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introduction: gender in european political science education – taking stock and future directions

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Abstract

Major changes have occurred in the teaching of gender since the shift from women's studies to gender studies. In some institutions gender studies became a separate and interdisciplinary track within social sciences and humanities, whilst in others it either lacked integration or disappeared altogether. What do these developments mean for gender in political science curricula? In this symposium scholars from different European countries, including Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK reflect on the state of gender within political science education. This introductory essay places national experiences within a broader European perspective; highlighting that gender is virtually absent from much of the political science curriculum. Gender and political science courses suffer from issues of supply (rather than demand), such as the persistent under-representation of women academics within political science as well as tight budget constraints. We argue that this is problematic and that gender should be a core part of the political science curricula for three key reasons: 1) politics

is about power and power is always gendered; 2) embedding gender in the core of political science education may positively affect gender equality in the profession and politics; and 3) it reflects the contemporary resurgence of feminist activism across Europe. We conclude with concrete recommendations about how institutions and individuals can help address the virtual absence of gender, including: the integration of gender-related courses in politics programs; Gender & Politics related awards; big data collection projects regarding women in the profession and gender and politics teaching; and the development of leadership courses for women in politics.

Keywords political science, teaching and learning, gender, feminism, political science associations

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, gender-related teaching has been through a major shift and moved beyond women's studies to comprehensive gender studies. This shift has taken various forms. In some institutions and countries, gender studies has reached the status of a fully independent interdisciplinary teaching track in social sciences and humanities. In other institutions and countries, gender-related teaching has been mainstreamed into general curricula in political science and social sciences. Finally, in some other institutions, gender has mostly disappeared from the teaching offering in political science. This development has led gender and political science scholars to reflect upon the status of gender in the discipline of political science and to emphasize its importance for the understanding of politics as a whole (Tickner, 1997; Youngs, 2004; Zalewski, 2007; Childs and Krook, 2006; Dahlerup, 2010).

Gender scholarship is gradually becoming part of mainstream political science, whilst retaining its distinct identity. For instance, gender and politics research has become strongly embedded in national Political Science Associations (PSAs) as well as the European, transatlantic and international umbrellas - European Consortium for Political Research

(ECPR), Council for European Studies (CES) and the International Political Science Association (IPSA). Gender and political science scholars regularly publish in leading political science journals that do not focus on gender per se, thereby improving the visibility of the sub-field. The rise of new book series specializing in gender and political science research reflects a burgeoning interest in the area (e.g. Cambridge University Press, Palgrave Macmillan, Routledge, Rowman and Littlefield). Additionally, a number of gender and political science textbooks, readers, and handbooks have been published that familiarize students with feminist and gendered theories and methodologies across the discipline (Ackerly *et al.*, 2006; Ackerly and True, 2010; Goertz and Mazur 2008; Krook and Childs, 2010; Shepherd, 2010; Waylen *et al.*, 2013).

What does the productivity and success of the field mean for the place of gender within political science curricula? A recent study among sixteen top-ranked political science departments in the UK found that gender was rarely dealt with in an adequate manner in the content of teaching material (Foster *et al.*, 2013; also see Smith and Lee, 2015). Likewise, current scholarship on teaching gender in the United States argues that gender is not a part of the core programmes or classroom materials (Atchison 2013a; Cassese *et al.*, 2015).¹ In this symposium, scholars from different European countries take stock of gender in political science education. The collection is guided by three questions. First, how is gender represented in political science curricula? Second, what are the explanations for the presence or absence of gender in the curricula? Third, what tools can be developed to maintain or embed gender and politics in the programmes at the undergraduate and graduate level?

This introduction places national experiences in a broader European context. Initially, we locate the study of women and gender within its intellectual and historical context. This then leads onto our argument as to why gender in political science matters today. Based on experiences from Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK, we identify cross-national similarities and differences. Finally, we lay out future directions and formulate recommendations to the ECPR, its member institutions, PSAs and the gender and political science research community.

