Graduate Non-seminar Paper Award

The Kansas Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, 1968-1970

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The feminist movement in the United States began with a refusal by women to allow their traditional secondary status to remain acceptable. Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States, once admonished that "no one can make you feel inferior without your consent." In most cultures around the world, including the United States, women have consented to inferiority throughout much of their history. But no longer. The women's rights movement has led to "enormous and mundane, subtle and not-so-subtle, delightful, painful, immediate, far-reaching, paradoxical, inexorable and probably irreversible changes in women's lives, and men's." ²

These changes did not come easily. Pioneer feminists such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Carrie Chapman Catt, dedicated their lives to eradicating gender discrimination.³ Progress was slow and laborious but ultimately led to the triumph of the nineteenth amendment, which gave women the right to vote in 1920. These women, and others like them, "wore out their lives" picketing, protesting, marching, and spending time in jail for their cause. Yet, after the goal was obtained, the women's movement ended, leaving men in all the positions of authority.⁴

¹Lawrence J. Peter, ed., *Peter's Quotations: Ideas For Our Time* (New York: Morrow, 1977), 358.

²Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1983), ix.

³Constance Buel Burnett, Five For Freedom (New York: Greenwood, 1953), 8.

⁴William L. O'Neill, *Feminism in America: a History* (1969; reprint, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989), xxi.

"Housewives," as one 1953 text described all women, had the right to choose lawmakers and laws but were still subjected to discrimination and relegated to the lowest paid jobs with no hope for advancement.⁵ This began to change, however, with a rebirth of the women's movement in the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1963 Betty Friedan published a stinging attack on inequality in her best-selling book entitled *The Feminine Mystique*. Three years later she helped organize and became president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), which staged the nationwide Women's Strike for Equality on August 26, 1970. The demonstration was the largest ever held in support of women's rights.

Although NOW was a significant addition to the proponents for equality, it was not the first group formed to fight for women. Fueled by the simultaneous push for African-American equal rights, the cause of women was given a boost on December 14, 1961, when President John F. Kennedy created the President's Commission on the Status of Women.⁶ This group recognized that responsibilities accompanied equal rights. Women had an obligation to make use of new opportunities, to vote and run for office, and to be educated. One challenge was to change the attitudes of the majority of men and even some women concerning the female role in society. The goal of the Commission was for women to strive for excellence in "education, family life, community participation, and employment."7 It was the first official group to study the issue and led to the formation of many state groups, including the Kansas Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, which was instigated on November 24, 1964.8 The group guickly became an influential force for women's causes in Kansas and aided in focusing attention on a subject which had, for too long, been virtually ignored.

⁵Burnett, Five for Freedom, 7; O'Neill, Feminism in America, xxi.

⁶O'Neill, Feminism in America, x.

⁷Governors' Commissions on the Status of Women, "Progress and Prospects: The Report of the Second National Conference" (Washington, D.C., 1965), 2-3.

⁸Governor John Anderson, Jr., "To whom it may concern," December 15, 1964, Papers of the Kansas Governor's Commission on the Status of Women (hereafter cited as KS GCSW), Box Ac. 82-8, Commission Membership File, Special Collections (hereafter cited as SC), Ablah Library (hereafter cited as AL), Wichita State University (hereafter cited as WSU), Wichita, Kansas.

The Kansas branch of the Status Commission was dedicated to the realization of the national goals and, in the words of one committee member, wanted to "obtain constructive results toward making women equal partners with men." Governor Robert B. Docking believed that women should have a more outspoken and critical role in government. Therefore, he challenged the state Commission with "investigating and making recommendations in regard to women's wages, political rights and established services involving educational counseling, training and home services." The group was divided into several committees which were supervised by one commission chairperson. Committees dealt with such topics as civil and political rights, education, private and state government employment, home and community, highway safety, and poverty.

Harriet Graham, chair of the Status Commission from 1968 to 1971, was involved with a variety of these issues. Graham, a Democrat from Wichita, served two terms as a state representative from 1965 to 1968. She also served as clerk of the District Court in Sedgwick County for four years before being elected to the legislature. Appointed to the Commission on July 19, 1965, Graham worked as chairman of the subcommittee on state government and private employment. A little over two years later, on January 18, 1968, she was appointed chairman of the fifty-member Status Commission by Governor Docking.

⁹Wichita Eagle clipping, "Meet Your Eagle and Beacon Writers," KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, General Articles and Editorials file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

¹⁰Ibid., "Graham: Leading Commission's Work."

