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No Shortcuts to Gender Equality: The Structures of Women's Exclusion in Political Science

Anonymous

J. R. R. Tolkien once suggested that "short cuts make long delays." While Tolkien was not talking about improving the situation of women in political science, this essay argues that those of us interested in making political science less alienating for women would do well to heed his advice.

There is significant evidence that women's position in the discipline is improving. Many scholars in political science (of all sexes) are deeply

concerned with gender equity in the field. Very few (though, unfortunately, some) people find explicit sexism acceptable. The APSA, the regional associations, and subfield associations, such as ISA, now have both Committees on the Status of Women and gender-themed substantive sections. Women now constitute a significant minority of faculty members and a majority of graduate students. All of those developments might inspire optimism not only about women's current situation, but about the potential to end gender inequity in political science in the future by continuing on this path.

We argue (perhaps controversially) that these trends should actually be a source of pessimism. It may seem counterintuitive to argue that the increased representation of women, the commitment to the cause of women's representation, and the celebration of that representation are actually problematic for the cause of gender equity. We suggest, though, that exactly that realization is essential to deconstructing the gender-hierarchical order of political science because current moves toward representational inclusion of women both leave intact the structural masculinism of the discipline (which is the underlying cause of women's exclusion), and make that masculinism less visible, more difficult to problematize, and easier to tacitly accept. After outlining the argument that political science is a masculinist discipline, this essay proposes some ways to expose and deal with both that masculinism and the ways the celebration and signification of "women's inclusion" in the discipline entrenches the masculinism of its structures.

The "Gender Equal" Discipline of Political Science

In a fairly average Research I political science department, almost 30% of the faculty, across rank and subfield, are women.[1] In this Department, not all the women are paid less than the men. Some of them were heavily recruited and are being financially rewarded for that. The Department has a liberal policy for family leave and looks to accommodate the needs of faculty members with children, aging parents, or other care responsibilities. Women often find themselves with such responsibilities. On the surface, this Department is doing pretty well in including women.

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1. The percentage cited is not the statistical mean computed for any set of departments in any given year, but rather suggests an experience common at Research I departments. That said, the TRIP (Teaching and Research in International Politics) Survey in 2011 indicated that 31% of International Relations (IR) faculty responding to the survey were women (Maliniak, Peterson, and Tierny 2012).

Still, the Department's women faculty are overrepresented in marginal positions (like adjunct faculty and untenured faculty) and underrepresented in positions of leadership (like chair, associate chair, graduate coordination, and executive committee) and power (like full professor). Because the leadership wants women "equally represented" on committees, women faculty often do more committee work than their male colleagues. These countable differences in position show that women's inclusion remains incomplete.

It is, however, the less visible, less countable dynamics that most influence women faculty's quality of life in this imaginary department. While they have difficulty naming the dynamic, many women faculty can see it. They see it in the "alpha male" competitions to make the same argument louder at faculty meetings, or in the ways that sexist jokes remain acceptable in the Department. They can see it in the comments that identify professional dedication as impressive in men but problematic for women's "work-life balance." They see it in the tenure denials of women — not per se because they are women, but because of pregnancies or personal relationships, covered in thinly veiled professional language about teaching ability or inconsistent records. They see the existence of a "boys club" that plays basketball together and just happens to discuss department policy at the men-only event. They see praise for men who care for children, suspicion of mothers' ability to do their jobs, and anxiety about when women of childbearing age might become pregnant. They see women in the Department being assigned "women's work" — that is, dealing more with undergraduates than graduate students, more with generalist courses then specialized ones, more with peripheral administrative assignments than core ones.[2] While many women would like their departments to have more women or to treat women differently, differences of subfield, research area, and career goals often create cleavages among women. As a result, in choosing colleagues and leaders, many women default to a "best candidate" standard and see it as an unfortunate externality that the best candidate is often a man.

