

Women of the Cloth Part Two: Preliminary Findings
of a Cross-Denominational Study of Men and Women Clergy
from 16 Protestant Denominations

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Outline of 1994 ASR Presentation

I. Study and sample:

This follow-up study of Women of the Cloth (Carroll, Hargrove, Lummis, 1983) expands the original study from 9 denominations to 16. It attempts to include a broader representation of both liberal and conservative denominations (see classification schema in Roof and McKinney, 1987) that have a strong representation of women clergy.

In order to distinguish between variation within denomination and gender categories we sought to distribute 800 questionnaires to each denomination, 400 men and 400 women. Altogether we sent out approximately 10,000 questionnaires. Our response rate overall was about 45%. There is a significantly lower response rate among the conservative churches. Among the mainline we are encouraged to report that response rates are generally above 50% and that the difference between mens and womens response rates is generally close to 10 percentage points.

The questionnaire is an extensive 27 page instrument and replicates certain questions from the first Women of the Cloth study as well as some newer questions on leadership styles, lifestyle patterns, ordination, seminary experiences, and career patterns. My own interest is in understanding the organizational and life course factors that contribute to patterns of gender inequality in organizations. However we are just beginning to analyse the data and so what I will be presenting here are some early descriptive findings.

II. Population characteristics

It is useful to begin by looking at changes in the number of clergy men and women over time. In Figure 1 we can see the change in the number of clergy from 1910-1990 broken down by gender. This data comes from the US occupational census and represents the number of persons listing "clergy" as their occupation in the various decennial census. Unlike most available religious statistics these figures reflect a survey of the population rather than a sampling of organizations. They reflect those persons who list "clergy" as their primary occupation regardless of religious orientation and thus are the most general and encompassing data available.

In this graph we see that the number of women clergy is relatively flat up until the 70's when it begins to rise sharply. This period is generally perceived as a period of expansion in womens opportunities because of the womens rights movement. However, it is interesting to note that the number of male clergy also rises sharply during this period indicating that at least part of the increase in the number of women clergy may be due to a

general expansion in the service sector and in the professions in general.

In fact when we compare the expansion of the clergy sector from 1970-1990 with other professions we see that this pattern of growth is repeated. In Figure 2 we see the trajectory of growth for women clergy compared to the traditional professions of medicine and law. In Figure 3 we see that similar trends can be observed for men. This suggests that much of the rise in the number of clergy we observe may indeed be part of a general social expansion of the service sector.

I thought it would be interesting if we could compare the advances women have made in the clergy profession with the progress women have made within the labor force in general. We can see from figure 2 and 3 that the clergy sector has grown less rapidly than other professions. One way to compare the rate of incorporation of women into the clergy profession with the incorporation of women into the labor force in general is to compare the number of women clergy over time with other professions as we have seen in figure 2. This figure suggests that women have been accepted into the legal and medical professions more rapidly than within the churches, however this is mediated by the fact that these occupations have also grown more rapidly than the clergy sector as well. A more general measure is to make comparisons with the percentage increase in the proportion of women that make up the labor force in the United States.

To see this I examine the period 1950-1990 in more detail. I look at changes in the proportion of women making up the labor force and compare it with changes in the proportion of women making up the clergy labor force. One way of thinking of this is to ask how well are clergy women doing compared with women in general?

Figure 4 compares changes in the proportion of women in the labor force to changes in the proportion of women in the clergy labor force from 1950-1990 at 10 year intervals. We can see that from 1950-1960 the proportion of women in the clergy labor force actually declined while the proportion of women in the overall labor force increased by approximately 3.5%. From 1960 to 1970 and 1970 to 1980 the proportion of women clergy increased but it still lagged behind the increases of women in general until the period between 1980 and 1990 when the proportion of women in the clergy workforce actually grows more (over 5%) than the proportion of women in general (approximately 2.5%).

These graphs suggest that the proportion of female clergy has taken a relatively large independent jump since the 1980's that cannot easily be explained by general social trends. One reason may be that we are beginning to see a slow shift in the sex ratio of the institutional church. A combination of factors may be causing

this change. The number of men entering the profession may be declining while the number of women is increasing. At the same time a number of male clergy are retiring. Together these factors may be contributing to the rise in the ratio of women in the churches.

However, figure 1 suggests that the number of male clergy has hardly been in decline since the 1980's. In absolute numbers there are still far more men being recruited into the churches. In fact an interesting feature to consider further is the large jump in the overall number of clergy. Between 1950 and 1960 the overall number of clergy increased by 32,875 persons. Between 1980 and 1990 the number of clergy increased by 235,395 or approximately 7x as much. What accounts for this dramatic jump? Does this rise represent a payoff to women mobilizing in the denominations and churches to break down institutional barriers? If so, why has the number of male clergy also risen so dramatically? Have churches expanded the definition of "clergy" to encompass lay roles, including those that have traditionally been occupied by women? Has there been a rise in the number of independent churches? These are provocative questions that bear further investigation.

Given the discussion within the liberal churches about the rise of mega-churches and efforts to consolidate or close small congregations it would seem that the rise in the number of clergy cannot be explained simply in terms of the expansion of the number of congregations within the Protestant mainline. The rise in clergy may thus reflect a rise in the number of independent religious groups. One path that I would like to investigate further is whether the increase in the number of clergy reflects a greater specialization of clergy occupations within denominations. How have the occupational categories within the clergy profession become increasingly specialized and differentiated in the last 30 years? Who is filling these new positions? As women and minorities enter the clergy profession are new kinds of clergy positions being defined? I will come back to this question in a moment but first I would like to look more closely at the denominations in our sample.

