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The Norm of Tradition: Gender Subordination and Women's Exclusion in International Relations

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The survey data in "Women in International Relations" explains that women are underrepresented in international relations as a whole, and that this underrepresentation only grows at the higher ranks of our profession. In observing the "gender gap" in IR, the essay offers an interesting and important overview of the possible reasons for women's underrepresentation and points out some meaningful differences between women and men in terms of perspective in the discipline, publication productivity, and teaching style, among other things. Near the beginning of the essay, the authors set up alternative explanations for women's marginal position in the discipline. They note that while feminist scholars relate women's marginalization to gender subordination, "other scholars suggest that the content of women's scholarship contributes to their marginalization" (see p. 122). I would argue that women's differences and gender subordination might not be *competing* explanations for women's marginalization. Instead, it might be that gender subordination can explain *both* women's differences *and* women's underrepresentation in the field.

A word about what a "feminist reading" of the article entails is important at the outset. Feminist scholarship in international relations asks two main questions of global politics — Where are the women?

(Enloe 1990) and What explains women's subordination? (Pettman 1996; Tickner 2001). Feminist scholarship is interested in looking at the roles and implications of gender subordination, both in global politics (Peterson and Runyan 1999) and in our chosen foci of study, epistemological assumptions, and methodological selections (Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006; Keller 1985). Feminist scholars argue that "only by introducing gender analysis could the differential impact of the ... system on the lives of women and men be fully understood" (Tickner and Sjoberg 2006). This response, then, uses gender analysis to think about where women are in international relations and why they are marginalized. As I read "Women in International Relations" and the survey results that it reports through feminist lenses, I am interested in two questions: First, where are the women? And second, what explains women's underrepresentation?

The question of where the women are is an important one for gender analysis. Women make up 50.9% of the population of the United States (United States Census 2000). Given that, women's representation in the field of international relations at the junior level is *half* of their representation in the general population, and at the senior level it drops to less than one-third of their presence in the population more generally.

Women's exclusion from the profession is, in fact, so common that there is a phrase for it: women who have "left the profession." I was first exposed to the idea of "leaving the profession" in a social setting at the 2007 annual meeting of the International Studies Association. I had gone out to dinner with a group of colleagues, most of whom were between 10 and 15 years out of graduate school. They were talking about women who they had known in the discipline who had "left the profession" for reasons in one way or another related to gender. Many of these were women whose books I had read as an undergraduate and in graduate school and whose work had been of high quality. These were women whom one would have expected to get a job, keep the job, and advance through the promotion and tenure ranks without a lot of trouble. I was discouraged by the fact that so many bright women in my field had left the community, but I was even more discouraged by how normal it seemed to their friends and colleagues still in the profession.

The perception that women "leave the field" is one that I cannot quantify — we do not have data concerning women who have left the field, and there are structural problems with a survey like Teaching, Research, and International Politics (TRIP) reaching or counting those people. They are, by definition, silent in a survey like this, as well as in

the discipline as a whole. There are those who argue that women being represented *less* at the senior levels in the field than they are at the junior levels reflects not leaving the field but an increasing representation of women that will "trickle up" as this generation of female junior scholars gets older. Still, women scholars in the field treat the loss of their female colleagues as a social fact, and that assumption in itself certainly has both social and professional impact.

Stories about the circumstances under which these women left the profession were even more discouraging. One woman was led to believe that she was denied tenure because she had poor course reviews in one crucial semester; those poor course reviews criticized her pregnancy. Another was told that she would never be a full professor because she was expected to get "distracted" and start a family. Yet another, part of an academic couple, felt that she was denied a promotion in punishment for her spouse's applying for other jobs. A fourth woman was denied an extension of the tenure clock after having a baby. These experiences suggest that, rather than being a "Ginger Rogers complex," as Daniel Maliniak and his colleagues suggest (see p. 132), women's perception that they may need to work more for the same successes as men may be an accurate understanding of their position in the discipline. One woman who was a part of the conversation and who considered leaving the profession said that she was tempted to do something else for a living, something where her womanhood did not disqualify her as it did in international relations. Certainly, the women who survive the process of searching for a job, retaining the job, and receiving promotion and tenure show that women *can* make it in the field. Additionally, other fields and professions also reflect a society still very entrenched in gender subordination. Still, in IR, women's underrepresentation is so grave that this "failure" to make it in the field cannot be understood as individual or incidental, but, rather, as a consequence of structural barriers to women's participation. The severity of women's exclusion from IR *as compared to* the rest of political science supports this understanding.

