



# Equity and Patterns of Library Governance

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THERE ARE THREE WAYS of introducing social change into organizations: (1) an attempt can be made to convert the hearts and minds of organizational members by argument and example; (2) a threat can be offered or applied in terms of legislation which will influence (force) the organization to adopt the desired change; or (3) the institution itself may be modified, or other changes in the institution used, to permit the introduction and acceptance of social change.

In the years since the enactment of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the promulgation of Executive Orders 11246, 11375 and 11478, those seeking to eliminate sex and race discrimination in libraries have relied largely on argument, example and legislation. While the success of these tactics is moot — e.g., a seeming increase in the number of announcements of women and minorities receiving promotions and appointments to high-level library positions versus the continued existence of salary differentials based on sex for both beginning<sup>1</sup> and established<sup>2</sup> librarians — there can be little doubt that efforts to decrease discrimination have had some influence on the way the library is run.

The object of this paper is to examine these methods of effecting social change for their impact on library governance. More specifically, effort will be made to identify the effect of legislating equity on library governance, and the effect of changes in library governance on the achievement of equity by those who desire it.

## TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF LIBRARY GOVERNANCE

Like many complex organizations, libraries tend to be organized into bureaucratic hierarchies in which authority and power (the planning,

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organizing, directing, staffing, controlling and evaluating functions) are centralized in the upper echelons, and the service and operations aspects are located in the primary units and departments. The administrative structure accompanying the hierarchy is usually characterized by chains of command in which the superior's responsibility for and authority over the subordinate is clearly defined, and by the use of rules and procedures both to control the activities of employees and, in theory at least, to provide equality of treatment for the organization's clientele. A significant element of bureaucratic authority is the assumption that subordinates possess little interest or expertise in the activities necessary for the success of the department.<sup>3</sup> As a result, employees are given little autonomy in determining which tasks to perform and which methods to use. Conformity to bureaucratic values is encouraged over creativity in service to users, and success is rewarded by promotion to administrative ranks rather than by professional advancement.

This form of library governance (which is rarely as clearly drawn as the above description suggests) is reasonably effective in a stable socio-economic and cultural environment, if the director is a benevolent authoritarian, and if employees expect this type of administration. When these conditions are not met or cease to exist, libraries using bureaucratic governance structures find it increasingly difficult both to achieve their objectives and to respond effectively to the new demands placed on them.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF THE LIBRARY BUREAUCRACY

Several explanations have been offered for the emergence of this governance structure, rather than another, in libraries. Marchant,<sup>4</sup> for example, suggests that the authoritarian administrative pattern found in today's libraries is a carryover from the type of administration used in early twentieth century business and emulated by early library leaders during periods of growth and expansion. Lynch<sup>5</sup> notes that this type of governance is effective in achieving the library's organizational goals and is well suited to the work done. In other words, because much of library work consists of repetitive, routine tasks requiring little discretion and is highly amenable to rules and standard procedures, it is well suited to a bureaucratic structure with its concomitant authoritarian leadership style. Garrison<sup>6</sup> states that the bureaucratic, authoritarian library developed because of the predominance of women in the library profession. The social and cultural environment in which librarianship developed was such (and to an extent continues to be) that women expected and accepted administrative controls, low autonomy and subordination to rou-

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tine clerical tasks. Schiller<sup>7</sup> reverses cause and effect to argue that women were recruited into librarianship to accommodate a pre-existing hierarchical structure and the accompanying low pay.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR EQUITY

