

# THE CULTURE OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Feminist scholars in the Philippines have documented the disadvantaged position of women as compared to men in the domestic and non-domestic spheres. Women have been entangled in the web of gender inequality as perpetuated by cultural practices and conditions as well as marginalized as a result of employment status, higher unemployment rate, lower wages and government regulatory policies.<sup>1</sup> Despite the marked increase in the participation of women in the labor force, the expected wider representation and advocacy of the feminist cause through policy formulation and implementation have not been realized.<sup>2</sup>

Statistics show that the gender mix of Philippine bureaucracy which is currently 1,257,452 strong reflects the present status of women in formal organizations. The first level known as the sub-professional category composed of clerks, secretaries and those

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- 1 See Carolyn I. Sobritchea, "Gender Inequality and Its Supporting Ideologies in Philippine Society," in Liberato Bautista and Elizabeth Rifareal, Eds., *And She Said No!* Program Unit on Human Rights, National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 1990, pp. 8-17; Luz Lopez Rodriguez, "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination in the Philippines," *Review of Women's Studies*, (1990) pp. 15-25; Lourdes Quisumbing and Barbara B. Lazarus, Eds. "Women and Work," in *Aspirations Career Planning Handbook of the New Asian Women*. Manila, Philippines. Commission on Women and Work. Asian Women's Institute, 1985, p. 2.
  - 2 Proserpina Domingo Tapales. "Expanding the Public Domain: the Bureaucracy as Mechanism for Women's Political Participation," in Proserpina Domingo Tapales, ed., *Filipino Women and Public Policy*, U.P. Center for Women's Studies, 1992.

involved in auxiliary or support services is dominated by men as they control 58% of all posts. The second level composed of the technical and professional workers is dominated by women as they occupy 59% of all positions in this category. The third level composed of executives, administrators, and directors is overwhelmingly dominated by men as they occupy 71% of all posts. The data clearly show that the second level, which is women-dominated and the logical "feeder" group to the third level is not enjoying the expected "upward mobility."<sup>3</sup>

In Southeast Asia, women are well represented in the service industry, but are found mostly in the lowest echelons. The higher the pay, status, and level of employment, the fewer the women. This is most true in government where women tend to be in ministries such as education, culture, and social welfare. The occupational pattern of women in services is that they are over-represented as professionals, clerks, and sales and service personnel, while under-represented in managerial positions. The same pattern holds in Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore although the disparity is not as great in the latter two countries.<sup>4</sup>

To say that women are generally underrepresented in the ranks of decision makers is an understatement even if they make up nearly half of the world's workers. Women constitute a mere 10 to 20 percent of managerial and administrative jobs worldwide.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this study is to inquire further into the cultural knowledge, practices and conditions present in formal organizations. As the study is qualitative in nature, the data will be interpreted to ascertain whether there are gender differences in perceptions as regards division of work, influence and ways of doing

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3 Patricia A. Sto. Tomas. "Women in the Bureaucracy." Paper prepared for the Consultation on Women in Politics and Public Policy, 8-10 August, 1991, pp. 1-3.

4 Victoria S. Licuanan, ed. *Beyond Profit. ASEAN Women Managers in Government and Not-For Profit Organizations*. Asian Institute of Management, 1992, pp. 30-31.

5 Editorial, "Women Decision Makers: Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling," INSTRAW NEWS, 17 (Spring 1992), p. 1.

things. These perceptions will be analyzed within the context of how they serve as barriers to women's access to decision-making. The concept of equality within the context of feminism means equal access to opportunities for decision-making, power and other resources.

If culture is defined as a system of shared symbols and meanings, what forms of cultural knowledge are prevalent in the workplace which are used as bases to interpret experience and generate the appropriate behavior? How are these cultural practices and conditions actualized in formal organizations? For the purpose of the study, formal organizations will be taken here to mean public bureaucratic organizations with their basic structural features such as hierarchy, specialization/division of labor, presence of rules and regulations, personnel complement, and system of records.

Two government agencies were selected as loci for the research in the interest of documenting women's experiences in the workplace. In-depth interviews were conducted in August-September, 1990 among a selected group of women managers and staff while two male respondents agreed to participate in the study.