These structural barriers might include the gendered subject matter of the discipline, the gendered language in which the discipline describes and analyzes global politics, and the gendered qualifications for employment, promotion, and tenure specific to the discipline and in academia more generally. Until I heard the conversation just referenced, like most of the explanations in "Women in International Relations" and elsewhere in the discipline, I had assumed that women's marginalization in the discipline was incidental, not structural. Incidental explanations

identify some factor or set of factors, such as educational differences, differences in the subfields of international relations that women are interested in, age differences, methodological differences, and so on, and "blame" women's underrepresentation on those differences. These explanations imply that, if women had the "same" education, the "same" interests, and the "same" methods, then their experience in the subfield of international relations would be similar to men's. As such, many who look for women's equality in our field are actively interested in finding more women who do "good work" and including them among the ranks of their departments. I have heard several department chairs lament that they simply were unable to find a woman who met their criteria, and thus were unable to hire a woman to fill a vacant tenure-track line. In this scenario, senior colleagues explain, were there to be a woman who did the same work at the same level as the (more qualified) male candidate, then the department would have no problem hiring the person — women who were "the same" would be treated that way.

The problem, then, for those who consider women's underrepresentation incidental, is that women are not the same. Because of perceived inferior preparation, skills, research interests, research methodologies, or other qualifications, women are often understood as less qualified job candidates and less desirable contenders for promotion. Women's underrepresentation could be fixed by assuring that women got the same training, worked in the same areas, and obtained the same qualifications.

Yet there is an endogeneity problem in this argument. Several times throughout the essay, the authors of "Women in International Relations" point out that instead of being interested in the "same" things, women are open to and interested in "nontraditional" research problems in the discipline. What the article does not explore, however, are the normative complications with the use of the word "traditional." There is a sociology to what is traditional, much like there is a sociology to our discipline more generally. What is traditional matches what men do more than it matches what women do at least, in part, because traditionally, IR scholars have been men, and therefore the perspectives of male scholars have defined the "tradition" of IR scholarship. Feminists have described this as the "malestream," rather than the "mainstream" of IR, because even where women are becoming more accepted as political scientists, it is largely conditional upon socializing themselves into the discipline as defined by the men who came before them (Youngs 2004). Knowledge ought to "always be seen as especially problematical when it was

constructed only by those in positions of privilege that afforded them only distorted views about the world" (Scheman 1993). As Anne Phillips (1987) notes, the integration of women into certain elements of society is incomplete even when women are "equally represented" because the discursive structures of gender subordination are left in place.

If what is "traditional" is endogenous, then the problem of women's underrepresentation is structural rather than incidental. To argue that the problem is structural is to argue that adding women to the ranks of our faculties, our tenure rolls, and our journals is insufficient to redress women's subordination. Even if women were numerically "equal" to men in terms of their participation and rank in the profession, they would still be participating in a men's world. Nancy Hirschmann explains that "one cannot merely add women's experience to the dominant discourse because the two utilize different ontological and epistemological frameworks" (1989, 1242).

Maybe women's experiences in life also color their preference for nonmainstream theories. I am not saying that there is one "woman's perspective" or that all women necessarily have something in common (except, perhaps, some experience of gender subordination). But gender subordination *is* rampant throughout the world and even in the United States. J. Ann Tickner argues that women's marginality *in life* helps them to see women's marginality specifically and political marginality more generally *in scholarship*. This argument would help explain the difference of chosen areas of study. The argument is essentially that subordination alters perspective (Pettman 1996; Tickner 2001). Catharine MacKinnon argues that differences between women and men in task, perspective, and even physicality are the result of gender subordination rather than its cause, because subordinated people have different tasks and see the world differently (MacKinnon 1989). The incompleteness of gender subordination accounts for the exceptions, while the fact of gender subordination accounts for the norm. Spike Peterson argues that "the femininity and masculinity that inform our identification as women and men have pervasive implications for the lives we lead and the world(s) in which we live" (1999, 37). For example, women's experiences of the public/private divide in personal life might lead them to question the line between "personal" and "political" in international relations (Elshtain 1987), or women might be more likely to be constructivists because women's experiences in life are less "reactively autonomous" and more "relationally autonomous." Reactive autonomy is the understanding that we are autonomous, and,

when our autonomy is interfered with, we *react*. The idea of relational autonomy acknowledges that we live in a world of constraint and nonvoluntary obligation; our autonomy is *related* to the (often gendered) contexts of our lives. Hirschmann suggests that women experience their lives with a relational understanding of autonomy more often than do men (Hirschmann 1989; 2003; Sylvester 1990).