WOMEN'S STUDIES AND GENDER AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

The teaching of gender has its origins within women's studies departments, in which women, and women's bodies, were the principal sites of analysis. During the 1980s there was a turn towards difference. This resulted in a rejection of essentialism and also a shift away from the use of patriarchy as a framework for understanding women's oppression (Hemmings, 2011), with many scholars looking to social constructivist accounts of political inequality. The push for greater analysis of difference also chimed with black feminist writers who articulated the failure of the women's movement, and of women's studies in particular, to address intersections of power— such as race, ethnicity, sexuality and class (Davis, 1980). Such critiques resulted in the turn towards gender.

Gender-based analysis provided a wider analytical framework for those within the academy who were keen to conceptualise and scrutinise inequality. Moreover, it also provided space for the emergence of sexuality studies and for critical work exploring constructions of masculinity. This 'opening up' of the research agenda coincided with the increasing visibility and popularity of post-structuralist thought, which destabilized fixed notions of identity. For some this shift away from a focus on women and women's bodies was to be welcomed as a necessary step in understanding, and then resisting, gendered power dynamics. For others, the deconstructivist turn was perceived to be both apolitical and harmful to combating the various forms of violence against women (Hemmings, 2011).

Today we tend to talk about gender and politics, even though for many scholars working within the field the principle site of analysis remains women. This emphasis on gender is largely due to the anti-essentialist nature of the concept, a concept that captures power and difference amongst and between women (cf. Mazur and Appleton, 1997). It is not uncommon to find research centres or specific courses that include both 'women' and 'gender' in their titles. The use of 'women' as an analytical category reflects the realities of political power: gender inequalities disproportionately affect women and women's bodies. Hence, although we speak of gendered-analysis and of gender studies, the ongoing attachment to women and to women's experiences remains central to understanding politics.

WHY GENDER IN POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATION MATTERS *NOW*

Every political science student should acquire at the very least a basic understanding of gender dynamics in politics for three reasons: first, in order to ensure a proper understanding

of politics; second, to work towards increasing gender equality; and finally in recognition of the current popular resurgence of feminism.

UNDERSTANDING POLITICS

‘What is politics?’ is the key question that students in the first year are confronted with (Foster *et al.*, 2013: 567-570). Although there is debate about the forms and boundaries of politics, there is a general agreement that politics is about power (e.g. Lukes, 1974). Feminist scholars have pointed to the gendered nature in which power relations take shape and how power is unequally distributed and differently experienced (see among others Scott, 1994; Squires, 2000). The gendered nature of power makes it essential to incorporate gender into introductory courses in political science. As Foster *et al.* argue (2013, 570), this will 1), enhance student capacity for critical analysis of mainstream discourses; 2) shed light on the effects of power regimes by making visible experiences and voices that are traditionally marginalized; and 3) destabilize normalized and naturalized identities that structure power relations. An example of this can be found in the work undertaken by the Feminism and Institutionalism International Network, which has sought to analyse institutions through a gendered lens.² Such an approach to a ‘mainstream’ theme within political science enables students to develop their analytical skills whilst also providing a challenge to normative studies of political institutions.

GENDER EQUALITY

Embedding gender within the teaching of political science may exert a positive effect on gender equality in the profession, politics, and society more broadly (Matthes, 2013). Although political science has become less male-dominated over the years (Bayes, 2012) women are still under-represented amongst the professoriate, in executive committees, as members of PSAs, and as paper givers, chairs and discussants at mainstream political science conferences (Lindroos *et al.*, 2014). For example, in international relations (IR) female authors are less likely to be cited in publications (Maliniak *et al.*, 2013). An analysis of British based Political Science and International Relations journals reveals that that women are less likely to be published as sole or lead authors than their male counterparts even though they are just as likely to be cited (Williams *et al.*, 2015). Despite sub-field specific variations,

cross-national comparison demonstrates overall that the structural disadvantages women face in the discipline transcend national boundaries (Abels and Woods, 2015; Bates and Savigny, 2015a, b; Briggs and Harrison, 2015; Elizondo, 2015; Kantola, 2015). Mainstreaming gender should promote female students' engagement with the material, this in turn may encourage more women to pursue further studies and even an academic career within political science (Cassese and Bos, 2013: 221). In sum, this may well lead to a 'virtuous feedback loop in the presence of gender in political science education leads not just to more women in the profession, but also to greater acceptance of the discipline' (Atchison, 2013b: 233).