Agency "N"<sup>6</sup> is a government corporation involved in providing affordable housing to low-income families. Since its establishment in 1975, the position of general manager has always been occupied by males and while female nominees have been considered for the position of assistant general manager, the shortlisting of candidates inevitably excluding them from the selection process. The interviewees claim that since Agency N is considered a "production agency" there is a bias towards staffing it with personnel who have technical skills particularly in field operations. The workforce is divided into technical (architects and engineers) and non-technical (community relations, contract specialists and others). The researcher's request for a demographic profile of Agency N did not merit a favorable response from the Human Resource and Management Office. Fol-

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6 Disguised upon the request of interviewees. Subsequently, all the names of the respondents have been changed.

lowing the functional specialization of labor within Agency N, interviewees were drawn from the Program Planning and Review Office and the Community Relations Office (CREO).

### **Operations vs Non-operations**

“Nanet”<sup>7</sup> was a young graduate of architecture when Agency N recruited her through the Professional Development Program — this involves a series of examinations and interviews administered to the top 20% of graduating students nation-wide. After going through rigid screening, she went through six months of on-the-job training (OJT) as well as attended seminars in her entry position as junior architect (underboard).

She got promoted as architect when she passed the board examination. Her initial assignment was in the area of operations. This is usually a mixed team composed of an administrative officer (always a female), engineers and architects. While assigned to operations, Nanet claims that, “there was no preferential treatment towards women. When I was six months on the way, I even climbed mountains.” As an individual, she claims to have lots of confidence, to be competitive and aggressive especially in matters of promotion, “if someone gets the better of me, I will fight back” (*pag nalamangan, talagang umaalma*). On the side, she considers herself a skilled saleswoman for which she has won the admiration of her colleagues. This has deflated the ego of her husband especially when colleagues say, “hey, your wife is good ” (*hoy, magaling ang asawa mo*).

When Nanet got married to an engineer from the same agency, she occupied a higher position item. Nanet intimated that “I had to sacrifice for him to make my marriage work,” especially when she requested that the promotion due her be withheld until her husband got promoted himself. She also opted to transfer to a non-operations assignment. In her present position, she conducts planning and site investigations and at the same time assumes a staff position as contract specialist. Her frustration at being stuck

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7 Interview with “Nanet,” August 23, 1990, Quezon City.

in her present position has been offset by the happiness she feels for her husband who is a project officer assigned to operations.

There appears to be an explicit understanding in Agency N that when employees are designated as project officers there are risks or hazards involved since they are assigned to work in squatter areas. The choice for the position is always a male because they are expected to cope with overtime work such as supervising the concretizing of structures and attending meetings. Male project officers are preferred by department managers over females since they are expected to transact business even beyond official hours. According to Nanet, this makes the male project officers vulnerable to graft since "many transactions can be massaged" (*maraming nahihilot*) during business meetings.

Nanet cites an exploitative angle in her work. In transacting business with other agencies such as following through a Transfer Certificate of Title at the Register of Deeds, her co-workers would say, "send Nanet" (*ipadala si Nanet*). Asked why, Nanet answered, so "he will be kind or helpful especially if he is a male" (*para bumait ang Register of Deeds lalo na kung lalaki*).

"Mary"<sup>8</sup> has another story to share. She is an engineer who has been with Agency N for seven years. Mary accepts the reality that she has limitations in her job as men can work more effectively especially in overnight assignments. As part of the operations team, the role of each member is well delineated. Operations involve infrastructure development such as construction of roads and bridges and demolition. All these phases are documented. While members of the operations team supervise the execution of the work, the female members take charge of documentation because of their patience in attending to details. This appears to be an accepted norm since the females claim to be more skilled in verbal and writing skills. Besides, they also perform monitoring tasks well.

Mary believes that she is being "treated as a person, not as one of the guys." When asked what her reaction would be if assigned to work overnight, she replied "I will try to do it, whatever

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8 Interview with "Mary," August 23, 1990, Quezon City.

the cost" (*kakayanin at kakayanin*). However, she adds that a male department manager prefers to involve male members of the team specifically in assignments which are long-term and hazardous. She rationalizes the situation as "being protective of women."