¹¹a Committee Membership List, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Commission Membership file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

¹²Paul R. Shanahan, ed., *Kansas Directory* (Topeka: State Printer, 1965 and 1967), 40, 38.

¹³Wichita Beacon clipping, "Rep. Graham to Head New State Commission On Policies for Women," January 18, 1968, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Commission Membership file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

¹⁴Governor William H. Avery to Harriet Graham, July 19, 1965, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Commission Membership file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

¹⁵ Rep. Graham to Head New State Commission On Policies for Women."

Under Graham's leadership the Commission dealt with a number of important issues concerning women. In 1970 they hosted a statewide conference on daycare.16 Another important issue was discrimination in jury service. Men were more frequently chosen for juries because names were selected off property tax rolls. If a woman and her husband were joint owners of a car, the man's name would be taken as a potential jurgr instead of his wife's. Also, a woman could be released from jury duty simply by stating that she was female. 17 Protesting against discriminatory practices such as in jury selection was an important part of the Status Commission's responsibilities. Equally important was the distribution of information concerning women's rights and services available to women. The Commission conducted surveys to become aware of potential areas for action, established a public information program, and made reports available to libraries in Kansas. 18 However, the issue that created the most publicity and was of greatest concern to the Commission and its chairperson was discrimination against women at work.

The need for employment reform was great. Across Kansas women were being treated unequally with men in their workplace. One example of this practice is evident from a letter received by Harriet Graham in 1966 when she was chairman of the sub-committee on employment. Although laws such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been passed by the federal government to protect women against discrimination, these laws did not encompass every employee of the state. ¹⁹ Anti-discrimination laws were needed in Kansas as well. Helen M. Puffer, a longtime Cessna Aircraft employee, wrote:

As I sit here in my 4x4 stall . . . I stop and reminisce about the 29 years . . . I have worked side by side with men and have been required to produce twice the work for half the

¹⁶"Comprehensive Day Care Services for Kansas," February 6, 1970, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Day Care Conference file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

¹⁷"Minutes of Commission Meeting, September 17, 1969," KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Commission Meeting of September 17, 1969, file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

^{18&}quot;Graham: Leading Commission's Work."

¹⁹U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Standards Administration, Women's Bureau, "Brief Highlights of Major Federal Laws and Order on Sex Discrimination in Employment" (February, 1977), 1-3.

money, and have been obliged to remain at the same work level while the men are advanced--some after I have shown them the way Not one woman could have been happier than I was to see the women included in the civil rights bill . . . However, if anything the requirements of the new law have made the work equality worse than ever in this location.

Puffer went on to note a case that she was aware of in which a written protest was thrown out for lack of grounds. The woman who filed the report remained unemployed and was told she would not be employed again. Many women were too afraid of being "blackballed" from the aircraft industry to protest even the most severe forms of discrimination. When Puffer requested a federal investigation of Beech, Boeing, Cessna, and Lear because of their refusal to hire women as factory workers or inspectors, she was denied this action, and, in addition, was told that she would be fired and would never work in her area again if she chose to file a complaint. She therefore remained in her current position, "working in an office at approximately \$100 a month less money just because I am female."²⁰

The problems encountered by this one Cessna employee and countless other women workers across the state led the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women to set three goals for employment improvement. These were: 1) passage of equal pay for equal work legislation; 2) passage of a minimum wage law; and 3) elimination of sexual discrimination in employment.²¹ The Commission maintained that the need for these laws was obvious. In a survey of one governmental department in Kansas during the late 1960s, an average college-educated woman with 10.5 years of experience earned \$480 per month. An average college-educated man with 9.3 years of experience earned \$724 per month. Thus, with slightly less experience, the man earned a considerable sum more than his female co-worker. Partially as a result of this difference in wages, many female workers were struggling to

²⁰Helen M. Puffer to Harriet Graham, February 9, 1966, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Miscellaneous Material on Equal Pay for Equal Work file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

²¹Dr. Emily Taylor to concerned Kansas women, November 7, 1969, KS GCSW, Box AC. 82-8, Miscellaneous Material on Equal Pay for Equal Work file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

maintain a decent standard of living. A minimum wage law would help alleviate this problem and should be passed, according to the Status Commission, because of the need to raise full-time men and women employees above the poverty level. In an effort to do this, all except fourteen states had already passed a minimum wage law. Similarly, all except nineteen states had legislated anti-discrimination laws. They recognized that sexual discrimination was equal to discrimination based on religion, race, or national origin.