Gendered analysis that encompasses masculinities also reveals the extent to which male students are affected by gender and the hierarchies of masculinities at work in contemporary society. Students are invited to explore which kind of masculinities dominate political legislatures (Murray, 2014), and which others are marginalized (Hearn, 2004)? What is the role of men in political ideologies (Dean, 1998) and nation building (Altinay, 2004)? What kind of gender equality policies may promote men's involvement in care activities, such as parental leave? Gender-related issues in politics and policy are predominantly addressed by female scholars, with the notable exception of sexuality studies. Ideally, more men would incorporate gender in their teaching as a reflection of the integral role that it plays in how politics works.

The study and teaching of politics 'is part of how we learn to participate in political life: political science is a form of civic education' (Matthes, 2013: 236). Consequently, political science education has the potential to impact civic and political culture more broadly (Cassese and Bos, 2013: 221). It therefore may be a key tool to achieve more political equality.

THE RESURGENCE OF FEMINISM

A final reason to ensure that gender is a core part of the political science curricula lies in the resurgence of feminist activism that is currently occurring across Europe (Walby, 2011). Feminist activists are returning to issues of sexual objectification, gender based violence and economic inequality. At the same time they address relatively new themes such as trans inclusion and online misogyny (Evans, 2015). The revival of feminist activism has led to a growth in the supply of students who wish to understand the theories behind, and empirical

analyses of, gender. In short, there is both the demand from students to learn about gender in the classroom as a means by which to interpret power relations around the world, but also in order to inform their own political activism beyond the confines of a scholarly environment. Whereas women and gender studies departments have retained their presence at many US Universities and colleges, sadly the same is not true across Europe. It is therefore the responsibility of individual disciplines to meet the demands of young women and men who are keen to explore the various ways in which gender effects, and affects, individual and societal choices and power dynamics.

The backlash against feminism that occurred during the 1990s has had a lasting impact (Faludi, 1991). Young women in particular have often been reluctant to identify as feminist because of the negative connotations associated with the label, for instance that all feminists are man-hating or unfeminine (Scharff, 2012). This has led some individuals to support feminist principles whilst not embracing a feminist identity (Rowley and Shepherd, 2012). However, despite the hostility with which feminism and the women's movement are typically treated by the media, the resurgence of feminist activism has in fact been underpinned by a desire to reclaim the feminist label. This means that students are often keen to engage with theoretical and societal accounts of feminist politics in order to make sense of their own ontological and epistemological approaches. Meanwhile, there are those students for whom feminism and the study of gender appears 'redundant' due to the (erroneous) belief that equality has been achieved (Foster *et al.*, 2013: 572). For normative reasons we obviously contend that teaching these students about gender is also critical.

GENDER GAPS IN EUROPEAN CURRICULA: CROSS-NATIONAL VARIATION AND OVERLAP

The contributions in this collection assess the availability of gender courses and the extent to which gender is included in general political science courses in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK. These five case studies share some striking similarities. Overall, gender and political science courses have remained scarce or even absent in mainstream programmes in political science, and gender does not feature anywhere as an integral part of the curriculum. A recurring explanation sheds light on the overarching impact of the under-representation of female academics in political science departments. The gap is particularly high among full professors and faculty in management positions. In addition,

chairs in gender or women's studies have proven to be difficult posts to secure once the initial holder retires, although there is a small increase in feminist scholars holding mainstream chairs.