Perhaps the problem, then, is not that women's work is nontraditional. Rather, it is that we consider women's perspectives outside of tradition because tradition is laced with gender subordination. If "tradition" excludes women's perspectives, indoctrinating women into tradition will not "fix" the gender disparities in our profession. While we should be asking why there are *fewer* women at all levels, especially the highest levels of the international relations profession, we should also be asking why *drastically* fewer women than men join the profession in the beginning. The answer, I argue, is that women's perspectives[1] are, by definition, excluded from the subjects that the discipline finds interesting.

As such, instead of providing women the "same" education and the "same" opportunities, perhaps it is time to question the value that we as a discipline assign to sameness. Perhaps it is time to stop thinking that women fall outside of the norm, and start redefining the norm in terms of the presence and importance of women's perspectives in the discipline.

Feminist scholarship in IR offers some insights into how we, as a discipline, might move from a "tradition" defined by men's perspectives to a disciplinary "objectivity," including the perspectives of scholars of both and/or all genders. As Mary Hawkesworth notes, "the discovery of pervasive androcentrism in the definition of intellectual problems as well as in specific theories, concepts, methods, and interpretations of research fuels efforts to distinguish between knowledge and prejudice" within feminist scholarship (1989, 534).

One path to inclusiveness in the discipline can be found in what feminists have called "strong" or "dynamic" objectivity.[2] This sort of objectivity does not give up on the idea that there is a proper and

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1. By "women's perspectives" here, I do not mean that women have natural or essential commonalities that should be reflected in the discipline. Instead, I mean something simpler: If half of the population was excluded from the formulation of the discipline, its values, and its inclusions and exclusions, presumably the inclusion of those perspectives would have made (and would make) a different discipline. Further, the structural inequality in the discipline and outside of it between women and men color their experiences, which color perspectives.

2. "Strong" objectivity is a concept taken from Sandra Harding (1998), whereas "dynamic" objectivity is derived from the work of Evelyn Fox Keller (1985). Both concepts emphasize the need to include *all* rather than the elite few in defining what counts as knowledge.

identifiable subject matter for political science, or a way to study that subject matter which we can, as a community, agree is most rigorous or most appropriate for a given subject. Instead, it means that we level the playing field of power when we make those decisions by including both voices of those men who have traditionally defined the discipline *and* also the perspectives and inscriptions of those women who have left the profession out of frustration, exhaustion, or involuntary exclusion, as well as the perspectives in between. Dynamic objectivity leads us to include the perspectives of women, minorities, and others who are underrepresented in the field of international relations *within* the bounds of the discipline, rather than marginalizing them and wondering why those people "fail" in our discipline disproportionately. Such an approach, instead of looking to make women "the same" or study "traditional" topics, includes the topics that women find important (such as, in the Maliniak et al. article in this issue, feminism and constructivism) within the boundaries of "good work" in the field.

A more inclusive definition of the boundaries of knowledge in our discipline "offers us a more connected view of objectivity with less potential for domination" (Tickner 2001, 62). As Evelyn Fox Keller explains, dynamic objectivity "aims at a form of knowledge that grants to the world around us independent integrity but does so in a way that remains cognizant of, indeed relies on, our connectivity with that world" (1985, 17). The gender integration of the field of international relations, then, is reliant on its substantive inclusiveness — we will only be able to redress women's underrepresentation when we break down the structural barriers to their success in the forms of gender-biased definitions of mainstream ideas, of publishable work, and of the sort of people we believe should be promoted and tenured.

Perhaps by addressing what counts as quality work in international relations not through the gender-subordinating lenses of tradition but with a dynamic understanding of objectivity, not only would the numerical underrepresentation of women be addressed, but also the substantive underrepresentation of women and issues and ideas traditionally associated with femininity. As scholars of international relations, we can use a dynamic objectivity approach to improve the gender balance in our discipline, and in doing so, enrich both our understanding of global politics and the methods that we use to study it. Until we achieve that goal, and so long as international relations is a man's world, perhaps the best reaction that we as female scholars of international relations can have individually is to pursue a transformative agenda, while paying close

attention to our publications, status, and rank in hopes of avoiding "becoming a statistic" of women's exclusion in international relations.

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