The women in this hypothetical department then venture out into their hypothetical professional associations — with their annual meetings, substantive sections, journals, and regional organizations. As we mentioned at the outset, those associations have committees and caucuses explicitly interested in women's inclusion in and experience of

2. See discussion of many of these dynamics in Monroe et al. (2008).

the discipline. These committees and caucuses have official, and sometimes even substantive, participation in organizational hierarchies. Yet, in those very associations women are named rarely as leading figures in their subfields, are published in journals like the *APSR* less frequently, and are cited less often than men controlling for other factors (e.g., Kadera 2013; Malinak, Peterson, and Tierney 2012; Malinaik, Powers, and Walter 2013). These differences are framed in terms of the "best candidate" being male, or the quality of individual research submissions, or discussed as a trend that is bound to end. I argue that those accounts leave out a crucial part of the story: disciplinary masculinism.[3]

"The Closer You Look, the Less You See:" Political Science as Masculinist

The great majority of the dynamics just named are never *explicitly* about sex and gender, and they often seem sex-neutral to the people complicit in making and perpetuating them. Each exclusion, each marginalization, can be justified in terms other than sex or gender. Yet they are produced and manifested almost entirely along the lines of biological sex. No one still argues that women have no — or an inferior — place in the discipline. Yet *almost everyone* (consciously or unconsciously) acts like it — even those of us who are committed feminists.

Sometimes, we can actually hear the sex and gender in it, but more often we do not. More often, the women in our hypothetical department and organization may have this nagging feeling that there is something missing — that the department leadership and power structure is off because it excludes women, and that the exclusion of women is institutional rather than incidental. Yet it is never said. Instead, the opposite is repeated, constantly: we *want* women, we *need* to include women. Despite that explicit commitment, and though the differences become more subtle, differences of expectation and result on the basis of sex persist.

We argue that this is actually a disciplinary structure rather than a problem of the inclusion and representation of women. The discipline is structurally *masculinist*. Charlotte Hooper (1998, 31) defines masculinism as "the ideology that justifies and naturalizes gender

3. "Masculinism" here is used to denote the disciplining power of values associated with masculinities over values associated with femininities.

hierarchy by not questioning the elevation of ways of being and knowing associated with men and masculinity over those associated with femininity." Rather than seeing the underrepresentation of women as incidental, temporary, or even related to actual differences between men and women, we argue that it is important to remember that the discipline's substance and institutions were both established when the discipline was mostly, if not entirely, composed of male scholars, and those male scholars prized values associated with masculinity, such as objectivity, rationality, and competitiveness. As feminist theorists have long argued, knowledge should "be seen as especially problematical" when it is constructed and produced "only by those in a position of privilege" that "afforded them only distorted views about the world" (Scheman 1993).

Like J. R. R. Tolkien, Naomi Scheman was not talking about political science. But her analysis applies nonetheless. What qualifies as good research design, good research methods, and good research are standards that were largely set in the discipline by men and that express masculine values, as were the standards that the discipline understands as qualifying people to be full professors, department chairs, award winners, association leaders, productive researchers, and good citizens. Standards that express masculine values are assumed to fit men best, and men are socialized to meet them.

That is why we contend that many of the dominant norms of the discipline are *gender-biased*. It is important to clarify that gender-bias (bias in favor of values associated with masculinities over values associated with femininities) is different from, but often produces, *sex bias* (bias in favor of men over women). The general understanding of the separability and separateness of research subject and object in political science (in Patrick Jackson's [2010] terms, dualism) is a masculinist bias. Considering femininity in the research process reveals the interdependence of knower and known, the role of position and emotion in the production of research, and the impossibility of traditional notions of independence and objectivity. The assumption that those distinguishable research subjects are rational, and even that rationality is a useful construct, is a masculinist assumption. Recognizing the feminine in decision making has suggested that rationality is a partial, biased concept that leaves out impulse, connectivity, emotion, desire, and other elements of the (presumed feminine) part of human interaction almost systematically left out of the discipline. The tendency to favor quantitative methods is masculinist, as it privileges the language

of rational communication over the language of reflexivity. The idea that a department chair should be "stable, predictable, rational, calm, managerial, level-headed, and strong" (recalling again our hypothetical department) is masculinist, as it undervalues sympathy, empathy, passion, emotion, communication, and the willingness to compromise and/or sacrifice — values traditionally associated with femininity. The juxtaposition of tenure clocks and childbearing years in the discipline is masculinist, as it ignores the ways that many women (and possibly feminized men) live their *personal* lives. Indeed, the very separation of personal and professional problems for women's advancement in the field is masculinist, as it makes the assumption that the public/private dichotomy makes sense and that it is just to ignore the role of the "private" in people's careers in the discipline.

We could go on, but our goal in this piece is not to chronicle all of the evidence of gendered values in the research and administration of the field of political science. It is, instead, to make a case for the plausibility of the argument that the root cause of women's underrepresentation, underplacement, and slow advancement in the field is the masculinist structure of the discipline, rather than women's inability to (yet) climb the ranks of a discipline that we assume to be gender-neutral. In this sense, with the movie *Now You See Me*, "the closer you look, the less you see," since the effort to increase women's representation appears to solve the problem when, as we argue below, it does not. In fact, the existing efforts may be a part of the problem.

