether in the field or in Washington—can undermine significantly the emancipatory efforts of organizational management and of the court. In this case, the unempowered were women. The selected literature presented here has shown the power of a tenacious counterculture over any disadvantaged group—whether they are women in this country or the constituent publics of our diplomatic efforts in developing countries.

At the same time, we see that women's incorporation into the highest levels of the FS is critically important—but that law and the posture of the dominant culture there are not enough to make this goal a reality. The importance of such a goal is three fold. First, it is inarguably the right thing to do. Second, the consequences of discrimination against women whose work involves communication as part of their diplomatic service might adversely affect their constituencies in developing countries. After all, one in every four women who filed legitimate claims in the sex discrimination suit against the FS is directly involved in communication at overseas posts. With the remedial court order and an external review of the Department's compliance with it, female FSOs should have a chance to practice both managerial and technical roles at home and abroad. This, in turn, should help to create what Currie and Kazi (1987) called the global vision that serves as an emancipatory platform for First and Third World women.

Finally, and most important, the goal of eradicating the negative influence of a divisive counterculture within the FS has critical implications that go beyond the women themselves. As Rakow (1987) said, rather than studying the depressing facts, we need to study gender itself. She pointed out that researchers have assumed gender to be biologically determined and culturally modified. She contended, however, that sex is as cultural as gender and that we live in a culture that persists in seeing see two biological sexes.

Feminist scholarship such as this, then, must go beyond the study of gender as a cause of any particular communication process. It needs to do more than compare the way men and women may practice communication—based on any a priori notions about their polarity.²⁸ Instead, it must elucidate the relation between the dominant and subordinate that characterizes our social, political, economic, and cultural system. In so doing, the study speaks to any group that may find itself outside of the dominant norms.

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²⁸As Johnson (1984) explained, "To compare women to men is to reaffirm and perpetuate rather than to question the normative value of male behavior" (p. 80).

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