Given that gender-related courses are mostly taught by women, one of the main consequences of the low numbers of female professors is that relatively few lecturers are available to supply or initiate gender and political science courses. This also means that there are generally few professors with the institutional power, seniority and agenda to lobby for the inclusion or strengthening of gender in the curricula. This situation might well reverse in the future with the increasing number of female faculty at junior and mid-career positions. However, until they reach more senior positions, junior lecturers usually may not have much control over the courses that they teach. For sure, not all female academics work on gender and politics; nevertheless, given that attitudinally women are more likely to hold feminist beliefs than men it is not unreasonable to assert that female academics are more likely to include gender in their teaching. In some subfields such as political theory, feminist theories are increasingly integrated in core courses, even though they remain largely excluded from the 'canon' of western historical thought.

Another similarity across the case studies is the recurrence of the financial crisis as a common challenge for sustaining and diversifying gender and politics courses and research. Budget cuts have a particularly negative effect on the investment in tenure track positions or hires with a gender profile, institutional financial support and the opportunities to obtain funding (Evans and Amery, 2016; Sauer, 2016).

Finally, the political and public attitude towards gender equality and feminism may facilitate or hinder mainstreaming of gender in the curricula substantively. In Spain, for instance, a recent favourable political context to gender equality was key to putting the issue on the agenda. It provided opportunities for a group of committed actors within political institutions, political science associations and universities to lobby and set the agenda. This eventually led to the implementation of a legal mandate for mainstreaming gender in higher education. This also included the creation of gender equality institutions within universities, such as gender units and feminist research institutes (Alonso and Lombardo, 2016). On the contrary, in Austria, the political climate is chilly and even hostile towards gender studies, research and gender equality (Sauer, 2016). While rightist media hold the field responsible for the decay of the traditional family, leftist media accuse the field for being anti-scientific,

anti-political and anti-emancipatory. At the same time, there is no organized counter voice or movement, to respond to the anti-gender discourse. The Dutch case also underlines the importance of engaged actors and responsive politicians and policy makers. Women's studies were established under the influence of the feminist movement in the 1980s. Political support entailed financial resources for research and staff members. The decline of women's studies coincided with the decline of political support (Bonjour *et al.*, 2016).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The successful integration of gender in the curricula would require interventions on several levels by a variety of actors. Here are some suggestions for professional associations, political science departments, the gender and politics community and individual faculty:

- *Departmental heads and faculty members* involved in the recruitment and retention of faculty members should recognize the study of gender and politics not just as an 'optional luxury' in terms of expertise but should seek to ensure that the sub-field is viewed as a core element of any respectable department.
- *PSA umbrella organisations* such as the ECPR, the International Political Science Association (IPSA) and the International Studies Association (ISA) should facilitate systematic data collection on gender in current political science curricula. One option would be to survey members including questions about their course outlines and contents. What, according to them, are the key concepts and core texts in their field of teaching? A survey would help establish whether lecturers who do not specifically teach gender courses feature women/gender in their teaching, and if so, where. Such a discipline-wide survey would also be a good tool to collect contact information of colleagues who teach foundational undergraduate courses. These lecturers are the real target group to improve actual teaching practices.
- *Gender and Politics Scholars* could then draw on the data (collected by professional associations) to develop teaching materials, such as textbooks and materials in order to aid mainstreaming. The challenge is to convince, predominantly male, lecturers that students can't fully understand politics without taking account of gender. The point is not to add 'women's issues' to the list of interesting case studies to discuss, but to demonstrate that gender is a fundamental but politically negotiated dimension of

societal inequalities and power relations. To be effective, mainstreaming materials should avoid simply seeking to dismiss all that has gone before, but instead should offer simple tools to make it even more relevant than it already is. This could be a short manual tailored to key fields of the discipline, for example political theory, IR, political economy, public policy, comparative politics and political behaviour. Such introductions – two pages long – would explain why gender is relevant to core questions asked in that specific field (e.g., justice for political theory, sexual violence in civil wars, domestic labour in political economy) and how it influences key concepts, and methodologies. The relevance should be illustrated with a good example/topical case study and some examples of questions to use in lectures and assignments. Ideally, these introductions would be written by carefully selected tandems of a well-respected ‘mainstream’ scholar – whose materials are often used in the classroom– and a gender and politics scholar.