These explanations are not mutually exclusive and together they offer some insight into why it is difficult for women and minorities to achieve equity by working within the system. First, traditional library governance patterns are based on, and continue to promote, a division of labor and accompanying status by sex.<sup>8</sup> In other words, administrative positions are expected to be the province of the few men who enter the library profession. Carl Jackson commented on the significance of this expectation for women academic librarians: "In my early years in the profession, there was a general and widespread assumption among my colleagues . . . that women generally would not achieve positions above department head level in university libraries. . . . This is not a conscious plot or a commitment, but, I think, more a subconscious awareness that this is, in fact, what generally existed."<sup>9</sup> Women administrators, especially effective ones, are considered remarkable exceptions. Similar expectations have been held for black librarians. In 1970 Edward Mapp wrote: "Black librarians are now sought after where 'entry level' or token positions are vacant but when a major college or university library directorship becomes available, the experienced black librarian, with few exceptions, remains 'the invisible man.'"<sup>10</sup>

Because these unconscious assumptions and prejudices are sanctified by the bureaucratic tradition, two further disadvantages accrue to women and minority librarians. They are prevented from obtaining the experience necessary for increased responsibility as decision-makers (one recalls the oft-heard lament, "But there are no qualified minority or women applicants"), and from obtaining the rewards — salary, work satisfaction, power and influence — which go disproportionately to top administrators.

Inflexibility is the final factor explaining the library's inability to meet the expectations of minority and women employees. This is due to the existence of maintenance mechanisms inherent in the bureaucratic governance structure — for example, formal authority, rule enforcement, influence and status rewards according to hierarchical position — which work to limit the library's ability to adopt change.<sup>11</sup> The end result is a governance system which by custom and usage fails to provide equal and impartial treatment for the majority of its employees.

## THE DEMAND FOR EQUITY

As the preceding discussion implies, discrimination in employment imposes costs on minority and women librarians in terms of income and the positive benefits of work — recognition, achievement and self-actualization. It is not surprising then, that the demands for equity have centered in the following five areas:

1. The active recruitment of minority group members into the profession;
2. The opportunity to apply for and obtain, or be promoted to, positions justified by experience and education;
3. The power to shape effectively the library's role in the community it serves;
4. Equal pay for equal work for both professional and nonprofessional library workers; and,
5. Equal benefits.

These issues are not, of course, completely new to the library profession. Concern and action about salary differentials between men and women,<sup>12</sup> the segregation of seating and eating facilities at professional meetings,<sup>13</sup> and the integration of professional organizations and library facilities<sup>14</sup> all predated current interests by many years. It was, however, only with the passage of federal legislation prohibiting race and sex discrimination in employment, and the subsequent revision or introduction of similar legislation at the state and local levels, that a legal foundation for action was created. Highlights of relevant equal employment opportunity legislation will be described here.

## FEDERAL LEGISLATION

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, is a broadly based law which prohibits employers from discriminating (by refusing to hire, discharging or otherwise discriminating in wages, benefits or conditions of employment), classifying, or segregating employees and applicants on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, or sex. This means that marital status, grooming standards, or the preferences of customers (in this case library users) or of fellow employees may not be used as criteria in the hiring process or to assign employees. In addition, the act has been used to delimit job qualifications to those actually necessary for performing the work, and it also precludes discrimination against white males. Unlike other equal employment legislation, the act does not require corrective

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affirmative action involving hiring and promotion goals unless a compliance review or self-analysis results in a finding of discrimination.<sup>15</sup>

Executive Order 11246 as amended by E.O. 11375 and E.O. 11478 prohibits employment discrimination by federal contractors, subcontractors, and federal employers. In addition, the orders require organizations with contracts over \$50,000 and fifty or more employees to develop and implement written affirmative action programs which describe goals and timetables for the employment of minorities and women in job categories in which they have been underutilized. The guidelines issued for these orders in Revised Order No. 4 are similar to court interpretations of Title VII requirements; they prohibit job advertisements by sex, sex- or race-based seniority lists, distinctions between married and unmarried persons by sex, and so forth.<sup>16</sup> Most, if not all, of the larger university and federal libraries in the United States are subject to the provisions of these orders.