Asked why she stays in government, Mary replied, "I am single and I can use what I have learned (*single ako at nagagamit ang napag-aralan*). *Walang opportunities outside pero maraming benefits like provident fund* (There are no opportunities outside but there are many benefits like provident fund). We do not work like machines here and there is a team spirit."

Through the eyes of a male program architect, the sexual division of labor is reinforced by these perceptions.

"Manny"<sup>9</sup> was a walk-in applicant at Agency N. Upon his recruitment, he was assigned to the Tondo foreshore area as part of the composite team of architects, engineers and community organizers (COs) to upgrade slums in Metro Manila.

His assignment then was to observe and survey basic utilities, plan the road system, and adjust the water and sewer systems. A minimum of four plans are prepared for consideration by the department managers and consultants before presentation to the community. The COs play very important roles because they take care of "conditioning" the minds of the community members who need to approve the plan especially if it involves demolition of existing structures. Aside from cushioning the impact of the approved plans on the community, the COs also take care of livelihood programs and socio-economic surveys. In the words of Manny, the COs or CREOs serve as "frontliners" and "buffers." "The CREOs affectionately stroke [the egos of the community members], if unsuccessful, they do it everyday" (*Ang CREOs ang nanghihimas, pag hindi nahimas, inaaraw-araw*). Most of the dirty work is assigned to the CREOs. It has been the peoples' perception that when the male members of the team explain the concept, they tend to be technical, resulting in resistance to the

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9 Interview with "Manny," August 23, 1990, Quezon City.

project since they cannot cushion the impact of the proposed changes on the community.

Manny admits that he relies more on women to produce more because they are dedicated to their work. "In preparing reports, my tendency is to write the report in two or three sentences. However, the women can always determine what I overlooked in report preparation. They can also work until 3 A.M. to do odd jobs especially when they assist the manager in preparing presentations." Manny disclosed that he has to be flexible in dealing with his female staff since their "families and monthly sickness affect their performance." In working with women, he intentionally avoids those who are "grouchy" (*masungit*). This was also affirmed by the women managers who admitted that it is difficult to deal with their female co-workers. They are emotional because of their moods, difficult to please, and "difficult to get along with" (*mahirap pakisamahan*). "Men are more stable to talk with" (*Mas estable kausap ang lalaki*).

The software component of facilitating the provision of shelter to low-income families is being actualized by the Community Relations Office (CREO).<sup>10</sup> This office was set up in 1976 by a female manager cum social worker based on the belief that there is a need to nurture the clients so they will trust the government in the implementation of projects. This component ensures that clients are "somehow consulted in policy-formulation and implementation."

The need for CREOs to undertake community relations is based on the type of community and activity. Based on their experience, female CREOs are needed to deal with hardliners (community members affiliated with progressive organized committees or people's organizations). Women have the "patience" (*matiyaga*) and facility to communicate policies, procedures and guidelines and to strengthen the organization (*pagpapalakas ng organisasyon*). They are also expected to mediate clients' needs and resolve community issues. When they enter a community, the CREOs' role is to "befriend the masses of people" (*kaibiganin and*

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Division Managers and Chiefs of Various Offices, August 21, 1990, Quezon City.

*pulutong*) in the community and give them importance. Men do not have the patience to engage in such activity because they “sometimes get involved in fights and drinking” (*minsang napapaaway at napapainom*). However, they can better explain the costs and physical infrastructure of community projects.

In their work, men delegate responsibility and women welcome the opportunity because they want to learn new things especially when these involve hands-on experience. “There is patience to learn new things” (*May tiyaga na matuto ng ibang bagay*). The technical personnel and community organizers have learned from each other in the course of their work. The CREOs trained the technical staff in various aspects of community organizing such as collaborative problem-solving between clients and planners and managing people in a community assembly. On the other hand, the technical staff trained the CREOs to understand the planning process as well as critique and analyze plans.

Do they exert influence in decision-making? The women managers affirmed that they assist in surfacing issues or problems that require policy directives or review. They also prepare guidelines on the policy and board levels.

### **Woman’s Role in Non-Traditional Domain**

The other agency included in this study is Agency “C,”<sup>11</sup> a constitutional body entrusted with the “power, authority, and duty to examine, audit and settle all accounts of the Government or any of its subdivisions, agencies, or instrumentalities...” It is more popularly known as the watchdog or the guardian of government funds. A total of two women directors, two assistant directors, one state auditor and one male manager participated in the in-depth interviews conducted by this researcher.