III. Study sample

Figure 5 shows the population parameters of male and female clergy in each denomination included in our study. These are the most recent numbers available from denominational research offices. In requesting this information we asked the denominations to supply us with the number of non-retired men and women ordained to the highest ministerial status as defined in their denomination. This makes our data comparable to two surveys conducted by the NCC in 1977 and 1986 (see Jacquet, 1989).

To give you a better idea of how the number of clergywomen in these denominations has changed over time Figure 6 depicts the number of women clergy in each denomination in 1977, 1986 and 1994. Given that the numbers are cumulative, it is interesting to note

that the number of women clergy has actually decreased for the AOG, Free Methodists, Church of the Nazarene and Wesleyan Churches. In fact the decline in the number of women clergy is so dramatic in the Assemblies of God that I suspect that the 1986 number may be an inflated estimate based on the number of women in licensed and specialized ministries as well as fully ordained ministers.

However, absolute numbers may not be the most meaningful way to interpret the growth of women's influence. Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) classic study of men and women in organizations suggests that the proportion of women, or the sex ratio in an organization may be more significant than absolute numbers in effecting changes in the workplace. Kanter suggests that the proportion of women within a group influences the behavior of women as well as their treatment by co-workers. Minority groups, majority groups and "token" figures have different styles of interaction and mobilization and also have different opportunities for changing organizational dynamics.

In Figure 7 I look at changes in the sex ratio of women in a subset of denominations for 1977, 1986 and 1994. Because of missing data on the number of male clergy at earlier time periods only a subset of denominations are displayed here. There is an increase in the sex ratio of women between 1977 and 1986 in the American Baptist Church, the Church of the Brethren and the Reformed Church, but the sex ratios have remained the same or decreased for the rest of the denominations shown here. When we compare this to figure 6 we can see that even though it appears that the absolute numbers of women clergy have risen dramatically in some of the "liberal" churches such as the UCC and the PCUSA, relative to the changes in the number of men they have actually declined. This may suggest that men are still being recruited into the clergy at a higher rate than women in these denominations.

The literature on workplace and gender suggests that gender inequality may also be expressed through occupational sex segregation. This occurs when qualified women enter the workplace in growing numbers but are treated unequally by being tracked into occupations or positions that are rewarded at a lower rate of return than those occupations dominated by men. Earlier I proposed that a possible reason accounting for the rise in the number of clergy is that clergy roles are becoming more differentiated and specialized. We can observe increasingly specialized ministries devoted to youth, education, music, missionary work, spiritual life, and special missions. Theories of sex segregation predict that one way organizations maintain gender inequality is that they track women into positions that are rewarded at a lower rate than those dominated by men. To examine this further I look at the distributions of men and women in our sample across comparable clergy positions in Figure 8.

This graph indicates that a higher percentage of men in our

sample are likely to be senior or sole pastors, while a higher percentage of women are likely to be in associate or other congregational positions. However, this may be a partial reflection of differences in career aspirations between men and women. One question in our study asked what goals clergy had when they left seminary. A higher percentage of men expressed the desire to be senior and sole pastors than did women. Table 1 shows the top five goals expressed by men and women upon leaving seminary. There is a clear preference among men and women for positions where they are the sole pastor of the church.

We can make a crude assessment of the tracking hypothesis by looking at Table 2 which shows the first job these clergy obtained after seminary. Although men and women both express the desire to work in sole pastorates 42.9% of the male seminary graduates were successful in obtaining sole pastorates in their first job compared to only 18.6% of the female graduates. Women seemed to be more likely to obtain positions as assistant or associate pastors.

It would be interesting to discover whether women are being tracked into associate positions by denominational executives or if women see associate or assistant positions as a better opportunity for career advancement. Serving as an associate or assistant allows clergy to get training, experience, confidence and references necessary for moving to a better position. Women may need these credentials more than men to obtain the positions they want or there may be a perception that women need these credentials more than men by denominational placement officers and so they may be more likely to be tracked into these positions. In addition, congregations may be more comfortable with women as associate or assistant pastors than as senior or sole pastors.

In Table 3 I look at the distribution of our respondents across positions in their current jobs. These frequencies do not account for important variables such as job experience, age, or training however you can see that the distribution across the two top positions more nearly matches the aspirations of seminary graduates displayed in table 1. Whereas 18.6% of the women obtained sole pastorates in their first position, 32.3% of the current sample have eventually achieved this position. This is closer to the 45% of the women who expressed desire for this position as a goal.

Of course this is just a crude indication of job satisfaction and career achievement. In further analysis we will perform multivariate analyses that will control for the relevant factors affecting career mobility such as educational background, gender, income, family situation, organizational structures and job experience.

I also recognize that while the majority of clergy express a desire to become a sole pastor, not all sole pastoring positions

are created equal. The sole pastor of a small rural church or of three smaller churches faces a qualitatively different experience than the sole pastor at a medium sized suburban church. One kind of analysis I plan to do is to examine men and women who express a desire to become sole pastors and see what kind of church positions they end up in. The question is whether men are more likely to obtain the preferred positions and women are more likely to end up with marginal positions with fewer opportunities of advancement.