The Perpetuation of Masculinism in the Inclusion of Women

Advocacy for the inclusion of women often suggests that women and men are not inherently different and that individual women have aptly demonstrated their competitiveness in the field. In this view, it is the sex composition of the field that needs to change, not the field itself. We agree with those two premises — men and women are not inherently different, and many women have succeeded even given the (masculinist) structure of the field (or maybe even because of it). That does not, however, make it less problematic that traits associated with, and scholarly traditions associated with, masculinities currently dominate political science.

Failing to recognize the subtle ways that the field is dominated by masculinities makes it possible for (male and female) scholars to distinguish between advocacy for women's inclusion and the promotion

of research agendas that examine sex, gender, and sexuality in politics. People who make that distinction see the two missions as unrelated and argue (perhaps correctly) that relating them would reinforce the (inappropriate) expectation that women research women (or other more peripheral subjects in the field). Perhaps relatedly, advocacy for the inclusion of women is often salient in departments and organizations that continue to accept the marginalization of research on sex, gender, and sexuality.

We contend that the underrepresentation of women in the field of political science, the subtle discrimination that happens to women in their departments and in professional organizations, and the marginalization of research on sex, gender, and sexuality have the same cause and need the same solution. We are not interested in telling a well-known story of the overdetermination of the marginalization of women based on the history of women's opportunities in the field, the likely substance of their research, and gendered patterns of communication, though certainly all of those factors matter (for recent contributions, see, e.g., Kadera 2013; Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013; Mitchell and Hesli 2013; Mitchell, Lange, and Brus 2013; and Monroe and Chiu 2010).

Instead, we are arguing that the structural masculinism of the discipline is not overcome by sex integration. While some suggest that the values of the discipline will change as women are added to it, others contend that inclusiveness will select for women who fit with the field's masculinism. Feminist scholars have long argued that adding women to institutions dominated by values associated with masculinities (be they governments, militaries, or, here, academic disciplines) does not feminize those institutions or make them gender-neutral (e.g., Enloe 1990; Paxton and Hughes 2007). We argue that it is about time to apply this analysis to our discipline, to our organizations, and to our departments. Adding women to their ranks without changing their structures, their values, their standards of measurement, their substantive definitions of what is political science research and how it is performed does not automatically change the masculinism of the discipline. Instead, we argue, there are ways that it entrenches that masculinism.

This argument about entrenchment can be difficult to understand and even difficult to hear. How can efforts to include women in the discipline — and help them succeed once they are included — be bad for women and bad for the discipline? We argue that there are three important ways in which this seemingly contradictory set of consequences occurs.

First, it is not the fact of adding women to the discipline of political science that is insidious, but *how* women are being included in the discipline without a wholesale questioning of the masculinist structures that have overdetermined their exclusion for so long. The addition of women to the discipline poses a double bind of causing both the women and the men in the discipline to meet antiquated masculinist structures and of making those masculinist structures less visible. The decrease in visibility can be seen in our hypothetical masculinist department and organization above. What can possibly be wrong with the gender dynamics of a department that has 30% women and pays them more or less equally? What can possibly be wrong with an organization that has Committees on the Status of Women and Women's Caucuses? The answer, as we discussed above, is "a lot." Yet a decrease in representational exclusion makes it more difficult to see the remaining underlying structures of gender inequity that are then manifested in sex inequity. Counting women, their salaries, and their publications is important, but it is a "short cut" that neglects deeper problems.

Second, the recent increased representational inclusion of women in the discipline is assumed to be a positive trend and one that will produce sex and gender equality in political science if it is just followed, or amped up. The danger in this assumption, we contend, is that it is likely to lead to increased representation of women but to make gender inequity in the discipline worse rather than better. The proliferation of the women who meet the discipline's masculinized standards has the strong potential to fuel the argument that the discipline's (masculine) standards are suitable. Rather than actually being suitable, though, those standards serve as a straightjacket to limit and constrain (and perhaps ultimately kill) values associated with femininity in the field's research, teaching, and institutional practices. In other words, it is the very celebration of the success of inclusion — and the interpretation of that inclusion as ending gender subordination — that perpetuates the illusion that the masculinist standards of the discipline are fair, even-handed, and gender-neutral.

