SYMPOSIUM

Reflections on "How Political Science Can Be More Diverse"

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The articles in this symposium extensively and thoughtfully engage questions of crucial importance regarding diversity in (American) political science, particularly the situation of and for women in the profession, past and present. Furthermore, they present a number of arguments and recommendations about how the situation can be changed in the future. The commentaries are notable in being at once realistic and idealistic, descriptive and prescriptive, theoretical and concrete, and informed by an array of evidence and critical insights. They inspire as well as give guidance on how to achieve aspirations. Indeed, for these and other reasons the symposium might be more accurately titled "How Political Science Can Become More Diverse—*and (therefore) More Equal…and Better!*" In any case, I am honored to have been asked to offer some comments as part of this endeavor, though it is difficult to add much to the perceptive essays which are the core of the symposium. I should also note that I will comment on issues largely as they are presented in the symposium and on questions that emerge in my mind from that reading; that is, I acknowledge that the present symposium, as wide-ranging as it is, does not exhaust the array of questions and debate associated with gender diversity in academic disciplines.

In the brief remarks below, I note some points which struck me as especially interesting in what was said, and, in some instances, what was not said. In most respects, the symposium pieces present important evidence and valuable analyses, and point toward plausible and feasible approaches to improving the situation. Occasionally, however, it seems that some matters would benefit from further discussion, and in other cases I note some issues not considered much at all but that seem worthy of more attention.

To begin, the articles appropriately and understandably take the normative desirability of the enunciated goals as self-evident, as inherently consistent with, arguably required by, adherence to fundamental values as they pertain within academic disciplines and the broader society. The principles would seem unimpeachable, and especially so in a scholarly discipline such as political science which takes questions of equality very seriously and is imbedded in a political system in which equality is ostensibly embraced as a core belief, and would thus presumably be widely and deeply shared. And one can identify evidence which suggests some major accomplishments for women in higher education, such as presidents of Ivy league schools (including one who is a political scientist) and other prominent institutions. But one should be careful not to take the exception as the rule, and the very concerns and evidence which lead to and animate this symposium emphatically underscore that point. Understanding and seeking to ameliorate the disjunction between core American values and actual conditions is the focus of the symposium. Though not necessarily articulated quite this way, it seems the disjunction is attributable to potentially different meanings of the central concepts and/or differences in how to attain it, tradition and/or inertia, competing values, or indifference or opposition. There is probably some of each of these, and each of the articles implies that all of these elements are more or less relevant and more or less challenging with regard to the particular issues as they are addressed in each piece.

The articles bring close attention to various factors that are recognized as inhibiting diversity and describe particular practices which do so—and, in turn, put forth ways to address those practices. Those forces described in the essays as inhibiting seem consistent with what I have seen. For instance, in my experience over some period of time, part of what happens is that competing values such as scholarly "excellence," "rigor" (and specific definitions thereof), and the like are emphasized and privileged, as though diversity and these other values are mutually exclusive and/or that the latter should take priority over the former. It appears that (gender) diversity is implicitly assumed to be increasing (although many observers may acknowledge that it is increasing only incrementally), which is then viewed as ostensibly obviating a need for systematic, or systemic, attention. The other values are taken to be the bedrock and (appropriately) enduring ones. There is a recurring invocation of a perceived trade-off between the priority of diversity and "the highest standards." Often, strong concern with the ranking and status of a department as gauged by various metrics is raised, and this is certainly understandable. However, the presumption that diversity entails diminishment of excellence and that excellence has but one (legitimate) definition and single dimension can be problematic and can postpone or override concern with diversity, sometimes even animating impatience or antagonism toward it.

The articles confront broadly similar concerns and suggest general directions and conclusions, though they take different routes, emphasize different dimensions, and offer different, though compatible, prescriptions. While focused on a common theme, the articles display a diversity of their own in coming at the questions from different angles. For example, though the essays are centered on the situation of women in the US, scholars with expertise in comparative

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politics (Kittilson this issue; Mershon and Walsh, this issue) draw from those literatures. Hence they are able to invoke and explain practices used elsewhere which produce the desired outcomes. We can undoubtedly, and should seek to, learn a great deal from research on gender in legislative bodies and through political parties. However, those lessons may be more or less applicable to and useful for understanding academia and are not entirely transferable, as the authors note.

As shown in several of the articles, the overall numbers and proportions of women in the discipline are substantially lower than would be expected relative to the proportions within the larger population as well as relative to the number of women who are political science undergraduate majors. Additionally, there is considerable rank stratification; that is, women are disproportionately found at the assistant professor level rather than associate and full professor ranks. Hence, we are reminded that the situation is yet more complicated and difficult than it may first appear and that aggregate numbers may conceal as well as reveal. Equally important, the articles recognize and interrogate the numerous dimensions—individual, cultural, institutional, and others—that help explain the patterns. An important additional dimension acknowledged in all the articles, but especially stressed in some (e.g., Sinclair-Chapman, this issue and Alexander Floyd, this issue), concerns women of color and the extent of and reasons for their underrepresentation in the discipline. This is implicitly discussed as potentially an additional, perhaps cross-cutting, cleavage in the discipline, though it may pose more complexity than the articles collectively adumbrate. In short, they are right to recognize differences between women (and men) of color but further consideration would be helpful. For example, are there issues on which the concerns of women of color diverge from those of other women; relatedly, are there issues on which women of color share concerns with men of color more so than of other women? The intersectionality of gender and race should be recognized, but that does not necessarily determine whether on certain issues race or gender will be the more prominent and uniting (or divisive) dimension.