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11 Disguised



Auditing is perceived as a non-traditional field designated for men. However, a study conducted in 1983 shows that Agency C boasts of 57.16% women while 24.40% are Career Executive Service members.<sup>12</sup>

The results of the interviews elicited areas of complementarity and differences with regard to cultural knowledge, practices and conditions in the workplace.

"Laarni"<sup>13</sup> has been with Agency C for thirteen years. As State Auditor IV, she claims to be one of the few who occupy such a rank within the hierarchy. She attributes her promotion to good performance and instances when there were no competitors possessing her qualifications. She feels that "women are on equal footing with men" at Agency C as they assume important roles in decision-making because they are more articulate compared to their male counterparts who are "silent" (*tahimik*), "good" (*mahusay*), and "thorough in their analytical skills." "I feel I am aggressive," ...recognized as "hardworking" (*masipag*) since "I can render overtime work and won't leave my work until it is completely done."

During the time of the interview, Laarni was due for reassignment. However, she emphatically said that she is not recommending a male auditor to replace her because the agency where she is presently assigned is open to a lot of temptations. "There is a norm we follow in this agency — do not get friendly with the contractors, otherwise, you might get involved in messy deals."

"Citas"<sup>14</sup> is an Assistant Director of the Special Audit unit which is directly under the Chairman's Office. She has been with Special Audit since she entered Agency C twenty six years ago. "Auditing is not a man's job; I have been invariably described as 'brave' (*matapang*) or 'with guts.' In reality, I am kind" (*mabait ako*). She attributes all these qualities to her position in the family

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12 Proserpina Domingo Tapales, "The Status of Women in the Philippine Bureaucracy," *Journal of the Institute of Industrial Relations*, 8 (1986) and 9 (1987), p.101.

13 Interview with "Laarni," September 1, 1990, Quezon City.

14 Interview with "Citas," September 5, 1990, Quezon City.

(third in a family of two boys and two girls) and the responsibilities entrusted to her when her father died, such as providing support to the family, trouble-shooting problems and decision-making.

When Citas got married, she and her husband were both assigned to Special Audit and she was already a Supervising Auditor. The husband had to be reassigned to another agency to pave the way for her promotion as Assistant Director. This uneven situation has not caused tensions in their marriage because as a rule they do not "discuss official business at home. In fact, we consult each other regarding our work because of his seniority at Agency C."

She enjoys the role of being a "graftbuster" since "I want to straighten this government." Citas declares with pride that, "We cannot be 'manized' (*sic*), that is why we are less prone to corruption. We cannot be invited [to eat out]" (*hindi kami puwedeng imbitahin*). She believes that she exerts influence in decision making because the Director is not fully aware of operations. "Whenever we attend the same meeting, the Director always requests me to preside over the meeting. However, I still give due respect to the Director."

"Myra"<sup>15</sup> is the Director of the Local Government Audit Unit. The Unit facilitates and develops plans, operating standards, methods and techniques for the implementation of auditing rules and regulations in local government units. It is considered "premiere operations" as the unit covers the entire Philippines.

Myra relates that the former Chair of Agency C recruited more women to augment the workforce. Before martial law, men were assigned to the various branches of the military. However, the former Chairperson changed the situation by assigning an all-female staff. In personnel movement, there is the consideration to assign or reassign "tough auditors to match the personality of the agency head. If the agency head is stubborn, a female auditor will be sent" (*pag matigas ang ulo ng agency head, babae ang ipinapapadala*).

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15 Interview with "Myra," September 5, 1990, Quezon City.

She believes that the risk factor related to auditing depends on whether the auditor will participate in messy transactions. In her present work, she identifies her enemies as “politicians, mayors who do not know how to read and write. Sometimes they are not professional.”

Asked why she is described as “brave” (*matapang*), she answered, “I fight for principles. If I’m fired from my job, I still have my husband to support me. If I have to live my life all over again, I would still be in auditing since it provides stability and security of tenure.”