Conclusion:

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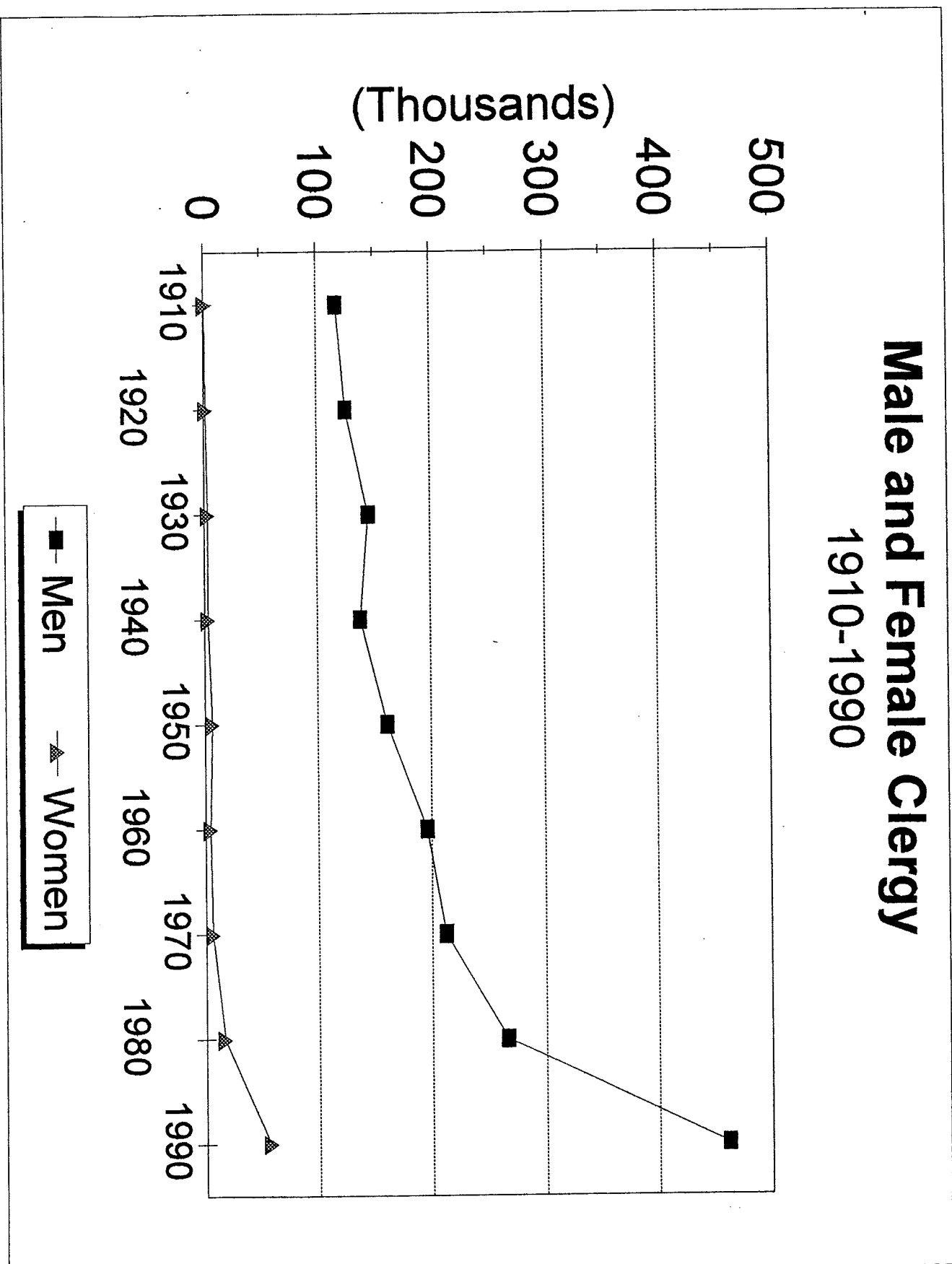
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FIGURE 1



