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THE CHANGING AMERICAN WOMAN:
HER ROLE FROM THE HOME TO THE
LABOR FORCE AND BUREAUCRATIC
SOCIAL STRUCTURE

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: WOMEN AND THE BUREAUCRACY

General Considerations

"Getting the vote just gave us equality in voting, that's all, but not in earning a living or seeing that the laws for earning a living are equal. I also think that the laws that govern looking after a family should be equal. So I propose that the next step is complete and absolute equality for women under the law." That was the beginning as Alice Paul and the National Women's Party began pushing for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment--which took the next 49 years to be passed by Congress (Pincus, 1977:59). We have often heard it said in reference to women, "You've come a long way to get where you are today," but just how far have women advanced in the last 100 years and since the right to vote? The women's movement is not new. In fact over 100 years ago the Seneca Falls women's movement group that gathered in New York in 1848 were crying for equal access to the labor force.

It was not until 1964 that the Civil Rights Act passed Congress, and Title VII of the Act, "Equal Employment Opportunity", prohibited discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in hiring, upgrading, and all other conditions of employment. The Equal Rights Amendment has not yet passed. But these are but surface actions and do not tell us the story beneath. Is there equality for women in the labor force?

My own working experience in the last three years has been within a bureaucratic organization; therefore, I began to focus this study on organizations and women's roles within them. A great deal of information has been amassed about bureaucracies and their formal and informal structures, but my first-hand experience within the system has been useful to add meaning to the theoretical principals advanced. Where are women in the organization and how do they fit into the hierarchial structure?

Formal organizations have existed since ancient times. Bureaucracies in which government officials were formally organized developed in ancient Rome and Egypt. Blau goes on to point out that the "greatest accomplishments of modern society - technological progress, superior standard of living, high level of education - would not be possible without formal organizations" which are "the roots of power" (Blau, 1971b:3). The bureaucratization of the industrial sector has been paralleled in other spheres. Government at all levels has undergone similar growth. "At the federal level, there were only 49,000 employees in 1870. By the close of World War II, that number had skyrocketed to 3,569,000. In 1969, there were still over 3 million federal employees" (Ritzer, 1977:34). The question then becomes how the structure and conditions of an organization affect individual human behavior and accordingly their roles. Women accounted for one-third of the Federal Civil Service work force, but "relative to men, women are concentrated in the lower level civil service grades. In October 1973, women accounted for nearly 47 percent of all employees in grades 1 to 6, 23 percent in grades 7 to 12, and only 4-5 percent in grades 13 and above" (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1975).

Considering the growing importance of bureaucracies and the increasing number of working women, the purpose of this inquiry is to assimilate information on women within a hierarchial structure of the formalized bureaucracy. That includes their mobility and power. Women account for a large percentage of the labor force, but only a small percentage of those in the upper strata or power structure. Observations of women workers certainly justify our stereotypes of women in clerical and service occupations, but why only a small percentage in management?

To examine this thought, we go back to our understanding that a bureaucracy has a normative structure and that it is a system of upward mobility. We must tie this to women within the system, and consider why they are not advancing in