The Commission noted that the advantages to these proposed laws were threefold. First, workers would increase their self-esteem and be able to support themselves instead of relying on welfare. Second, employers would gain respect and loyalty from employees and would have an increase in business. Third, taxpayers would have more people to "share the tax burden" and would benefit from a healthy economy.²² Lawmakers and employers, however, did not always agree with the views of the Status Commission, and considerable effort was required to turn these hopes into reality.

During Harriet Graham's tenure as Status Commission Chairperson, several bills were introduced to the Kansas legislature regarding equal pay and minimum wage. Despite the Commission's best efforts to get these bills passed, they were repeatedly struck down by committees. In August of 1968 the Status Commission passed a resolution supporting both goals and asked that the major political parties add the resolution to their platforms. This needed to be done, stated Graham, because the working women population in Kansas was growing, along with the pay gap between men and women. "Equal pay legislation offers equal protection for all," Graham wrote in a letter to the *Wichita Eagle*. "Men will not be replaced for cheap female labor." The Democratic party decided to include the resolution in their platform. The Republicans, however, refused.²³ House Bill 1330 calling for a minimum wage of

²²"Kansas Commission on the Status of Women Beliefs," KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Miscellaneous Material on Equal Pay for Equal Work file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

²³Wichita Eagle clipping, "Letters to the Public Forum," September 13, 1968, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Miscellaneous Material on Equal Pay for Equal Work file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

\$1.50 and equal pay for women was killed by committee in the 1969 session.²⁴

Setbacks were common in the quest for women's rights. In a search for helpful information, Commission members and all concerned women in Kansas were urged to contact their representatives and become acquainted with his/her beliefs on various subjects. An editorial in the November 27, 1969, issue of the *Wichita Eagle* praised the efforts of women who were trying to "stir up a little enthusiasm for legislation." Twenty-five representatives had been invited to meet with a group of interested women. Only eight lawmakers actually came. Still, the event was a step forward. In the past, the editor wrote, women had not lobbied hard enough for equal pay and equal opportunities. They had been "content to sit back--not only a silent but also an almost invisible majority--and let the male legislators laugh and pass witticisms every time bills affecting women came up." This trend had to change if women were to progress to political and social freedom. Women must not ask for the attention of the legislature, but demand it.²⁵

Unfortunately, the kind of attention gained was not always what was desired. Prejudices and misconceptions about women and their role in the workplace were common. For example, in early 1970 members of the Scott City, Kansas, Business and Professional Women's Club wrote to a senator from the twenty-seventh district and asked about his feelings toward equal pay for equal work, the minimum wage law, and antidiscrimination legislation. The senator, Don Christy, replied in a letter dated January 6, 1970. Regarding equal pay, the senator agreed that this would be fine if the work was piece work, or work paid for according to the number of products turned out, and "no other factors [were] involved." Christy went on to say that not every person has the same potential, but under the equal pay for equal work law everyone would get the same reward. Through these comments the senator implied that women were not capable of doing equal work with men, especially in upper level jobs where there was potential for advancement. Similarly, the congressman struck down the minimum wage law by stating that people with a "limited capability for work . . . cannot be afforded" under such a plan.

²⁴ Minutes of Commission Meeting, September 17, 1969."

²⁵"It's Time To Listen," Wichita Eagle, November 27, 1969, 10F.

In regard to the anti-discrimination proposal, Senator Christy was concerned about the "adverse" effects of the law. If, he asked, women wanted "half the people who work cattle . . . [and] do heavy farm work to be women," and "half the secretaries, nurses, and teachers be men," then how would this affect the job market of the country? The antidiscrimination philosophy, Christy argued, might lead to "offering jobs on the basis of bids for jobs." The senator apparently believed that, instead of desiring only equal opportunity, women wanted every type of position to be composed of half men and half women. If this occurred, then hiring would be done on the basis of gender rather than on qualifications. Also, if enough women chose not to seek employment than there would be a shortage of workers while qualified men were unemployed. Christy continued: "In our economy the law of supply and demand tends to regulate the market. If we destroy this fundamental does this mean tyranny?"26 The senator seemed so anxious to discredit the idea of employment equality, that, in the space of a few short sentences, he illogically brought the United States to the brink of tyranny as a result of offering equal choices to women and men alike. Prejudices of this magnitude had to be controlled before women's rights legislation could be achieved.