Occupational Changes: 1910-1990

Women in Selected Professions

FIGURE 2

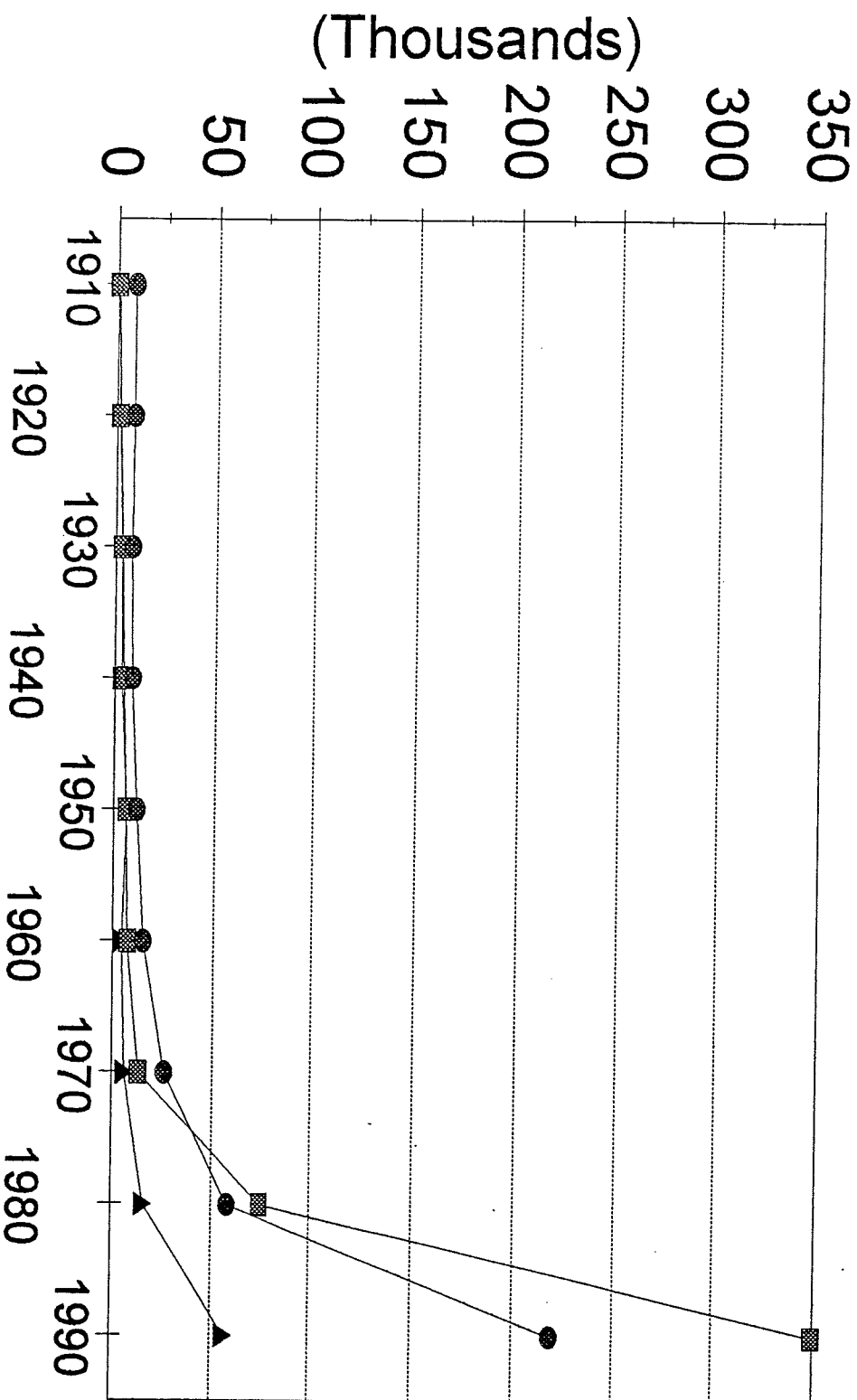


FIGURE 3

Occupational Changes: 1910-1990

Men in Selected Professions

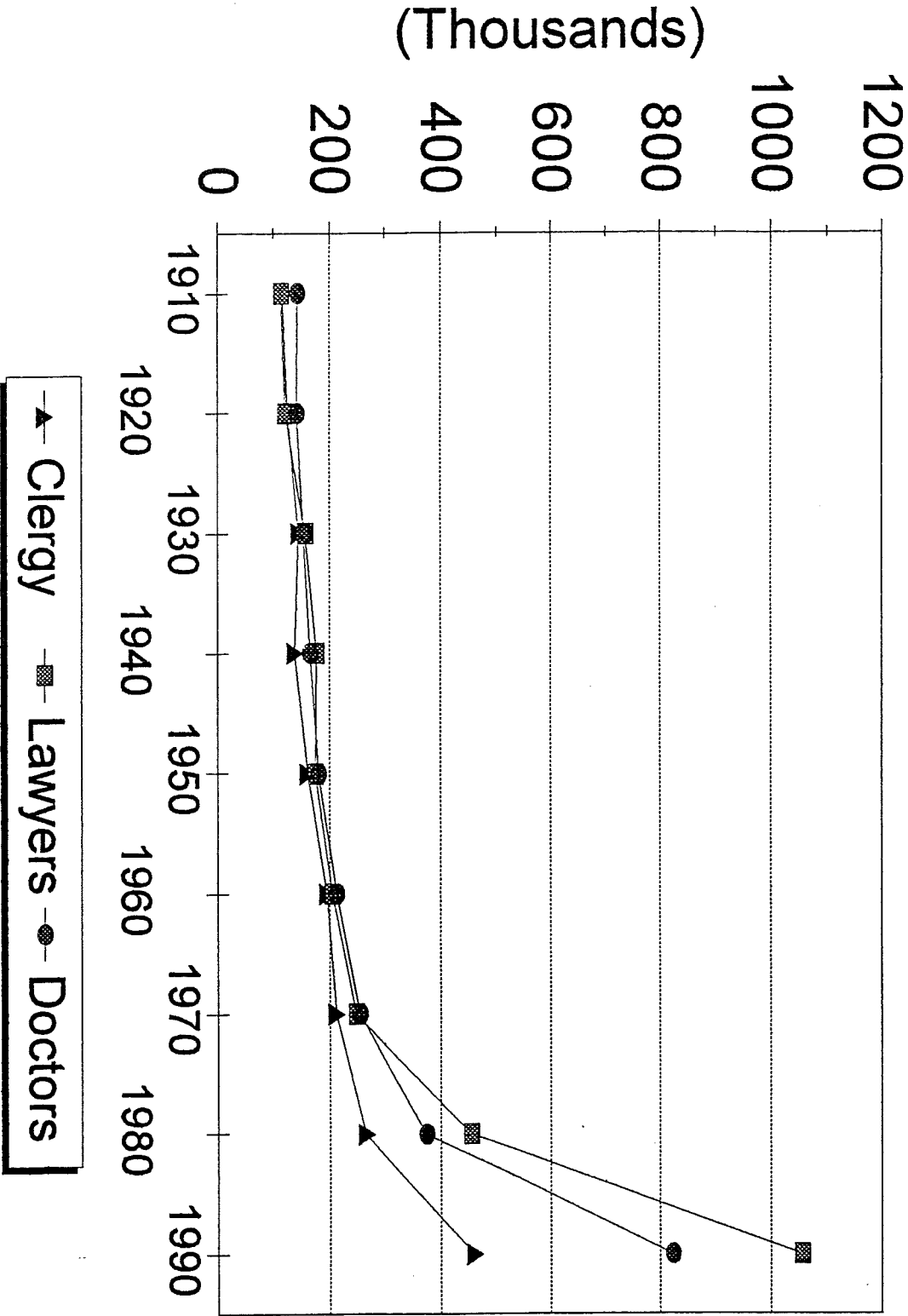


FIGURE 4

Changes in the Proportion of Women in the Labor Force