Third, the focus on the inclusion of women in the discipline perpetuates the assumption that there are people appropriately identified as women who have something essential in common (perhaps even other than how they are treated in the discipline), contrasted with the other half of that dichotomy: people appropriately identified as men. The male/female dichotomy is one of many reasons that many people in the discipline's ranks and more broadly confuse sex and gender. The idea that there are two sexes and two genders, and they map on to each other, perpetuates

that. Rarely in our inclusion conversations do we mention people who identify as neither/both male and/or female, people who identify as genderqueer, people whose lifestyle choices and sexual preferences distinguish them from heteronormative (or even homonormative) standards. Instead, the pursuit of women's inclusion *as women* unaccompanied by the gender analysis that opposes masculinism reifies the category of women, the association of women and femininity/men and masculinity, and the systematic exclusion of those who fall outside of the male/female dichotomy.

Shortcuts Make Long Delays

Far from being a solution to gender inequality in the discipline, we argue that current strategies to increase the representation of women are actually, in Tolkien's words, "short cuts" that make for long delays and might be overall counterproductive to changing the gendered landscape of the discipline. If the discipline is structurally masculinist, and advocacy and accomplishment of women's integration into that masculinist discipline is leaving (many, if not all of) its structures intact, the presence of more women in the discipline *without other changes* may serve to endorse, entrench, and make less visible those masculinist structures. Rather than "adding women and stirring," feminist scholars have suggested it is essential to break down the masculinist values of those institutions while integrating values associated with femininity in their priority structures (e.g., Acker 1990; Zalewski 1995). We suggest that it is crucially important not to take such a shortcut because the discipline should not have to deal with the long delay.

The produced long delay in the change of gendered structures of the discipline is problematic for a number of reasons. The first, and primary, is that it makes strategies of inclusion counterproductive to their ultimate goal. The second is that it makes the discipline unfriendly to characteristics associated with femininity, putting a cage around the sort of people (male, female, or otherwise) most likely to succeed in it and the sort of research that they must do, thus entrenching discrimination and subordination. The third and probably most important is that it makes us less good at what we do on its own terms. All of the questions that the discipline is interested in have elements of, and need thinking associated with, femininity to fully account for, explain, and understand them. So long as femininities are structurally either marginalized or

excluded in the discipline, the substance of our research and our teaching will be partial, incomplete, and therefore of lower quality than it could be if our inclusiveness were focused on gendered values, rather than on sexed bodies.

To accomplish that, we suggest that several steps are necessary. First, it is essential to recognize the masculinized structures of the discipline and their manifestations in not only personnel decisions but also across indicators of success in the field, from publishing to promotion. Second, we suggest that scholars in the field should think about the ways that they *personally* live the field as gendered. From the student evaluations that comment on a woman's shoes to the expectation that men be tough and stoic in the face of rejection, thinking about the ways that gendered assumptions and gendered expectations structure how people experience the discipline is a crucial step en route to deconstructing those assumptions and expectations. Particularly, understanding the gendered connections to the things that we find least satisfactory about our jobs (from feeling silenced to the competitiveness of departments, from care labor recognition to a need for interdependence) is important. Third, translating the realization of the macro- and microelements of the masculinist structure of the discipline to changing it is both essential and terrifically difficult. Such a transformation, to be successful, has to be based not on blame and anger but on strategies for demasculinizing our institutions and our research. This means infiltrating, agitating in, and looking to change the logic of the governance and power structures that we work in at all levels, from the department to the discipline as a whole. While calling out sexism and putting women in positions of power is not irrelevant to such a mission, it is also not the primary way it ought to be pursued. Instead, it ought to be pursued by naming and deconstructing the implicit masculinism in what we do and how we do it.

That last element — naming and deconstructing masculinism — is a belligerent, in-your-face strategy, especially when compared to the strategy of advocating for women to be allowed into and promoted within the discipline. In advocating for this strategy, we do not mean to suggest that it should be used as a tool to reify and deepen the gulf between masculinities and femininities (and, often, by extension, men and women) in the discipline. We also do not mean to add credibility to the masculine/feminine dichotomy. Still, we suggest that, in the situation of the (increasingly invisible) masculinization of the discipline, silence is tantamount to complicity both with gendered dichotomies and masculine bias, and calling them out is the only hope to deconstruct

them. We realize the radicalism of this proposal and challenge you to adopt that radicalism because it is not a "short cut," and it is the only way to avoid "long delays" in ending the masculinist structures of the discipline and making it truly inclusive for women and everyone.

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How an Intersectional Approach Can Help to Transform the University

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Advocates have been striving for decades to improve the representation of women and people of color in the academy. The results in political