Unlike Title VII, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (amended in 1972 and 1974) does not address all forms of employment discrimination; rather, it prohibits the creation or existence of pay differentials based on sex when both women and men perform work which is substantially equal. The degree of equality is measured with respect to total effort (both mental and physical), degree of skill, the amount of responsibility, and similarity of working conditions. Pay differences based on factors other than sex, e.g., shift differentials, seniority, and merit differentials, are permissible provided the systems are equally open to both sexes. Differences in job title, job classification, job description (as opposed to actual job content), the availability of women, or their willingness to work for a lower wage are not considered justification for pay differences, nor are supervisory styles which result from stereotyped assumptions about the abilities of women employees. The 1972 amendment extended coverage to administrative and professional employees, including college and university professors, elementary and secondary school teachers. The 1974 amendment extended protection to employees of most local, state and federal agencies.<sup>17</sup> Most librarians and library workers are covered by this act.

Other statutes of importance to libraries and librarians include Title IX of the Education Amendments Act, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, and the State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act of 1972, all of which specifically prohibit "exclusion from participation in," "the denial of benefits of," or discrimination arising from race, color, sex, religion or national origin.<sup>18</sup>

## IMPACT ON TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE PATTERNS

A careful study of equal employment opportunity legislation indicates that it is designed to correct employment inequities from within the bureaucratic framework. Most if not all of the recommended affirmative action procedures, for example, represent little more than a sound personnel program. Nevertheless, the law does have the potential to change procedural aspects of library governance. In the areas of recruitment and hiring, it redefines the procedure by determining the type and placement of job advertising; it places limitations on the information that can be obtained from candidates; and it requires validated, job-related selection standards and unbiased interviewing. In the area of salary and wage administration, it prescribes salaries, wages and fringe benefits. In the area of staffing, it prohibits the placement of librarians and other library staff into positions solely because of race, color or sex. The requirements of the affirmative action plan extend equal employment opportunity concepts to promotions, training, evaluation and career ladders; it further holds the library accountable for positive action in these areas. In addition, Revised Order No. 4 extends affirmative action requirements to the library's suppliers provided they have contracts of \$10,000 or more, and makes the library responsible for ensuring the supplier's compliance before a contract is assigned.

On paper, then, legislation has had an impact on library governance through an erosion of autonomy by placing limitations and demands on the actions of library administration, through a shift in responsibility from the victim of discrimination to the organization practicing it, and through changes in accountability in which the library must prove to the government not only nondiscrimination but affirmative action to counter the effects of past discrimination and inaction.

## EXAMPLES

Examples of these impacts occur with increasing frequency in the literature. One substantial change, the creation of equivalency schemes, resulted from the dilemma produced by the failure of the profession to attract minority group members to library careers and the pressure placed on libraries to hire and promote minority librarians. To solve this problem, some libraries have developed career ladders which allow nonprofessional employees to compete for professional openings either by equating their job experience with a college degree,<sup>19</sup> or by providing access to college-level coursework and using a combination of this and on-the-job training to allow nonprofessionals to earn professional standing.<sup>20</sup> In essence, these

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libraries have made significant policy changes to provide equity for minority group members. They have rewritten the education and experience requirements and eliminated the need for an MLS degree to obtain a professional position. The consequences are likely to reach beyond the individual library to the profession as a whole, if only because the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is not happy with the stipulation of a specific college degree for positions where it cannot be clearly proven necessary.<sup>21</sup>

Another example is the procedure now required for filling vacancies in academic libraries. As described by Christofferson,<sup>22</sup> it can involve steps ranging from developing the job description to signing the contract and including the notification of minority and other special employment groups, justifying the selection of one candidate, and providing reasons for rejecting others. The process may take six months or more with resultant deficiencies in library service due to inadequate staffing. Even more troublesome, there is no evidence yet to indicate that the hiring procedure has become more equitable. In fact, one administrator noted a reluctance to "take a chance on a black or female" because the required job descriptions are considered inflexible.<sup>23</sup> While this reasoning seems to assume that all blacks and females are doomed to failure, or that once hired, a librarian can never be fired, it also suggests that legislation may cause already inflexible bureaucratic governance systems to become even more resistant to change.