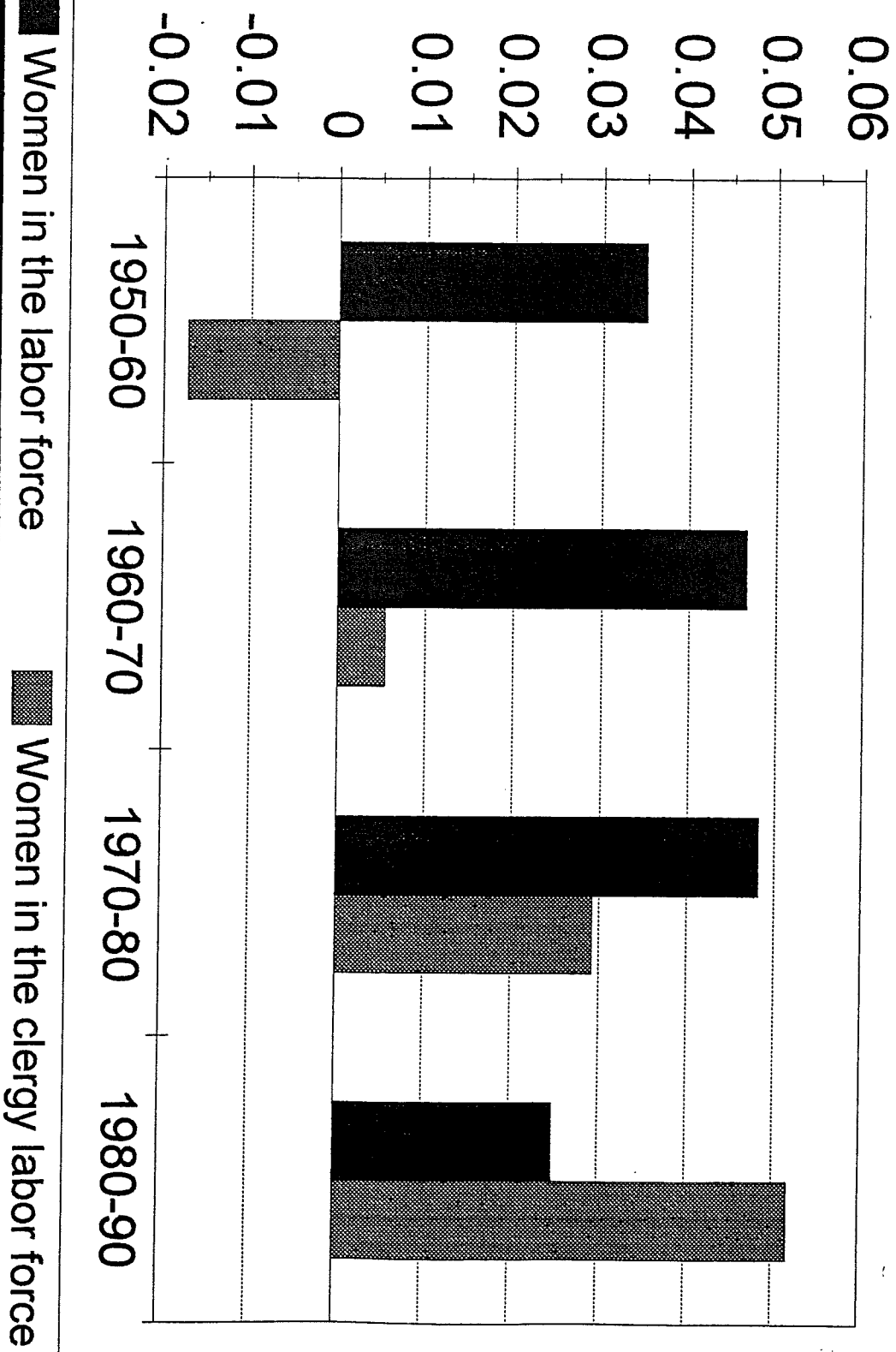


FIGURE 5

Number of male and female clergy:1994

Clergy Study Sample

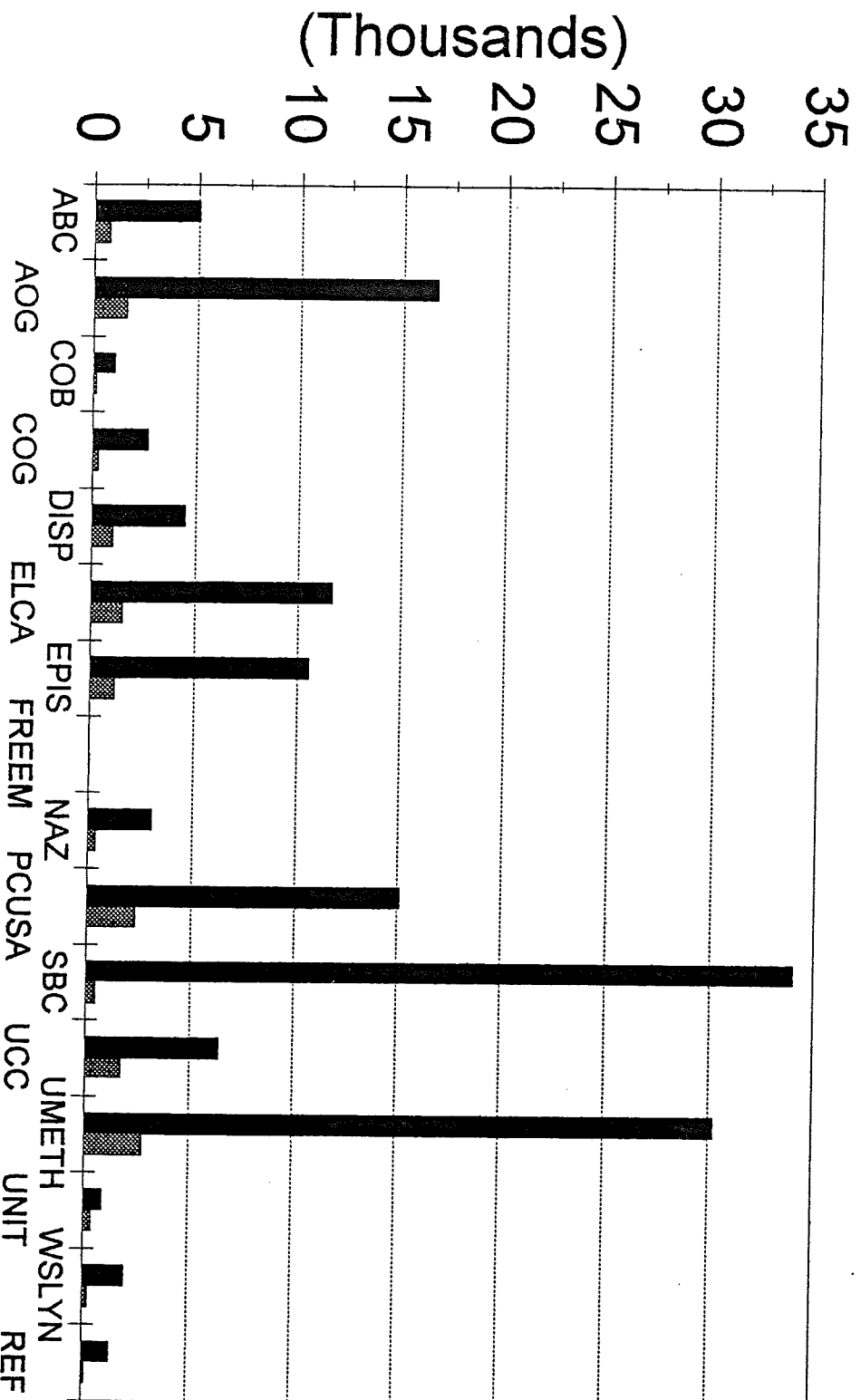


FIGURE 6

Changes in number of clergywomen By denomination and year

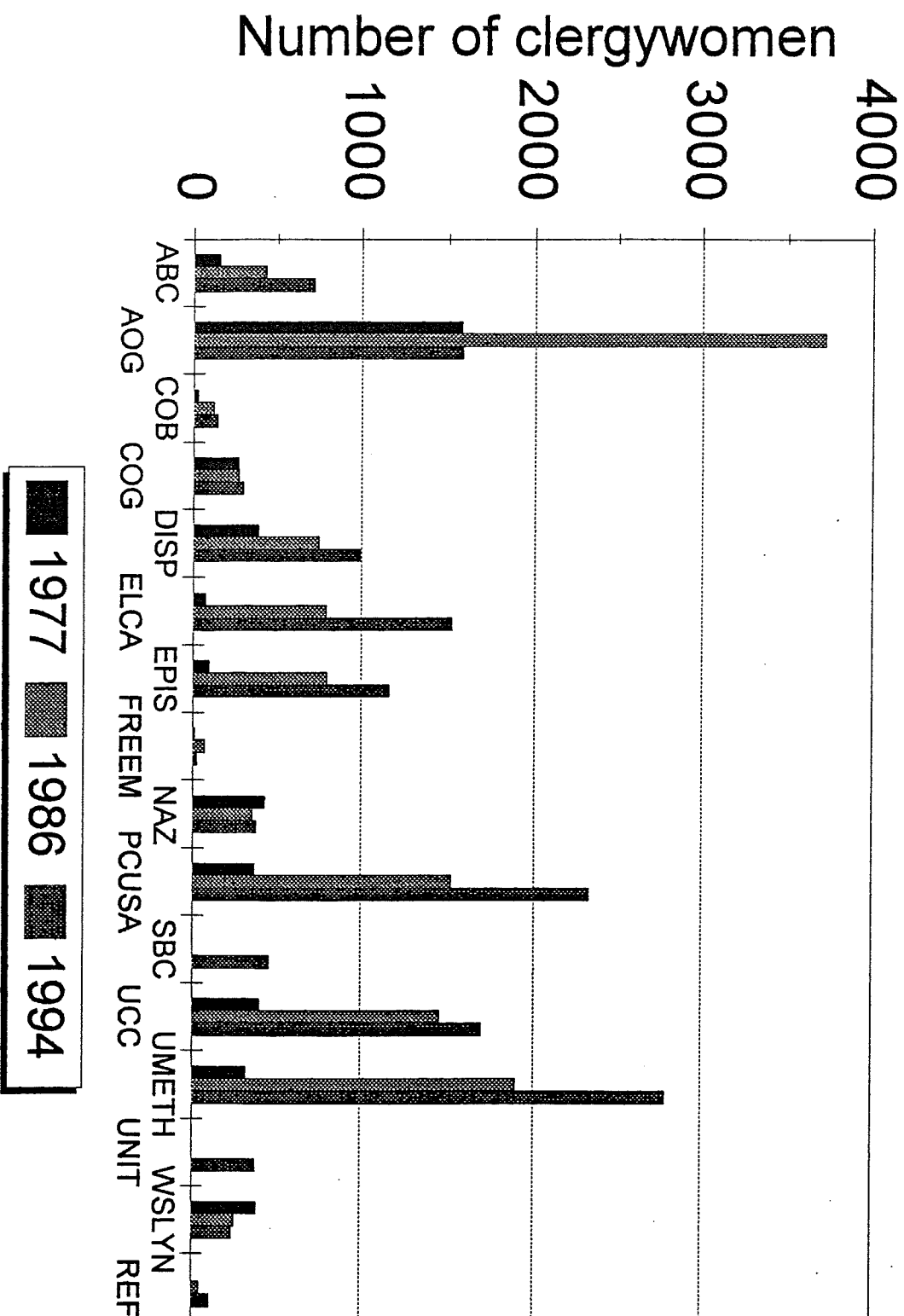


FIGURE 7