For all the serious, legitimate shortcomings identified and concerns expressed about the status of women in political science, it is encouraging to see that certain practices of the APSA have been seen as partly addressing these. In particular, committees play roles in selecting council members, and other governance positions emphasize the importance of seeking representation of women, minorities, types of institutions, region, and fields (see the Beckwith article, this issue). Articles in the symposium provide examples of how formal rules can bolster the achievement of diversity, and offer a case study of efforts within a particular department and how change—at times appearing considerable, at others rather modest—was brought about. Furthermore, they describe how coalitions of women with various others—women's groups within departments and within and across academic units, and allying with supporters in important administrative positions—can promote and sustain advances as well as demonstrate the possibilities and perils that attaining diversity can involve.

Several additional issues would have been useful to address all the same. One is the variation across subfields in the presence of women, and of women of color, as well as whether there are systematic differences in methodological orientation (broadly speaking, a quantitative/qualitative variation). How much variation is there, and why? A focus on aggregate numbers is common, but there is considerable variation across the subfields and/or methods in the discipline. This is itself an intriguing question that would bear attention and inquiry. Assuming there is (some) variation, does that have any implications for women's capacity to attain positions of leadership, create coalitions with "sympathetic elites," and otherwise undertake the types of actions the symposium articles say are important elements spurring increased diversity and change? One piece of evidence I can note comes from a simple eyeballing of data on the membership in APSA Organized Sections. The extent of gender (and racial/ethnic) diversity in organized section membership in general seems to be (even) less than in the discipline as a whole. They differ considerably; among the sections with the smallest women membership are methods and several sections which are focused on aspects of American politics. If this appraisal is correct, why individuals generally and women specifically do or do not join particular sections is not clear. I will not offer an explanation or even venture a guess here. However, the question is worth considering in seeking to make sense of broader patterns because sections can be important centers of intellectual involvement and support. It is not uncommon for a section to be a major source of scholarly engagement, especially for those with interests not always well represented in the larger discipline and/or those from small(er) institutions where they are the only ones who undertake research and teach in certain subfields and areas. This may pertain more so to women, and especially women of color, than to white men.

The articles identify a similar array of factors or variables which are causes of the gaps they identify. And while there are likely common ways in which those variables raise problems, one would assume that the particular weight and constellation

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or combinations and intensity which each of those variables (individual, institutional, etc.) brings to bear would almost surely vary depending on a range of factors. Similarly, the various strategies and remedies advanced would probably work more or less well in different contexts. And as the articles make clear, each of the strategies delineated involves not one but several elements, which raises a further question: are some of those strategies more or less necessary or sufficient? These questions were, understandably, beyond the scope of the symposium papers; and I am certainly not able to engage them here, either, but they seem to be worthy of further attention. For instance, given the depth and breadth of the non-diversity identified, one could readily imagine trying virtually every strategy identified in the articles. Some seem more "procedural," for example "transparency," and would presumably be desirable in (almost) all instances. Strategies about the creation of coalitions would presumably differ according to the number and proportion of those most intensely supportive of certain goals, their actual and potential allies, and the existing distance from and challenges to attaining those goals.

Other questions come to mind. For example, why is it that women comprise a smaller portion of political science than, say, sociology and other disciplines? Is there something about political science as a field of study, the empirical and/or normative questions "typically" posed, methods employed and/or other reasons? Some years ago Ernest Wilson (1985) sought to explain the relative inattention to race and minority groups in political science research (at least at the time he was writing) thusly: that political science studies power; certain groups don't have (much) power; therefore, those groups are not studied or are studied less. Whether that perspective is (at all) relevant to today, it does prompt us to consider how what is studied might affect who is or is not drawn to a field of study. There is considerable evidence that research by women scholars is less frequently cited in international relations journals. Why is that the case? Does it have implications for scholarship and women scholars who are or might be attracted to that subfield? Answers to such questions may be instructive and of practical significance.

We would anticipate differences between the situation in various types of academic settings—elite private universities, liberal arts schools, "R1" and "flagship" state universities, "directional" or regional state institutions, commuter campuses, or community colleges. Are the same impediments present, equally important, really relevant in all these cases? And while the symposium focuses mostly on professors who (already) hold positions, different circumstances may apply at different stages of a career—starting with graduate students (and maybe even sooner), beginning faculty members, promotion and tenure, and departmental and institution leadership positions. Stated otherwise, attention to "leaky pipelines," "ripple effects" and other phenomena which have been described will be issues needing attention, and resolution, for the desired advances to occur. All this is to say that diversity's challenges vary across space (institutional context) and time (career stage) among others. The challenges are wide, deep, and ongoing.

Along with articulating the fundamental and immensely important goals of achieving equitable presence (or "descriptive representation") and diversity in practice, several desired policies deemed essential to reaching those outcomes are identified (e.g., child care, parental leave, and a number of others). Recognizing that we must put first things first, the articles also strongly imply that there might be other consequences associated with increased diversity. The articles stimulate one to wonder what, along with the hoped for attainment of diversity, other consequences might come from that greater presence. For example, are there intellectual changes that might or would be expected to emerge from increased diversity? There is ample reason, based on past developments, to think so. But we might ask if there were more women in various subfields where there are now relatively few, would existing patterns be replicated, altered, or would some of both occur? How might more women in those subfields change them, and the discipline, in terms of the questions asked, the posing of new questions, whether and how old(er) questions are asked, the use and/or acceptance of new methods, or altered re-deployment of existing ones? Pondering some potential broad(er) rewards of greater gender diversity and equality could itself enrich thinking and help us imagine what the future may and can bring, perhaps even make it more likely. The essays in the symposium provide a foundation and building blocks significant toward those ends. ■

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