The Status Commission's fight against discrimination did not solely take place in the legislature. A situation that occurred in 1969 illustrated this fact and brought public attention to the subject of women's rights. A Wichita Eagle article entitled "Could Women Officers Fill Police Manpower Gap" attracted the attention of Harriet Graham. The article, written by staff writer Sharon McEachern, dealt with a twenty-five officer shortage on the Wichita, Kansas, police force and how women could help. Although there was no regulation prohibiting the employment of women as police officers, the head of the Police Academy stated that "we have no openings for women." In fact, very few women were being used on the force at all. Of the 330 commissioned officers that were employed in Wichita, only twelve were women, and they were limited to dealing with female criminals and juveniles because of their "limited" strength. Females filled 3.5% of the police positions. This statistic contrasted sharply with the 47% of women who were employed in the work force overall. When city officials were asked, however, if discrimination

²⁶Senator Don Christy to Scott City, Kansas, Business and Professional Women's Club, January 6, 1970, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Miscellaneous Material on Equal Pay for Equal Work file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

existed, they were adamant that it did not. One city commissioner stated:

Now I have no objection towards a person just because she happens to be female in the fields of law enforcement. Just because they happen to be females is no reason to say they have no place in our police department I just don't think a woman ought to go out on the streets on a motorcycle or riding in a patrol car with a pistol strapped around her waist.

Dale Richmond, city personnel manager, maintained that "there is nothing that says police officers have to be male only. You know it's a law that we can't discriminate due to sex."

Officials saw no problem, however, with limiting a policewoman's responsibilities. Frequently, stated the head of the police staff division, a woman officer would have to be accompanied on a case by a man to assure her safety, unless it was a very simple situation. Even giving a traffic ticket was deemed too dangerous for policewomen. "You don't know who you're stopping," argued Major R. C. Jones, head of police and community relations. "The guy could poke a woman in the nose and just take off." Also, traffic officers frequently had to deal with accident investigations and intoxicated drivers. Women were not prepared to handle these situations, stated Police Chief Merrell Kirkpatrick.

Shortly after the newspaper article was printed, Harriet Graham took action and attempted to improve the standing of women in the Wichita Police Department. On September 2, 1969, Graham wrote to Thomas Regan of the Governor's Committee on Criminal Administration. She asked him to provide her with a ruling on the availability of police grants if a "formal complaint of anti-discrimination under the Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act is filed" against the department.²⁹ The request was not intended as a threat, Graham insisted, but was simply an

²⁷Wichita Eagle clipping, "Could Women Officers Fill Police Manpower Gap?," August 19, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

²⁸"Police Department May Employ Women," *Wichita Beacon*, October 10, 1969, pg. 12D.

²⁹Harriet Graham to Tom Regan, September 2, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

inquiry.³⁰ Regan responded by stating that his agency was "committed to the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act, as it relates to our grants. Upon proof of discrimination practices by any of our sub-grantees, the Committee will take appropriate action."³¹

The same day this letter was sent to Regan, Graham requested that she be allowed to address the City Commission so that the role of women in the Wichita Police Department could be discussed. Her request was granted, and at the meeting she asked that a study be conducted to assess the future for female police in the department. His wichita is entitled to a topnotch police department, stated Graham. You can help make it that way and women are certainly ready to help. He Public reaction to the possibility of increased use of female officers was mixed. Although some traditionalists still insisted that a woman belonged in the home, many who expressed their opinions were open to change. The Police Department may be cheating itself and the city of some good officers Women could fill [the positions] if Americans ever got away from the secretary-clerk-schoolteacher thinking about women's jobs, stated one editorial. A man from Halstead, Kansas, wrote that the refusal of police to hire women was

³⁰Topeka Daily Capital clipping, "Police Urged to Hire Girls," September 6, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

³¹Thomas W. Regan to Harriet Graham, September 3, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

³²Harriet Graham to Ralph Wultz, September 2, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

³³"Commission Proceedings," September 9, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

³⁴ Wichita Beacon clipping, "Women Win Study on Jobs With Police," September 9, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

³⁵Wichita Eagle clipping, "Opinion Survey, Do You Think City Should Hire More Policewomen?" August 25, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

³⁶ lbid., "Women's Place Is On The Job As Well As In The Home."

merely another guise to further condition women into believing that her place is in the home Certainly a woman is physically handicapped in comparison to her male counterpart but not nearly as much as he would like her to believe. And certainly law enforcement involves risk but doesn't everything, including childbirth? But neither requires physical giants.³⁷