#### EVALUATION

It seems unlikely that legislation is the most appropriate tactic for introducing social change into libraries. It doesn't change attitudes; it may be used to pit one disadvantaged class against another; it may create the fear that minority librarians are cornering the employment and promotions market (thus deterring affirmative action efforts); or it may result in downgrading the MLS degree. Furthermore, as Toth<sup>24</sup> has argued, the enforcement of equal employment opportunity legislation in connection with high levels of unemployment places a heavy burden on employers and may mislead job hunters. Finally, the few reports available which measure — however indirectly — the effectiveness of legislation indicate that it still pays for librarians to be white males.<sup>25</sup>

An alternative to legislation (or, perhaps a complement) seems to exist in the introduction of nontraditional governance structures, particularly some form of participation, into libraries.

## NONTRADITIONAL FORMS OF GOVERNANCE

Participatory management, committee consultation, delegation, decentralization, self-governance, collegial governance and industrial democracy are all terms used to describe various forms of employee participation in the organization. Some of these — participatory management, committee consultation, delegation — are more descriptive of a leadership style that can operate fairly easily within the context of a hierarchical bureaucracy than of a governance structure. This is because in practice the supervisor permits or chooses to engage in participation with his/her subordinates as an alternative to an authoritarian style; the formal power structure remains unchanged. Collegial governance, self-governance and industrial democracy, on the other hand, tend to be built into the organization. They imply a flat hierarchy and an organization that is largely employee-controlled (i.e. decisions are almost always made at the lowest appropriate level) and that is sometimes employee-owned. According to some behavioral scientists, the introduction of self-governance requires that traditional organization be restructured and jobs redesigned before participation can emerge as an effective management technique.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the form, genuine participation is characterized by the staff's possession of real decision-making power over substantial matters affecting the organization, and is based on the premise that employees welcome autonomy and will accept responsibility for the constructive use of that autonomy on the job. Commitment, trust and power-sharing by management and employees are essential to the success of effective participation programs.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR EQUITY

Participation has several implications for the achievement of equity in organizations. First, because the supervisor and subordinate share the authority for decision-making and the responsibility for results, the power differential between them is reduced.<sup>27</sup> Second, participation, particularly the self-governance variety, tends to eliminate layers of middle management, thus reducing the traditional power structure<sup>28</sup> and permitting the introduction of new criteria for determining status (i.e. supervision is no longer a sign of status). Third, by virtue of participation in decision-making (attending meetings, providing input, interacting with a variety of people in the organization), individuals acquire higher status in the organization.<sup>29</sup> Fourth, because participation often occurs in group situations, individuals (particularly those with minority status) can more easily be-



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come accepted members of the organization.<sup>30</sup> Fifth, participation in decision-making provides the experience which women and minorities need in order to become more valued members of the organization. Finally, participation allows individuals to influence the progress of the organization and may produce feelings of achievement and self-actualization,<sup>31</sup> thus increasing individuals' identification with the organization and making them more valuable to it.

#### CAVEATS

Despite these factors, participation may not be the golden road to achieving equity. Because most participation in decision-making and problem-solving takes place in committees, the group's composition, leadership and mode of interaction heavily influence its effectiveness.

The usefulness of participation for achieving equity in terms of both the individual and the decision made can be nullified when explicit status distinctions within the committee are allowed to influence the content of communications or reduce social interaction and support among committee members. For example, low-status individuals may be unwilling to "make waves" because they have learned that such behavior is unlikely to be supported by high-status members of the group. Similarly, the group's leader(s) (either natural or elected) must be committed to the concept of equity. Otherwise, it is fairly easy to fail to pass on, or to ignore, the ideas and suggestions of group members seeking equity. The committee's mode of interaction is equally important because the internal operations of the group as a whole tend to squelch both unpopular ideas and ideas from unpopular people, before they can be considered on the basis of merit.<sup>32</sup>