Change in number of clergywomen As a percent of total clergy

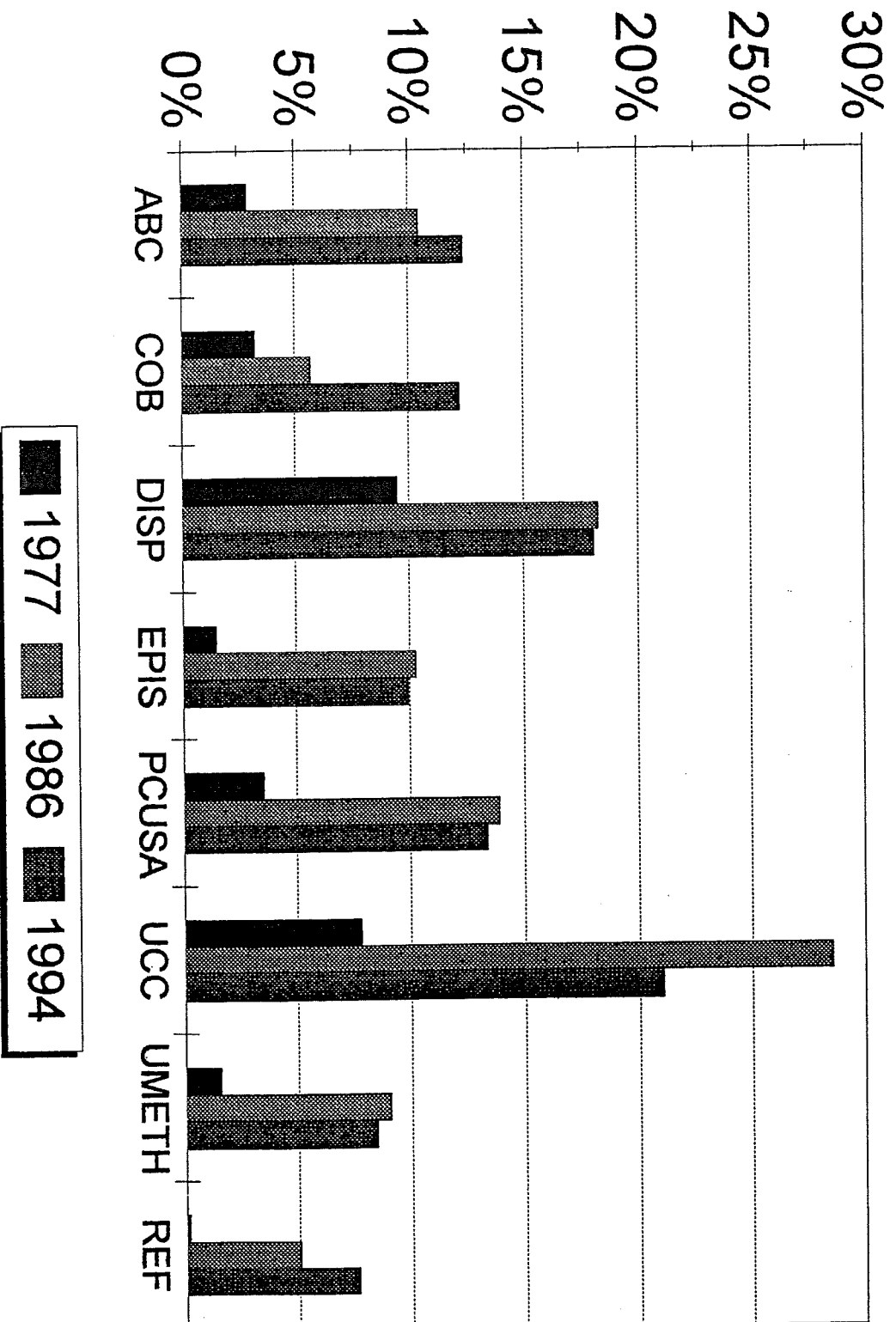


FIGURE 8

Distribution of clergy jobs by gender

Ordained Clergy Study

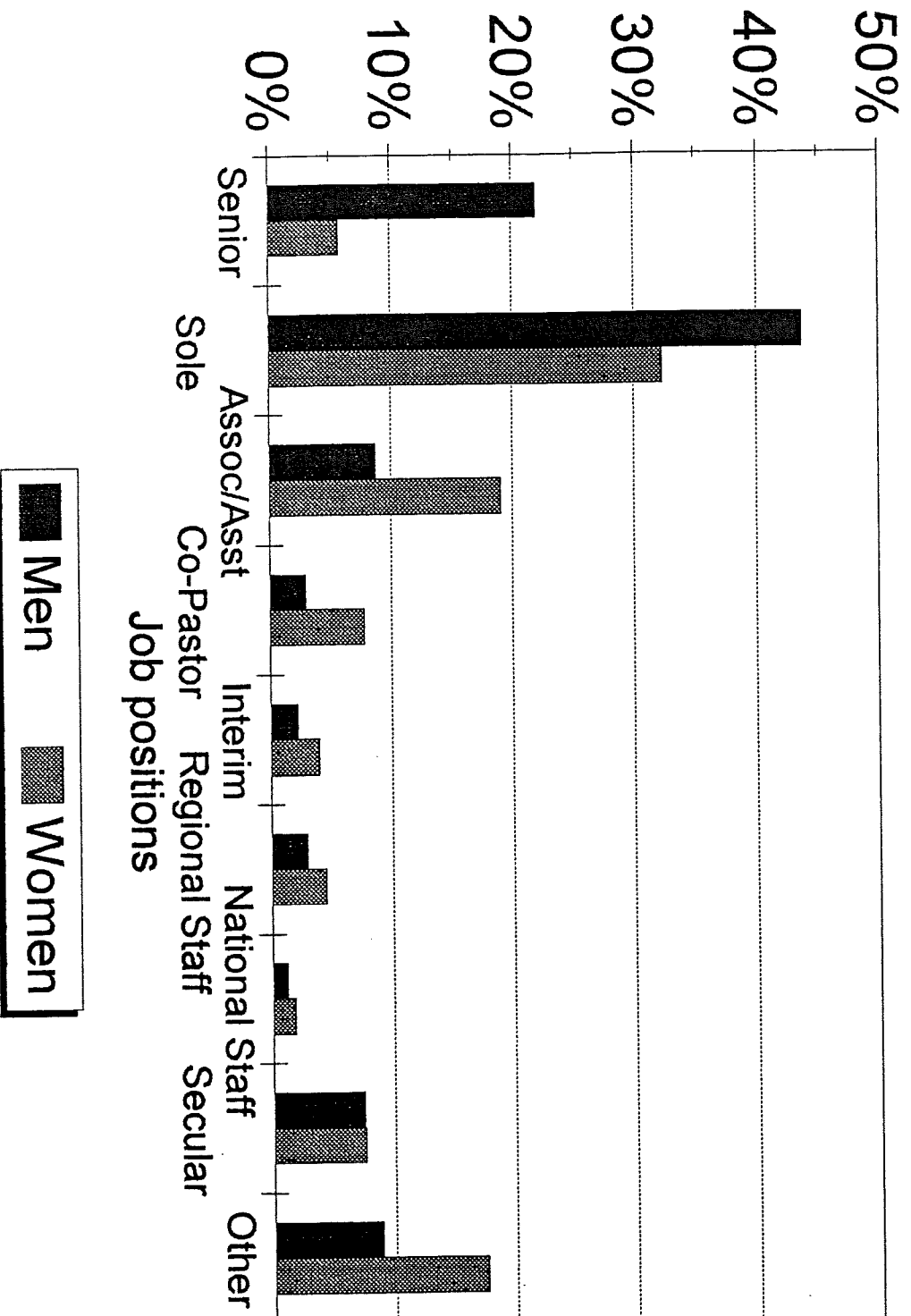


Table 1: Stated Job Goal Upon Leaving Seminary

MEN		WOMEN	
Sole	57.4%	Sole	45.1%
Senior	14.0%	Assoc/ Asst	10.9%
Assoc/ Asst	5.9%	Senior	8.2%
Other	4.6%	Other	4.9%
Youth	2.2%	Educ	4.5%
% of Total	84.1%	% of Total	73.6%

Table 2: First Job Upon Leaving Seminary

Men		Women	
Sole	42.9%	Assoc/ Asst	35.0%
Assoc/ Asst	30.8%	Sole	18.6%
Secular	10.2%	Other	16.3%
Other	6.1%	Secular	14.0%
Senior	4.2%	Co-Pastor	6.1%
% of Total	94.2%	% of Total	90.0%

Table 3: Present Job

Men		Women	
Sole	43.7%	Sole	32.3%
Senior	22.0%	Assoc/ Asst	19.0%
Other	8.9%	Other	17.6%
Assoc/ Asst	8.7%	Co-Pastor	7.7%
Secular	7.4%	Secular	7.5%
% of Total	90.7%	% of Total	84.1%