On September 12, 1969, the Chief of Police, Merrell Kirkpatrick, submitted a plan to the city that outlined methods of using more women as police officers. Each section of the department was examined to see where females could help alleviate the personnel shortage. Two women, Kirkpatrick said, could be added to the patrol section where they would handle routine complaint calls and work in the accident prevention bureau. The vice section could employ one woman, who would relieve a male vice detective for outside assignments. Also, two women could be assigned to "pawn shop detail and check detail to replace male detectives." Finally, the police and community relations section would be able to use one female officer.³⁸

Harriet Graham and her Commission were pleased with the outcome of their challenge to the Wichita police. In a letter to Governor Docking dated October 20, 1969, Graham expressed her feelings concerning the event:

Although it may at first [have] appeared ridiculous for the commission to make an issue of 'police-employment' for women, it appeared to us that a more receptive attitude toward employing women in all fields could be obtained by challenging the bigoted statements contained in the article, 'Could Women Officers Fill the Police Manpower Gap?' in a positive way. The support of Tom Regan in your administration was the factor which gave the

³⁷ Ibid., "Letters to the Public."

³⁸M. R. Kirkpatrick to Ralph Wulz, "Report Concerning the Hiring of Women," September 12, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

women a 'moral' victory with hope for a substantial increase in job opportunities in this department.³⁹

The "moral victory" that the Status Commission won against the police department was significant by 1969 standards. At that time prejudice was so pervasive against policewomen that any female addition to the roster was an accomplishment. It cannot be overlooked, however, that after the issue was settled, discrimination still existed. Women were not allowed the same job responsibilities as men and many times were hired solely to relieve men for more "important" duties. Nevertheless, progress had been made. Over the next ten years the percentage of women hired for protective service in Wichita grew, and by 1979, ten years after Graham had made her challenge to the police department, 8.9% of Wichitans in protective service were female.⁴⁰ This was a significant increase, especially when compared to national statistics. In 1980 only 4% of those in protective service nationwide were female.⁴¹

The year following the police department controversy, the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women achieved a long-awaited goal. House Bill 1916, which prohibited discrimination in employment and provided for equal pay for equal work, was finally passed in Kansas. Harriet Graham, along with several other Kansas women, testified at committee hearings about the need for the bill.⁴² On the *Wichita Eagle* editorial page the proposed law was said to be "of great importance to all of Kansas.... This is not really a women's bill. It is a bill which would benefit all of society.... Kansas has dragged its feet too long in this

³⁹Harriet Graham to Honorable Robert Docking, October 20, 1969, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Hiring Women on the Wichita Police Force file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

⁴⁰Wichita Commission on the Status of Women, "City Employment Practices Toward Women," April, 1979, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas, 17.

⁴¹Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthaei, *Race, Gender, and Work* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 327.

⁴²Topeka Capital Journal clipping, "Women's Rights Fight to Solons," February 12, 1970, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Anti-Discrimination State Legislation file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

area."⁴³ The law, passed in 1970 by the Kansas legislature, finally went into effect on July 1, 1973.⁴⁴

Harriet Graham resigned from her position as Chairperson of the Governor's Status Commission on March 30, 1971.45 The work involving women's rights, however, was not complete. The Equal Rights Amendment, which had been introduced in every Congress since 1923, continued to be an important and ongoing national issue for women.⁴⁶ Discrimination in the late 1970s was, based on the studies of one commission, "more subtle . . . than in past years. It is harder to detect and to prove, but frequently more pervasive and debilitating because it is so difficult to fight."47 Today's major issues in women's rights are the recent onslaught of sexual harassment suits and the controversy over women in combat. Just thirty years ago society questioned the practicality of women police officers; today they play a significant role in protective services nationwide. Just thirty years from now will society be as accepting of women generals or presidents? The story of women's rights is not, in the words of feminist Betty Friedan, finished. It is "to be continued."

⁴³"Let's Not Discriminate Against Women Either," *Wichita Eagle*, February 11, 1970, 4A.

⁴⁴Kent Frizzell to Harriet Graham, May 22, 1970, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Anti-Discrimination State Legislation file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

⁴⁵Governor Robert Docking to Harriet Graham, March 30, 1971, KS GCSW, Box Ac. 82-8, Commission Membership file, SC, AL, WSU, Wichita, Kansas.

⁴⁶Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women, "The Proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution" (March, 1970), 2.

⁴⁷"City Employment Practices Towards Women," 20.