- *PSAs* should include thesis awards for gender and political science graduate students to increase the status of this field (cf IPSA, 2013). PSAs should be creative in initiating country specific activities; the examples of Germany, Spain and the UK demonstrate that PSAs – or their women’s sections – are powerful institutions to raise gender awareness. The ECPR Standing Group in Gender and Politics has paved the way in creating the ECPR PhD Prize in Gender and Politics. Other prizes should follow to put gender and politics research and researchers at the forefront of the political science community.
- *Women’s and/or Gender and Politics Sections of professional organisations* should further develop and maintain banks of syllabi for gender and politics courses along the lines of the approach that has been adopted by the ECPR Standing Group in Gender and Politics and the American Political Science Association (APSA) Women and Politics Section. To ease the literature searches of lecturers who aim to include gender in their courses a top ten of ‘must reads’ should be developed for the main fields of the discipline. Such a list would contain a balanced mix of texts that are accessible and recognizable, as well as those that are more specialised. This, in turn, would mean that the lists can be actively circulated by section members to lecturers in their departments.
- *Authors of bestselling mainstream textbooks* should be encouraged to incorporate suggestions on adding gender and politics literature in their revisions for future

editions. The earlier mentioned survey should give a good overview as to which books are used the most. Mainstreaming will have the biggest effect if gender is integrated in these textbooks. Moreover, the mainstreaming materials could provide the basis for starting a conversation between gender and political science scholars and textbook authors.

- *Gender and Politics Scholars in powerful positions in their institutions* should initiate applied courses or trainings on political leadership for women, such as offered at US institutions like Harvard University, Rutgers University, Simmons College and the University of Massachusetts.³ In the long run this will not only positively affect the number of women running for office (Doherty, 2011; Krook and Norris, 2014), but will also show the urgency and practical applicability of gender in real politics.

Arguments in favour of increasing and promoting the study of gender and politics within the discipline is not a case of special pleading. Rather, the wider political context has made the study of gender a critical way in which to understand contemporary economic, social and cultural inequalities. It is vital that political science departments better reflect trends in political activism and engagement by ensuring that feminism and gender studies are central to any comprehensive analysis of politics. The critical lens offered by gender and political science is an important means by which to enlighten, to motivate and to inspire new generations of scholars and activists to question power dynamics in pursuit of justice, equality and liberty.

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Notes

¹ For accounts interdisciplinary gender studies see the book series 'Teaching with Gender' edited by the European Association for Gender Research, Education and Documentation

(ATGENDER), published by Central European University Press; for education studies see Ali *et al.* (2004).

² See <http://www.femfiin.com>, accessed 19 January 2015.

³ See <http://wapp.hks.harvard.edu/oval-office-program>,
http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/education_training/ReadytoRun/RtoR_overview.php,
<http://www.simmons.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/unique-learning-opportunities/barbara-lee-fellowship-program> and
http://www.umb.edu/academics/mgs/publicpolicy_publicaffairs/graduate/glpp, accessed 24 July 2015.

Key quotes (for the Publisher)

‘The gendered nature of power makes it essential to incorporate gender into introductory courses in political science’. (p.4)

‘Mainstreaming gender should promote female students’ engagement with the material, which in turn may encourage more women to pursue studies in political science and make an academic career in political science’. (p.5).

‘In short, there is both the demand from students to learn about gender in the classroom as a means by which to interpret power relations around the world, but also in order to inform their own political activism beyond the confines of a scholarly environment’. (p.6)

‘Overall, gender and political science courses have remained scarce or even absent in mainstream programmes in political science, and gender does not feature anywhere as an integral part of the curriculum’. (p.7)