“Rhina”<sup>16</sup> literally rose from the ranks — from Auditing Aide in 1972 to her present position as Assistant Director of the Financial Management Office (FMO). The office facilitates long-range annual plans and programs for Agency C. As a woman, Rhina feels that it is easier to “influence higher officials. It depends on how you approach them, I use the soft-sell approach but also defer to authority. In dealing with the Department of Budget and Management, I used to act like a man by enjoining them to engage in man’s talk” (*usapang lalaki*). This is qualified to mean “be serious in dealing with me, believe me (*maniwala ka*), since men entertain the notion that women change their minds, do not mean what they say and can be easily influenced” (*madaling maimpluwensiya*).

“Maria”<sup>17</sup> as Director of FMO focused her observations on the criteria for personnel movement (i.e., assignment and reassignment). These are based on the 1) “personality” of the audited agency and the person being assigned, i.e., does the person have the ability to deal with the head of the audited agency?; 2) sensitivity of the agency, i.e., vulnerability to graft and corruption; 3) image of the agency, i.e., is it a high profile and complex agency like the Office of the President and the Supreme Court.

She observes that if the agency is prone to graft and corruption, the tendency of the Central Office is to assign a female auditor. This is based on the belief that female auditors are less

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16 Interview with “Rhina,” September 5, 1990, Quezon City.

17 Interview with “Maria,” September 1, 1990, Quezon City.

vulnerable to graft and corruption. As an example, “it is more difficult to invite a woman [to eat out] (*mas mahirap kumbidahin*) especially if the head of the audited agency is a male.” In practice, male auditors are assigned to NPA and MNLFI-infested areas. However, there is a prevailing notion among the Regional Directors that women should be assigned to work in these high-risk areas because they are not touched (*hindi sila ginagalaw*) [by the insurgents] unlike male auditors.

Maria describes the climate at Agency C as discrimination-free and offers “more avenues for participation. We do not feel discriminated at all and we can even engage the commissioners in a debate during meetings. Women and men exert the same influence as both can approach the Chairperson directly.”

### **Qualitative Differences between Female and Male Managers**

Are there differences between female/male managers in terms of skills and ways of doing things in the exercise of their professions?

In terms of skills, the women managers and staff of the CREO in Agency N take pride in their facility to communicate (both verbal and written) in their line of work. Corollary to this, the CREOs also describe themselves as “assertive” since they are trained to speak before an assembly. This experience stimulates them to have a higher level of confidence. They can also be analytical and skilled in forecasting (i.e., they thought of housing cooperatives). Although they admit that women are “persistent” (*makulit*), they also feel that this cultural stereotyping has been put to good use in the conduct of research. They have the patience to check and counter-check data; prepare an analysis of the situation and present options. They believe that the “key to success” (*susi ng tagumpay*) in community organizing is “good analysis” (*mahusay na pagaanalisa*). In the preparation of reports, the women strive for comprehensiveness and richness of detail while they perceive men to be “compartmentalized and too focused in their approach.” In the area of decision-making, men are risk-takers since they “implement decisions without the benefit of discussions. Males do not think, they gamble, and are impulsive” (*pabugso-bugso*). On

the other hand, women are on the low-risk side since they spend more time on “process.” However, they also feel that they are more decisive and ready to take calculated risks — “when they make a bet, they really bet” (*pag tumaya, taya*).

Working styles also differ between male/female architects and engineers. According to the female architects, they would rather give priority to the form of the building (i.e, shape and facade) and then fit in the structural elements later. The male architects attend to structure specifically with regard to strength and durability. They are also more practical in their designs.

The female engineers describe their work as “cleaner and more thorough” (*mas malinis at mas masinop*). They intimated that society expects women to be orderly, clean and thorough and these are reinforced through socialization.

During work programming presentations, the interviewees describe female managers as “in control since they have a clear grasp of their areas of operation, are more organized and transparent with regard to surfacing and discussion of issues.

The women managers of Agency C also describe audit work as “detailed, analytical and involving a lot of patience.” They also take pride in their being “tough” especially in undertaking sensitive special audits. Female auditors are different because they “stay put in the office, are diligent and really study (*talagang nagaaral*) [their work]. They can also “deliver” because they are more “conscientious and conscious about their performance and more serious with their work.” They have also been observed to be effective in motivating people in small projects like the Monday Flag Ceremony as they are more creative in their presentations.