#### THE LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

Participation in the form of committee work aimed at tapping the experience and expertise of librarians has long been a practice in many libraries.<sup>33</sup> Only recently, however, have attempts been made to extend a role in the decision-making process to all interested staff members. Despite this short time span, a review of the literature reveals a full range of participation in library decision-making. Some examples include: the use of a consultative committee structure for coordination and decision-making;<sup>34</sup> the use of peer evaluation for promotions, tenure and pay raises;<sup>35</sup> the election of departmental chairpersons (and the suggestion that the library director be elected);<sup>36</sup> the use of ad hoc task forces for problem-

solving and decision-making; and the use of committees for the selection and recommendation of a library director.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the approach closest to self-governance has been the adoption of a collegial organization by some academic librarians. Collegial governance presumes that librarians will establish policies concerning themselves and their work and will conduct their own affairs, often through committees and usually according to a constitution.

#### PARTICIPATION AND EQUITY IN LIBRARIES

Unlike industry, where participation has been introduced because of management's perceived need to increase production, decrease costs and improve the quality of working life, participation in libraries is usually introduced in response to librarians' demands for a larger role in the decisions which affect their professional lives. Equity, when it occurs, appears to be a byproduct of the participation process. Some examples from the literature support this conclusion. For instance, Galloway<sup>38</sup> describes the procedure used at the University of Louisville to select a new library director. This is a good illustration of participation's potential for reducing power differentials, in this case between the library faculty and the university administration, and in all likelihood between the library faculty and the newly selected director. At no point, however, is this recognized as an advantage of the selection process.

In a second example, Yeh<sup>39</sup> describes the use of peer evaluation at Central Washington State College to determine promotions and merit increases. The faculty members evaluated each other in terms of five criteria: professional effectiveness, scholarship, personal qualities, special services, and professional activities. These evaluations were then summarized by a committee which made the recommendations for promotion and salary increases. The author notes that women received fewer recommendations for promotion, even from other women, because they had fewer advanced degrees and scholarly activities. This is interesting because the advanced degree (beyond the terminal MLS) was not a promotion criterion, and only the lack of scholarship (i.e. publications) — one item out of five — should have influenced the vote. This report appears to indicate that inequity can occur even with participation and objective criteria.

Articles such as Christofferson's, which describe the use of participation and affirmative action procedures for screening and selecting new librarians, contain little information on the effectiveness of the process beyond the comments that "this large selection team insures that no individual's

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prejudices will dominate the hiring process" and that "we are getting better candidates."<sup>40</sup>

Drawing on what little exists in the library literature and on personal experience in participation in library affairs, including the search and screen committee, it seems unlikely that participation as an alternate form of library governance can ensure equity for minority and women librarians. This conclusion is supported by the observation that the collegial form of governance used by teaching faculties has not made the acceptance of women and minorities into faculty life easier, and may, in fact, have hindered it. Nevertheless, participation and equal employment opportunity legislation, like the proverbial carrot and stick (the law to grab attention and the rewards of participation — increases in job satisfaction, morale, feelings of achievement and self-actualization — to keep it), have the potential for creating an environment where equity can flourish.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Although the literature on participation in libraries grows daily, it appears to be deficient in two areas. First, there is little hard data on the types of problems and decisions which participation faces in actual situations; and second, only a few attempts have been made to evaluate the quality of the solutions found and decisions made by participatory methods. There is also a need to know more about how to use participation to bring about desired changes such as increased equity. To this end, a series of small studies examining the composition of participatory groups in libraries might be useful. For example, is equity less likely when a committee is composed of three high-status males and one low-status black female? What happens when a search and selection team consists of three high-status men, a high-status woman and a low-status feminist? Do elected committees function better, more independently, than appointed groups?

A number of other questions should be asked and answered. What is the role of the larger institution within which many libraries function? Does it assist or hinder library attempts to provide equity? How would the achievement of equity, with its emphasis on the recruitment and promotion of minorities and women, affect the status of the profession?

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