“Gene,”<sup>18</sup> affirms some of the women managers’ perception that male managers are “more preoccupied with a generalizable level with regard to policy” while their female counterparts are “more attentive to details.” In terms of vulnerability to corruption, he believes that “it will take ten times more effort to corrupt a woman than a man. You cannot take a woman to the nightclub or the casino. However if a woman learns [these vices] it is a lot

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18 Interview with “Gene,” September 5, 1990, Quezon City.

worse" (*Ang babae hindi maaari i-nightclub o i-casino. Kaya lang pag natuto ang babae, mas masahol*).

Variance in the interpretation of shared understandings regarding the suitability of females for audit work can be gleaned from Gene's perception that a woman's coping mechanism is just right for a small agency in the city or national capital region because its span of control is narrower compared to agencies in the provinces. He qualifies this by saying that women could easily cope with the workload in a small agency especially if they have small children. "As a supervisor, I was very much against giving provincial assignments to women because of the long travels involved and because the area of jurisdiction is wider. In field assignments, if the area is uncertain because it is high-risk, men are sent right away" (*pag alanganin ang area dahil high-risk, ipapadala agad ang lalaki*).

## **Weapons of Influence**

How do women compete with men in order to influence decision makers in formal organizations? This query elicited a number of responses. Women describe themselves as a "warrior" (*guerrera*), who "cannot be silenced" (*hindi mapatahimik*). They can also be "manipulative" as they resort to "groundworking" — these are the informal face-to-face meetings with their managers to elicit support for their projects or suggestions. Various means of drawing sympathy from their superiors could come in the form of "gestures of affection" (*cariño*), "expressions of fondness" (*paglalambing*), "act of telling on somebody" (*pasumbong effect*) and crying. For example, women use their charms to facilitate the signing of papers by their superiors. They have also changed their strategy in dealing with "stubborn" male managers so that they (the managers) will accommodate their suggestions. They describe their approach as "subtle" not "confrontational" since nothing will happen if they become persistent. One strategy which they have adopted to cushion the impact of their suggestions or recommendations is normally to precede their statements with "Sir, do you think..." (*Sir, sa palagay ninyo kaya ay...*). Psychologically, this would provide their male superiors with a feeling of self-importance since they are being consulted instead

of being imposed upon with ideas. One interviewee claims that she has provided her male manager with a checklist of things to do while preparing for an out-of-town trip in place of verbal reminders.

The women managers of Agency C also describe their style of influencing people in a similar manner. Myra declares that “women use their charms to straighten management [of the audited agency] through persuasion” (*ang babae ginagamit ang charms para ituwid ang management sa pamamagitan ng pakiusap*). As much as possible they avoid “frontal clashes” especially when they suggest recommendations “in order to stop wrongdoings” (*para mapahinto yung ginagawang mali*). As much as possible, they avoid having “estranged relations” with the management of the audited agency.

## **Conclusions**

An interpretation of the workplace culture in these formal organizations reveals a climate where the concept of “inequality” appears to be not part of the women’s consciousness. On the surface, the interviewees seem to project confidence, commitment to their work, high motivation, and achievement-orientation. These women managers belong to the highly educated group of civil servants who certainly have an edge in terms of access to resources and decision-making but may not be infused with the feminist perspective.

An analysis of the articulated cultural knowledge and the actualized cultural practices and conditions discloses that 1) despite the entry of women in non-traditional fields (i.e., engineering, architecture, auditing) designated for men, there are gender differences with regard to division of labor. Men have been typecast to assume heavy and hazardous work as represented by the term “operations” while women have been relegated to “non-operations” functions which are normally associated with supporting and nurturing roles; 2) women resort to “groundworking,” also otherwise known as “weapons of the weak,” and non-confrontational approaches in order to accomplish their work goals. This projects an asymmetrical power relations where women defer to authority since majority of decision makers are men; 3) women

need to behave like men as part of their adaptive mechanism in a patriarchal society; 4) the perceived skills and ways of doing things associated with women are actualizations of societal expectations and the operative cultural values.

All these findings indicate that more effort needs to be invested in sensitizing women to be more gender conscious in order to infuse their ways of doing things with the feminist perspective. More so, it will surely be beneficial for feminists to redouble their efforts in documenting women's experiences in the workplace both in the public and private sectors.